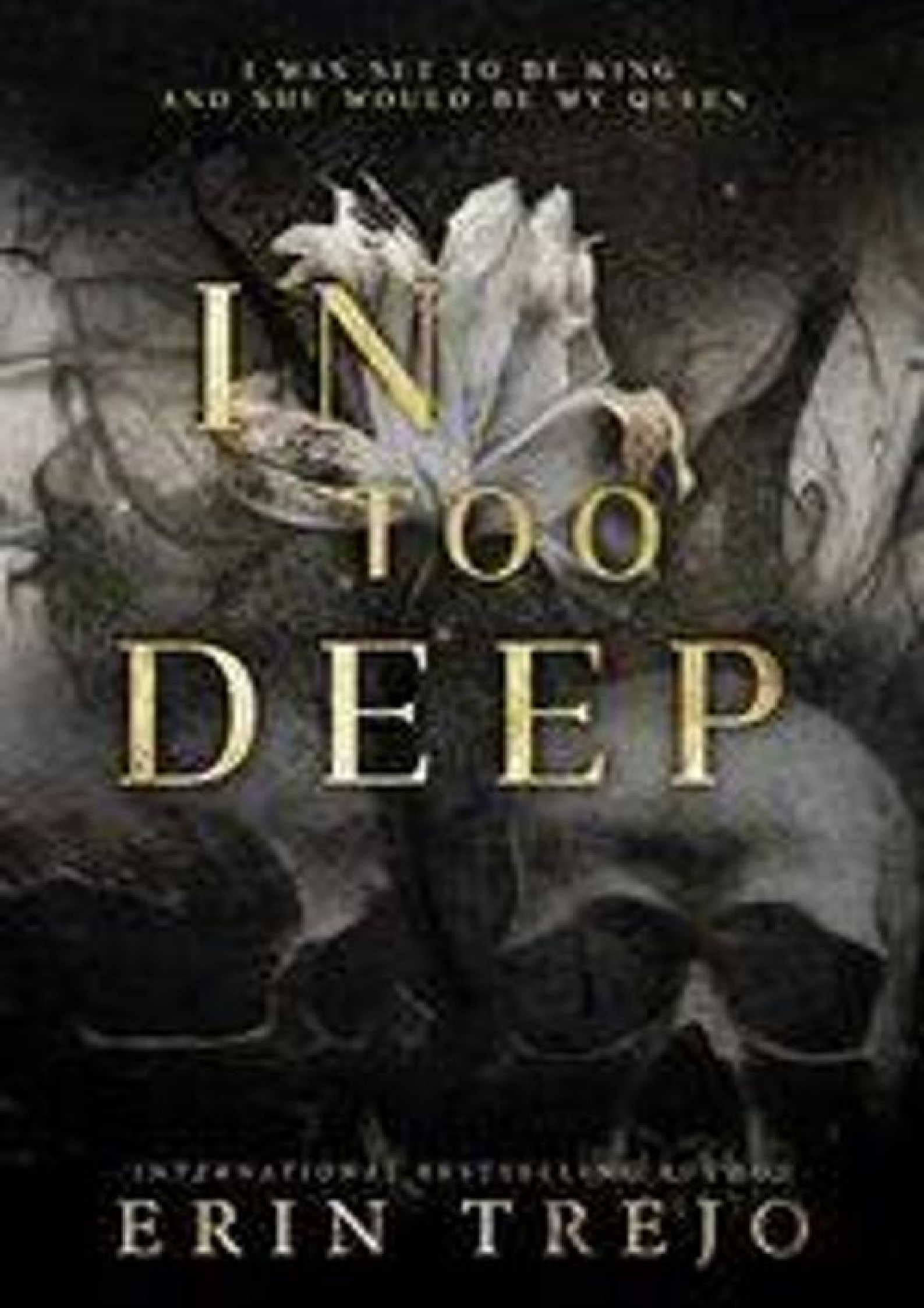


I WAS SET TO BE KING  
AND SHE WOULD BE MY QUEEN



IN  
TOO  
DEEP

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
ERIN TREJO

# **IN TOO DEEP**


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ERIN TREJO

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## **NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR**

If you're looking for a light and fluffy read **STEP AWAY NOW**. This book contains **DARK** themes not suitable for everyone. If you're squeamish this might not be the book for you. Possible triggers including but not limited to: Blood Play, stalking, kidnapping, torture(not done to the MFC by MMC) just to name a few. This is a Dark Secret Society Romance. So you've been warned.

Now that I warned you, If you love a man that would go the ends of the world for you, fuck you in ways you've never been fucked, and not hate you(you'll understand when you read) then Ares Scott is your man! Happy reading!

**A**s a child, you're taught how to look at the world; I was no different. I was taught to look at the world in black and white with no color in between. There was no grey, no middle, only sides, and you were punished if you chose the wrong side. I was on the receiving end of those punishments. I was the one who looked at things and questioned them. Wouldn't you?

I watched my father rule his empire with an iron fist. No one, and I mean no one, was off limits to him. My mother, God rest her soul, was his victim of choice. She was the reason I'm here today. She's the reason I walk and breathe. I didn't know it at the time, but my father tried to beat me out of her. He failed. I'm still here. The defiant son. He had no choice but to raise me after he murdered her. I was eleven at the time. Ten years, ten long years of my life have been spent under his authority. I tried to follow the rules he set out for me. I tried to be the man he wanted me to be, but I always looked for more. I looked outside the box my father kept me in. His box. His world. It wasn't that it was a bad world because it wasn't. The issue was that I wasn't loved. Love played no part in our lives. It never has.

“Where's your head at?” My father asks.

“What do you mean?”

“You look like you're lost in your own little world,” he remarks as he lights his cigar and stares at me across his desk.

“I'm here.”



“You’re being short with me.”

“How would you like me to be? I’m doing what you ask of me, am I not?”

“You are, and you’re doing it well. At the end of all this, when my life is over, you will have my entire empire at your fingertips, Ares.” He says it as if that’s what I want. He doesn’t know what I want. He’s never asked, and he doesn’t care.

“Is that what this is about?” I ask him, leaning forward to rest my elbows on my knees.

“No, it’s about more. This is about revenge.”

“Revenge against who?” His eyes light up as he sits back in his chair and looks at me.

“All of them, Ares. Bitches are a dime a dozen. They are the ones responsible for the issues. They make it hard for us men to do what we need to do.”

“And that’s why we end them,” I fill in the blanks of what he’s saying. He nods his head, blowing smoke between his lips.

“That’s exactly right. They are expendable at the end of the day,” he states casually.

“Just like my mother?” Now, his eyes darken.

“You know what she did,” he hisses.

“I know what you said she did. I don’t remember much from childhood when you claim she did those things. I shouldn’t have been there when she did what you say she did.” My words make him angry. I can see it in his eyes.

“You shouldn’t be around now either,” he deadpans. I smirk now and huff out a laugh.

“Then why am I?”

“You know why you’re here, Ares. You’re my son.”

“A son you never wanted. A son who means nothing to you.”

“That isn’t true. You mean something to me. You’re the only one who can run this empire once I’m gone,” he says.

“And how long will that be?” I ask him, causing his nostrils to flare as he looks at me.

“Is that what you want? A dead father?”

“You never wanted a child, and yet here I am,” I tell him, waving my hand up and down in front of me.

“And you don’t want a father?”

“I don’t need one. I do just fine on my own.”

“Is that what you think? That you don’t need me?” he asks, looking me dead in the eyes.

“That’s exactly what I think.”

“Then you’d be wrong, Ares. You do need me. You need me to teach you, guide you.”

“To do what?”

“Revenge. Torture. All the things you do now,” he answers casually. Now I sit up, straightening my back as I look at him.

“You don’t think I can handle doing those things alone?” He smiles, a smile I hate. One I loathe and want to cut off his face. If given the chance, I may do it.

“That’s not what I’m saying, Ares. You’re reading too much into it.”

“Am I? It doesn’t seem that way,” I retort as I shove to my feet, my hands clenching by my sides.

“Ares, you’re my son. I’ve groomed you, made you into what you are today.”

“And what I am?”

“A God. A man of power. A man who holds the world in the palm of his hands.”

“No. I’m a murderer. I kill. I torture and take lives that aren’t mine to take.”

“And how do you know they aren’t yours to take?”

“Who am I, Father?” Now, he stands and places his hands on the desk in front of him, leaning toward me.

“You are Ares Scott! You are the ruler of your empire. You are the chosen one.”

“Chosen by who?”

“Me, of course. Why are you pushing me on this, Ares?”

“I’m not pushing you. Maybe I just don’t see things the same way as you.”

“What other way is there?” he asks, tilting his head to study me. It’s always the same thing. My father scrutinizing me. Me revolting and being rebellious.

“The real world, Father. There is a real world where people don’t go around killing others because they can!”

“And you think you’d survive in that world?” he roars. He’s right. I probably wouldn’t survive in that world. It’s a simple answer.

“No.”

“**W**hat’s his problem?” Juno asks as I raise the whip and bring it down across the woman’s back. Blood flies through the air as I whip her over and over.

“I don’t know. He makes these small jabs at me. Like I can’t handle the job he’s given me,” I tell Juno, my best friend. My only friend. The one constant thing in my life. He grew up in this mess the same as I did. He does the same things I do, and his father doesn’t question him.

“You seem to be doing fine to me,” he says, nodding to the woman on her knees before me. I look down at the sobbing blonde before huffing out a breath.

“You would think so, wouldn’t you?” I kneel and run my fingers along the marks I’ve made on her back, bringing my blood-coated fingers to my lips. I lick them clean and smirk up at Juno as he groans.

“What more could he want from you?”

“I don’t know. He didn’t say. Just kept telling me the empire he’s built will be mine one day.”

“He’s not wrong. It will all be yours,” he adds. I nod as I shove to my feet and let the whip fly through the air again. The woman screams in pain before Juno grabs her roughly off the ground and drags her back to her cage. He tosses her in and slams the door, clicking the lock into place before opening another and bringing out a new woman. This one has dark hair and dark eyes, just like me. It makes me wonder if that’s how

my mother looked. I don't remember much about her, just bits and pieces, but for the most part, I try to forget her. What's the point in remembering someone who hurt you?

"The question is, do I want it?"

"Why wouldn't you want it?" Juno asks as he straps the girl to the table. She's lying naked on her stomach, her body on display. Tears already leak down her cheeks, and we haven't even started yet.

"Don't you ever think outside the box, Juno?"

"What do you mean?"

"The world outside these walls doesn't live like this. So why are we?"

"Outside of Belmont?"

"Yeah. Normal people don't live the way we do. They're ... happy."

"Normal? What's so normal about them?" he asks, adjusting the straps to ensure the woman can't get up.

"They have wives, children. They go to school, shopping, to the movies, and then there's us."

"You would want to do those things?" he asks with his nose scrunched up.

"I don't know. Wouldn't it be nice to have the option?"

"I don't know, Ares. I don't know if people like us are meant to be normal. I've never yearned for that kind of thing before."

"Me either, but that doesn't mean anything."

"Yeah, it does. It means we're not normal, and we both know it. Do you honestly think you could have a normal loving relationship with a woman after the things we do?" he asks, nodding toward the woman on the table. I walk over and run my fingers along her back, watching bumps form on her flesh. This is what we do here. We ruin them. Women, that is. We ruin them and send them back to their families. Some die

at our hands, and that's just a problem we deal with when it arises.

Juno walks over and picks up the knife before standing beside her, letting the blade tip dance across her skin. Her screams pierce the silence, and I do nothing except smile. I watch her face, the way it contorts in pain. There's a beauty in pain, a beauty I'm intimate with. I wonder if that's the way they felt. The children they hurt and abused. I shake my head, not wanting to imagine it.

"Do you ever wonder if you'll have children of your own?" I ask, taking the knife from him. I place the tip against her cheek and slowly press down until I see her crimson blood begin to show. Then I drag the knife across her face. Blood blooms on her skin, and Juno grins at what I've just done.

"Children? For what? To be what we are? I mean, yeah, I'm sick in the fucking head, Ares. I wouldn't want to raise a son to be like me or have my daughter go through this if someone deems it," he says.

"You ever wonder why there aren't any girls in Bellmont?" Juno steps back, looking as though he's thinking about it. The thought has crossed my mind more than once.

"Now that you mention it, it is a little odd, isn't it?" I nod my head as I carve up the poor woman who lies beneath my blade. She screams; they all scream until they can't. Like her, they pass out, and maybe that's a good thing.

"Not a single girl."

"And there are only three women here," he says as he thinks it over.

"There is and yet no girls. No female children."

"Why haven't I thought of this before?" he asks, looking over at me.

"We didn't pay attention, Juno. We did as we were raised and ordered. It wouldn't have been wise of us to notice," I add. He nods before taking the knife from me, creating art on her skin.

“What do you think their families say? Once they’re returned to them?” I shrug.

“I don’t know. I know whatever they did to end up here is null and void. I’m sure they won’t do it again.”

“And to think this is all going to be yours,” he laughs manically.

“In due time.”

“You would think we’d be privy to the information, considering we’re doing all the dirty work while your father sits in his office doing nothing.”

“One would think so, but that isn’t how things work here, and we both know it. In time, things will change.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just as I said. Things will change. Don’t you want more, Juno? Don’t you ever get tired of being told you know enough?” I ask him. He stops carving up the girl’s back long enough to look at me.

“I do. I know asking my father would get me nowhere, and yours sure as hell isn’t going to tell us anything.”

“Then we find out ourselves.”

“Are you insane?”

“I carve women up for a living. I’m obviously insane, Juno.”

**D**ark hair, blue eyes. It's such an unusual combination. Dark and light. Those are two things that don't often go together. Like me. The grey area in between. I wonder what she would look like with my work all over her body. Would she be as appealing as she is now? What would she see when she looked at me? The monster I am because of what I do? Or the monster I am because of what I look like? Either way, she wouldn't see me for me. No one does. Not even Juno.

She walks across campus, her jeans hugging her curves in all the right places. I can't stop watching her. There's something ... different about her. I watch as she climbs into the car, and I start mine. She pulls out onto the street, and I follow just far enough behind her she won't notice me.

I follow her to her house, which she shares with her friends. But are they really her friends? I see the fake smile she plasters on her face, trying to appease them. They don't see her. Not the way I do.

When she climbs out of the car, I do the same. I walk down the sidewalk and around the side of the house to her window. The shade is broken in one spot, allowing me a glimpse of her. I wait. I wait until she walks in, closing the door behind her and dropping her bag onto the desk before pulling her shirt over her head and tossing it to the side. Black bra. I know there are black panties beneath her jeans. It is her favorite color, after all.



She walks to the bathroom, denying me the ability to see her. Anger claws at my insides. After a few minutes, she returns with a towel wrapped around her body and another in her hand, drying her hair. She tosses the one in her hand before looking at herself in the mirror. She raises her hand to her face, running her fingers along her lips before growing angry. Then she grabs her face in her hand and claws at her flesh while screaming. She knows no one else is home to hear her. That's the only reason she does it.

When she stops screaming and pulls her hand away from her face, you can see the angry red marks she made. Never deep enough to stay there for long, but deep enough to satisfy her. I tilt my head to the side and study her. She isn't small. She's probably five foot nine to my six foot three. It's the perfect height if you ask me.

She slowly drops the towel, and that's when her body is fully displayed for me. I bite my lip because she's perfect. She isn't stick thin. She has curves and a belly. Everything a so-called 'perfect girl' doesn't have, she does. And to me, that's perfect. She stares at herself in the mirror, turning sideways to look at herself. I see the hate, the disgust. They want her to be perfect. They want her to be stick thin, and I know she sometimes starves herself to be just that.

"You're so fucking ugly!" She screams at the mirror. If only she knew how beautiful she truly is. There are days I wish I could tell her. I wish I could talk to her, but that isn't an option, not in my world.

With a sigh, she walks over and sits on the edge of her bed, pulling her vibrator from the drawer beside her bed. I watch in fascination as she turns it on and lays back on the bed. When she spreads her legs, I groan. I watch her slip the vibrator in her pussy and work it in and out. That vibrator has nothing on a real man who could make her feel real things. She arches her back as she slowly pulls it out and circles her clit with the glistening tip. I can't pull my eyes off her and how she moves and writhes.

I reach for the zipper on my jeans and pull my hard cock out in my hand. Stroking it, I watch her get off as I do the

same. No, it's her that's getting me off. It's been her for as long as I've been stalking her.

I tug at my cock as she begins to pant and moan. I bite my fucking lip to keep myself from groaning too loudly and risking the chance of her seeing me out here.

I keep stroking myself as she gets herself closer to orgasm. Then she lets go, crying out as her body trembles. I come hard, shooting my seed on the side of the house as I keep my eyes on her. I know I could make her come harder than that. I could make her feel more than that. But she isn't the type to let me do as I please. She isn't the type I fuck. She's everything I can't have, and it would do me well to remember that.

I tuck my cock back into my pants and zip them as I hear her front door slam. I know the others are coming home now, and the chances of me getting caught are higher, so I sneak back around and down the street to my car. I climb in and start it up, pulling out onto the road when my cell rings. I press the button on the radio and answer.

"Yeah?"

"Where are you?" my father's voice comes over the line.

"Out. Why?"

"You left Belmont?"

"I am allowed to leave, aren't I?" He sighs into the line.

"You are. I have work for you to do, Ares."

"What kind of work? I've already dealt with the Gambina woman," I tell him.

"You did?" he asks, sounding surprised.

"She was there, I handled her. I didn't see the point in waiting. She's in the basement with the others," I tell him as I pull over at the local liquor store. I put the car in park, waiting for him to tell me the reason for his call.

"Very well then. You're free until Thursday."

"Who are we picking up Thursday?" I ask.

“You remember James Corna?”

“The asshole who stole money from you? The one who threatened us all?” Yeah, I remember that bastard.

“That’s him. His daughter is now legally eighteen years old and, from what I’m being told, needs a heavy hand.” I sigh. It’s never good for them when they turn eighteen. We don’t harm children. At least Juno and I don’t. I can’t say the same about my father, though.

“Which means she is fair game,” I say with a slight smile.

“We’ve been watching her long enough, Ares. She’s now yours to handle.” I can’t stop the genuine smile from crossing my face when I hear those words. From what I was told by my father, she is repayment for what he stole. I have watched Angela for a long time, but I’ve never seen her do the things they claim she’s done. They claim she tortured and abused her younger siblings, but as I said, I’ve never seen it happen.

“When?”

“As I said, Thursday.”

“Why so long?” Now he laughs into the line.

“Are you that eager to get your hands on her?”

“I’ve had plans for her for a long time.”

“I know you have, and you’ll get to fulfill every single desire, Ares. Nothing is off limits with her,” he adds. Now, I do smile. A sick, sinister smile.

“Nothing?”

“Nothing at all, my son.” I press the end key with a smile before climbing out of the car and heading into the liquor store. This night just got a whole lot better.

““**Y**ou’re kidding me?” Juno asks as the girl on her knees sucks his cock.

“I’m not. Nothing is off-limits with her. He said so himself.”

“Nothing?” I shake my head as the little blonde riding me bends over and snorts another line before getting back to work. Her body bounces on my cock as I trail the end of my knife down her spine. She arches her back as bumps form on her flesh, but that doesn’t stop her from riding me. I glance at Juno as he tangles his hand in the girl’s hair, sucking him off before shoving her head further down. I listen to her gag, and her eyes begin to water. I just laugh. He looks up at me and grins before doing it again.

“What is it about a bitch choking on your cock that makes it harder?” he asks.

“I don’t know, but this is going to be a great night,” I tell him. The blonde riding my cock begins to sway slightly, and I know that she’s high off her ass. She’s snorted more than any of us, making me grin.

“You going to ride me, sweetheart? Or you too fucked up?” She stands up quickly, my cock sliding out before she stumbles and turns to face me. Then she straddles my hips and slides herself back down my length before starting again. I watch her, her eyes, that is. So out of focus. She doesn’t have any idea what the hell she’s doing right now, and I love it. She digs her nails into my chest before I reach up and snatch her

wrists in my hands. Placing them together in one hand, I hold them between us as she rides me. She's so close to orgasm that I can feel it. I pinch her nipple with my free hand, and she cries out for me but then stops. She dead fucking stops what she's doing.

"Are you going to be sick?" I ask her.

"I ... I don't feel right," she mumbles as her head swims and sways.

"What do you feel?"

"I don't know. I just don't feel right." Then I smirk. "What ... what did you give me?"

"Coke, sweetheart. You wanted it, you got it."

"No. This isn't just coke," she argues as she tries to pull herself away from me.

"What do you think it was then?"

"What's wrong with her?" Juno asks when he hears us talking.

"You did something to me!" Now I begin to laugh as I keep one hand on her hip, holding her down on my cock.

"What do you mean? You wanted coke, so I gave you coke." Then, it begins to happen slowly. Her muscles tense up, and her breathing becomes sporadic.

"What's happening to me?" she cries, tears leaking down her cheeks as my cock twitches inside her.

"Only what you wanted to happen," I tell her. She looks at me pleadingly, but I can do nothing now. Nothing I can do to stop it. She doesn't know that I knew her plan for the evening. She was going to fuck me and Juno like a good little whore, and then she planned on killing herself for what she'd done. She didn't want this life on the street with a kid anymore, so she planned to end it all. What I've done is just speed it up for her.

Her muscles lock, her body tensing. Her head jerks back at an awkward angle as her friend pulls her mouth from Juno's

cock to look over.

“What’s happening to her?” she squeals as Juno grabs her, pulling her into his lap and forcing her to watch what’s happening to her friend.

“She wanted this,” I tell her calmly as her body pulses around mine. I groan and raise my hips, fucking her as her muscles spasm uncontrollably. Her back arches at an unnatural angle before she straightens back up. Her breathing has become labored, with no sounds leaving her throat. I thrust a few more times as she gasped for air. Her friend cries, she screams, but no one can hear her.

“What the hell, Ares?” Juno asks with a smile on his face.

“She planned on doing it anyway.”

“She did not! She wouldn’t do that,” her friend yells louder. Juno must grow tired of hearing her and slaps his hand over her mouth while keeping the other around her waist, holding her in place.

“You can’t tell me she didn’t tell you,” I say casually as her friend stares at me with wide eyes. The bitch on my lap convulses until she eventually falls off my lap and cock onto the floor. I look down at her and shrug. Her friend screams behind Juno’s hand as he laughs.

“I did not see that one coming,” he says, nodding toward the girl, now dead on the floor. I tuck my cock back into my pants before standing and grabbing a beer.

“What are you doing with her?” I ask, nodding to the girl still in his arms. He pulls her back and whispers something I can’t hear in her ear before removing his hand from her mouth. He brushes her sweaty hair away from her face.

“What should we do with you?” he asks her as I watch the two of them.

“You ... you could let me go. I won’t say anything to anyone.”

“Isn’t that what they say before running to the cops?”

“I swear. I didn’t see anything.” Now I laugh loudly.

“Come here,” I tell her. She shakes her head as I laugh harder. Juno shoves her off his lap and stands behind her to make sure she walks over to me. Then I grab a new condom from my pocket and pull my cock back out. She licks her lips like she wants more, and that’s exactly what she’s going to get.

She stops in front of me, and I grab her, pulling her to the floor. She lies on her back as I slide inside her. Juno watches, standing above us before kneeling on the floor next to her. As I fuck her, he turns her head to face him and slides his cock in her mouth. He fucks her face while I fuck her pussy. It’s quick fuck; nothing notable about it. I finish quickly when Juno shoves his cock down her throat. I see her gagging as she tries to catch a breath, but he doesn’t let her. He looks at me for confirmation of what she’s done, and I nod. You would think we killed women for fun, but that’s not what this is. That’s not what we do. We have reason and good reason at that.

“You sure?”

“That’s what my father said,” I tell him, shrugging before grabbing another beer and taking a long pull. Juno pulls out of her mouth long enough for her to suck air into her lungs quickly before he shoves back in. This time, he holds steady and watches her. I do too. I watch her watery eyes as she looks up at him, waiting, wondering if he will let her go. He’s not. He glances at me with a sick smile as I watch as he holds himself steady. She struggles, reaching up and clawing at his arms. It does her no good. It’s only prolonging what’s about to happen. It seems like it takes forever while I drink my beer, but finally, it’s over. Juno pulls his cock out of her mouth and pulls the condom off before standing and yanking his jeans back up.

“You ever get tired of this?” I ask.

“Of what?”

“Killing women.”

“Not really. It’s what we were raised to do. It’s who we are.” I suppose he’s right about that. “Why? Do you?” I shrug.

“I don’t know. It all seems to bleed into the next, you know? Same shit, different day.”

“Yeah, I get that. We need to change up our techniques?” I shrug once more as I grab the gas can on the floor next to the couch and pour it over the crime scene.

“Maybe. I don’t know.”

“Are you tired of it?”

“No. Just thinking is all.” I toss the can, grab a cigarette, and light it up. Juno grabs a beer and takes a long pull before heading toward the door, tossing the bottle over his shoulder. I walk behind him, sucking the nicotine into my lungs before flicking the cigarette over my shoulder. Almost immediately, it ignites as we make it outside. We walk over to my car and stand back, watching as the flames slowly get bigger and bigger.

“We need to go,” Juno declares as I watch the flames lick the darkness.

“Yeah,” I say, but I don’t move. I stand still, watching as the place burns.



I'm annoyed, beyond annoyed. Today is one of those days when you don't want to be bothered with life but know you have to. It's one of those days when you'd rather stay in bed and ignore the rest of the world, but you can't. Yeah, even killers like me have those days.

I bring the joint to my lips as I lay back on my bed and contemplate the rest of the day. Stalking is high on my priority list for today. I need to see her. I need to see her face. She's what makes getting through days like this better. Just ... her.

My door flies open, and my father walks in with Juno behind him. I look between them, but Juno just shrugs his shoulders.

"What is this?"

"Why are you in my house?" I ask him as Juno walks over, takes the joint from my hand, and brings it to his lips.

"You didn't show up today," he says.

"I didn't have anything to do today either," I remind him.

"There's always something to do, Ares."

"What is this really about, Father?" he sighs as I take the joint away from Juno and bring it back to my lips, inhaling.

"I'm going out of town," he announces, shocking the shit out of me. I nearly choke on my joint. I shove myself up and sit back against the headboard as I raise my eyebrows.

“What? Why? You never leave Bellmont,” I tell him. Bellmont is ours. All the land. All the houses. Everything. It’s like an independent subdivision of sorts.

“Not in a while, I haven’t, but things change. I’m needed elsewhere.”

“Where?” I ask, not really caring about it.

“You remember the export businesses I was talking about not long ago in New York?” I nod. “Well, there’s been some talk, and I’d like to see what it’s all about.”

“Turning a new leaf?” I laugh.

“No. Nothing here changes. When Bellmont was built all those years ago, they had big plans. Some fell through, and others are thriving. I’ve always thought exports would be lucrative. Legitimate business alongside what we do here. You need to always look at options in this line of work, Ares. You must see the bigger picture and other ways to make money,” he says.

“Are we not making enough with what we do?”

“Of course we are, but who doesn’t want more? Everyone wants more, Ares. More food, more water, more money, more women. There’s always a want out there.”

“What do you need more money for? You have everything you could ever want here in Bellmont.”

“I’m thinking of the future, Ares. Your future. My grandson’s future.”

“Grandson?” I question him. What the hell is he talking about? I’m his only child.

“Yes, my grandson. Soon, you will need to produce an heir to all this.”

“Why not a granddaughter?” I ask, knowing I’m crossing a line. A line he’s drawn. I see the anger in his eyes as he looks at me.

“Have you learned nothing about women?” he roars.

“I’ve learned a lot about them, actually.”

“Then you know exactly why a woman would never be in this role.”

“And what if the child was a girl? Then what?”

“Then the appropriate steps would be taken.”

“Which are?” His face reddens as he looks at me like he’s about to explode.

“None of your concern at the moment. Why are you always questioning me, Ares?”

“I was simply asking, Father.”

“Well, don’t. You need to find a woman to produce me an heir.”

“And what woman would that be? I see very few around Belmont. Certainly, none that are my age.” He looks at Juno and back to me as if we’ve figured out his deep, dark secret. Not yet, but I plan to.

“A woman of your choice, of course. I would never force you to have a child with someone you didn’t approve of.”

“Anyone I choose?”

“Yes. Anyone you choose, Ares,” he says.

“And I get to keep her?” Now he laughs as he looks around the room as if I’m the crazed one.

“Keep her? Why would you want to keep her?”

“Why wouldn’t I? She would be the mother of my child. Shouldn’t I care for her, keep her around?” My father scrubs his hand over his face before taking a deep breath.

“We’ll discuss this more when I return.”

“Which is?”

“I don’t know yet. I want to look into other opportunities while I’m over there. I trust things here will be handled accordingly. Mitch will be in charge while I’m away.” I nod my head. Mitch is Juno’s father and my father’s best friend. I finish my joint as my father stares at me. His looks don’t scare me; they never have. Probably because it’s been the same look

I've gotten since I was little. I see the rage, the anger, and I don't care. I don't care what he thinks of me. Not anymore.

"Not to worry, Father. Everything will be taken care of."

"I'm sure it will." With that, he turns on his heel and walks out of my room. I nod to Juno to go behind him and make sure he leaves my goddamn house. Sometimes, I hate living in Belmont for this exact reason.

I sigh and lay back down when Juno walks in and sits on the edge of the bed.

"He's gone."

"Thank fuck for that."

"You good? You seem a little off today," Juno says.

"No. I'm fine."

"You want to stalk your girl, right?" he laughs.

"I plan on stalking her, but there's more to do, Juno."

"What's there to do today?" he asks confused. Nothing was planned for today, as far as I know.

"We get to go to my father's house." I shove myself up and grab my jeans, pulling them on before slipping my feet into my boots.

"And that's fun, how?"

"Juno, we've talked about this. We can look for more information."

"Are you truly doubting him? Doubting why we do what we do?" I shrug.

"I don't know. Something just feels off about everything. And now I have to fucking have a kid on top of it?"

"I can't see you being a father," he laughs as I laugh with him. What the fuck am I going to teach my son? How to kill a woman? That's exactly what my father taught me, but I'm not him. And I'm not completely sure that's what I want out of my life.

"Me either. What the hell would I do with a kid?"

“Exactly. Your temper is too short. You’d end up killing the kid,” he laughs once more.

“You’re probably right. And where the hell am I supposed to find a woman to have a kid with?”

“Why not the girl you’re stalking?” I laugh again.

“Seriously? I’d have to kidnap her, Juno.” It’s not as if the thought hasn’t crossed my mind a few times. It has. I’ve thought about how I would keep her for myself.

“And you’re against kidnapping?”

“What would I do with her after?”

“I don’t know, keep her.”

“In this life?” I huff out a laugh.

“Why not? There has to be a reason there’s a few women around, right?”

“I don’t think they’re around for the reasons we’re thinking. There’s more,” I tell him.

“And that’s what we’re finding out?” I nod as I walk toward the door, grabbing my keys and glasses. I check my pocket for my phone as Juno follows me down the stairs and out the front door to my car.

“You coming?” I ask him. He shrugs and then nods his head. He knows he wants to come with me. He has a thing for the little blonde that lives there, too. He climbs in as I start the car and pull out of the driveway. I drive down the road, past my father’s house, to the gates at the main entrance. A man steps out of the booth to the right and nods his head at me before opening the large gates. No one gets in or out unless it’s through these gates. There is a twelve-foot concrete fence around the whole property as well as cameras at every fucking turn. No one does anything we don’t know about, and that’s the point. This is my father’s land, and he damn sure will not let anything go down here that he didn’t plan and plot.

“You really are into this girl, aren’t you?”

“No.”

“Then why are you stalking her? She isn’t even that good-looking.” I ball up my fist and slam it into his chest, causing him to cough. He glances over at me and smirks.

“Oh fuck, Ares. You do like that girl.”

“Mind your own fucking business, Juno.”

“Shit. This is my business. We’re best friends, basically brothers, Ares. Why don’t you just talk to her?” I glance at him before looking back at the road.

“Not going to happen.”

“Why not?”

“Do you honestly think my father wouldn’t find out?”

“So what? He told you to find a girl, right?”

“He wouldn’t approve of her. She isn’t the type he has in mind,” I tell him.

“What’s the type then?” I nearly roll my eyes.

“Like my mother was.”

“I don’t know what your mother looked like,” he reminds me. He’s right. No one has a picture of her anywhere. Not even me.

“I don’t know either. I don’t remember much about her.”

“You weren’t that young when he killed her, were you?”

“I was eleven.”

“So you should remember something.”

“I remember the whip. The way her blood splattered across my face. I remember how the blood coated her skin as she lay on the floor bleeding out.”

“Fuck, Ares.”

“What? You wanted to know what I remember. That’s what the fuck I remember.”

“I shouldn’t have asked,” he adds. No, he shouldn’t. Because those are memories I block out, or so the doctor told my father.

I sit back with a cigarette between my lips as she laughs. Fuck, that laugh could get a man killed. Juno is too wrapped up in her friend to notice what I'm doing as I reach down and adjust my cock. They all splash around in their little bikinis while she stays in her oversized t-shirt with just her legs in the water.

"I so want to get in there," Juno says. I crack my neck from side to side as I think it over. It's not that I don't want to be near her. It's just if I do get near her, how the hell am I going to pull myself away from her? You know what they say: you can't walk away once you've had a taste. And I'm afraid that'll be me.

I think about it. I think about it hard when I nod my head.

"Let's get in," I declare as I flick the cigarette to the ground and stand, stomping it out.

"What?"

"Let's go over there. You want to talk to her that badly." Juno looks at me as if I've grown two heads. Like he can't believe what I'm saying, this isn't me. I wouldn't get too close, but what the fuck is the difference now?

I start toward the pool, pulling my shirt over my head as I stalk toward them. Juno runs to catch up with me.

"You're serious?"

"Why the fuck not? We don't have shit else to do today," I tell him. The sun is setting but isn't so low that there's no

light. I shove the gate open to the pool and step inside, dropping my pants. There are only the girls and two other guys in here. They all glance over and stare at us just in our boxers before I dive in. I don't pay attention to Juno or what he's doing as I swim toward the girl. I pop up at her feet and blow water out of my mouth. She looks down at me with wide eyes but doesn't say a word as I stare at her.

"What the fuck are you doing, man?" One of the guys yells. I don't turn to look at him. I keep my eyes on hers as her lips slowly part. She doesn't know what to say, and that's fine. I don't want her to speak just yet. Not until she's begging me.

"Who the hell are you talking to?" Juno's voice thunders through the air.

"You don't live in this neighborhood."

"And?"

"This is a community pool," the asshole replies as I keep my eyes trained on her. Neither of us speaks a word still. The air is thick. My cock is hard. She swallows hard as she looks into my eyes.

"The girls invited us," Juno says, causing me to smirk a little. That's when a hand lands on my shoulder. I can tell it's a man as I crack my neck from side to side. Then I turn slowly to face the idiot who put his hands on me.

"I suggest that you take your fucking hand off me before I cut it the fuck off," I growl at him. He pulls his hand back quickly, no doubt seeing my rage.

"You weren't invited," he says.

"We were. Tell him, girls," Juno chimes in once more as he stands next to the little blonde who has him so intrigued. She looks at him when he nods his head. A slow smile creeps across her face as she nods her head.

"We did, Chase. We invited them."

"You did not."

"The girl said she did," I growl once more. I watch the asshole nod before he moves around me and places his hand



on my girl's leg. She jolts like she was burned, and I growl loud enough for the whole goddamn pool to hear.

"Fuck me," Juno mumbles, but I hear him.

I move, reaching up and grabbing his wrist, twisting it in my hand. He screams in pain as I turn him to face me.

"If you ever put a fucking hand on her again, I'll kill you. And I'll enjoy every single fucking minute of it."

"Who the hell are you?" he asks, even as I keep his wrist twisted.

"Your goddamn nightmare."

"I'll call the police," he says, and I chuckle.

"Good. Call them, and you'll go down for sexual harassment."

"I didn't do anything," he yells.

"You touched her. You fucking put your hands on something that isn't yours." The anger in my tone has him rethinking what he did. I can see it in his eyes. He glances at her and then back to me, and the thought of clawing his fucking eyes out for looking at her crosses my mind.

"You're insane." Now I laugh. It's a sick, dark laugh.

"You have no fucking idea just how much. Now, let me tell you this. If I ever see you touch or even look at her, I will gouge your fucking eyes from the socket before I cut you limb for limb."

"Let go of me," he howls as I twist a little harder before letting go. "You're going to pay for that." I laugh again.

"If you think you have the balls to stand up to me, go for it."

"You want to go a round right now?" he asks, shaking his wrist. I look back at my girl before turning back to this idiot.

"Get out of the fucking pool," I order. He snorts and turns, swimming toward the shallow end to climb out. I move to the edge and pull myself up next to my girl before standing to my

feet. She still hasn't said a word as she looks up and watches me. I wink at her and walk over to the grassy area on the side of the pool and wait. I'm still in my soaked boxers, not giving half a shit about fighting him.

"Chase, what the fuck are you doing?" his friend finally chimes in.

"He wants a fight, I'll give him one," the dumb fuck says. I shake my head, knowing this isn't going to end well for him, but I'll go with it anyway.

"You're making a big mistake," Juno tells him as he leans back against the side of the pool and throws his arm around the blonde. I look back at Chase.

"You ready for this?"

"I'm ready," I tell him. He throws the first punch, which I dodge. I let him throw a few more, dodging out of the way of all of them. He can't touch me. I live for this shit. He tries a few more times until I finally let him get one. I want to feel the pain. I need to get my head in the game, so I let him hit me. The first punch sends my head back, but I come back laughing.

"That's all you got? Fucking pussy," I taunt him. That must hurt his little feelings because he comes back at me full force this time. I slam my fist into his face and watch his head snap sideways. He stumbles back but rights himself pretty quickly before coming for me again. I sidestep and watch him swing, falling face down when he misses me. Juno and the girls in the pool laugh, but that's when his friend climbs out.

"Chase, fucking stop!" he calls out to him. Chase doesn't listen. He tries again, swinging at me, and I let it connect. Blood trickles down my lip, and I stick my tongue out, licking it off while I smile. I've had enough of these games, so I swing, knocking the air from his lungs before punching him in the face. His little friend rushes to his side when he falls to the ground.

"Get him the fuck out of here before I do more damage," I warn. He looks up at me but doesn't say a word before hauling

his boy to his feet and forcing him to walk. I watch them go before walking back to the pool and easing myself back in.

“That is not a true friend,” Juno says. I turn to look at him, wondering what the hell he’s talking about.

“What?”

“That wasn’t a true friend. I would never let someone beat your ass.” I laugh again as I shake my head.

“No one would ever beat my ass to begin with,” I remind him.

“You’re right.” That’s when one of the other girls swims closer to me. She slides up next to me and wraps her arms around my neck as I turn my head to look at her.

“You have three seconds to get the fuck off me,” I warn her. I don’t like her touching me. She isn’t the one I want touching me. She quickly removes her arms, and I move toward my girl. She’s looking the other way when I reach up and wrap my hands around her waist, pulling her into the water. She gasps, and a small scream rips from her throat as I settle her in the water.

“Your name.”

“What?”

“Your name. What is it?” She shakes her head slowly as she looks me in the eye.

“I don’t know you,” she tells me. Oh, I like her.

“That’s why I’m asking your name.”

“I don’t talk to people I don’t know,” she tells me. Fuck, she’s making me harder than I already was. I move closer, brushing her hair away from her face as those ice-blue eyes stare into my goddamn soul.

“You’re right. You don’t know me, and maybe it was better that way. But unfortunately for you, it isn’t. Now, you’re going to tell me your name one way or another,” I warn her. I let my hand fall back into the water before sliding it under the hem of

the too-big shirt. She stops me quickly, grabbing my wrist, and I release a growl.

“Don’t.” I ignore her plea. I don’t care she doesn’t want me touching her.

“Oh, I am.”

“No, you’re not. I’ll scream.”

“You have no idea how much I like screamers,” I inform her.

“I mean it.”

“Give me one good reason, and I’ll move my hand.” She blinks rapidly, tears filling her eyes. I know what she’s thinking without her telling me.

“I’m ... I’m not skinny like they are. I don’t shave down there like they do,” she mumbles, nodding toward her friends.

“And?”

“What do you mean, and?”

“I don’t give two fucks what they look like, sweetheart. I’m here for you.” She looks confused, which causes her to loosen her grip on my wrist just slightly, and I take advantage of that to slide my hand under her shirt. I feel her curves, her belly, and I groan. What the fuck does this girl do to me? She bites her lip and looks me in the eye while I sneak my hand toward her bikini bottoms. She shakes her head, but I nod mine. I slip my hand over her generous belly and lower, using the heel of my palm to take the weight as I slip my fingers into her bottoms. She sucks in a breath and watches me as if I’ve lost my mind, and maybe I have. I’m too close. Too fucking close, and I know after this, I won’t get enough of her.

My hand sinks further as I use my foot to kick her legs apart. She spreads them as I listen to Juno and the other girls laughing and having a good time on the other side of the pool. My focus is on her. Always on her.

“I’m going to fuck you with my fingers,” I tell her. She narrows her eyes at me and shakes her head. I smirk. “Oh, yeah, Little Lamb, I am.” I part her pussy lips and find her clit.

I drag my fingers over it slowly before moving lower. Sinking a finger inside her, she gasps. Fuck she's wet and not from the fucking pool water either.

"You have scars," she says as her eyes lower to my chest.

"Is that what you want to talk about right now?" She swallows hard and shakes her head. I didn't think so. Besides, I wasn't going to share with her anyway. That isn't what this is, what's happening right now.

I slowly fuck her with my fingers, sliding them in and out, and I know she likes this. Her lips part as I keep going, in and out, in and out. I love the fucking slickness that coats my fingers and wonder what she tastes like. I bet she's fucking delicious.

I keep going like this until she's panting and a gasping mess. I never take my eyes off hers, and she never takes hers off mine. There's such a pull with her. Something tugs me closer and closer. I step into her a little more and feel her hard nipples pressing into my chest through her shirt. I want to bite one. I want to mark her, but not now. Not today.

"A name," I say once more huskily. She's nearly breathless when I press my thumb to her clit. That's all it takes. Her body trembles as I wrap my free arm around her waist to hold her steady. She comes and comes hard. The noises she's making? Fuck, I've never heard anything like that before. And the way she holds her breath? Like that's going to help. My cock is screaming for attention.

"Breathe, Little Lamb," I tell her once more. She sucks in a big breath, but her eyes never leave mine. She watched me the whole time she came. I wonder if she would do that if I were inside her.

"Sage," she whispers. I smile as I lean in and brush my lips over hers. I don't kiss her, just give her a taste. Then I move in, parting her lips with my tongue and biting her lip between my teeth roughly. She lets out a little screech that drives me crazy before I pull back.

“Don’t shave anything, Sage. I want you just like this,” I tell her, pulling at the little hairs before slipping my hand from her bottoms. I lean in closely, nipping at her ear before saying, “Mine.”

Then, I pull away quickly and swim toward the shallow end.

“Let’s go, Juno,” I call out to him as I climb out. He groans and mumbles, but he follows me out just the same.

**W**hips, knives, scissors, shears. You name it, we have it. Anything you could want to torture someone, we have it on hand, as well as masks. We always wear masks so they don't realize who we are and could never identify us.

I wash my body after the latest round of women were handled. Juno is handling their return where they belong while I clean myself up. Climbing out of the shower, I grab the towel and dry myself before wiping the fog from the mirror, looking at the scars Sage saw. It's not like I try to hide them even though I have tattoos, most of them are still visible. What's the point in hiding what made you? What's the point of not showing them like a badge of honor? I reach up and run my fingers over the one covering my heart, but that isn't what makes me a monster to most. It's the one's on my face.

One runs from my eyebrow down to my eyelid and further down my cheek. There's another one running from my ear, crossing over the other to my bottom lip. Some of them were deserved. Or so I was told.

I shake my head, not willing to live in the past anymore. That's where these scars belong. In the fucking dark. Maybe that's where I belong, too. Maybe I'm not meant to be more than a monster. My door flies open, and Juno walks in just as I drop my towel and head for the dresser.

"You're early," I tell him. He flops onto my bed and yawns.

“Yeah, I know. I was out early,” he replies.

“Where were you?” I ask as I look over my shoulder and pull my boxers on. Then I move to the closet and grab my jeans and T-shirt.

“Out, fucking Sara.”

“Who the fuck is Sara?” I pull my jeans on and grab my socks before pulling my boots on.

“The blonde from the pool. Her name is Sara.”

“And you’re fucking her?”

“Of course I am. Why wouldn’t I?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe the fact you haven’t fucked anyone you let live in years,” I remind him. He chuckles and rolls over onto his back, sitting up to look at me as I pull my shirt on.

“Neither have you, and you got your girl, Sage.”

“I haven’t fucked, Sage. In fact, I haven’t let her see me again,” I admit to him.

“Yeah, I know. Sara was talking about it,” he says.

“About what?”

“You finger fucked Sage and then just left her hanging. She thinks it’s because she’s fat.”

“She isn’t fat,” I growl as I look at him with an evil glint in my eye.

“I’m just telling you what she said,” he explains, raising his hands. “Why haven’t you gone back?”

“I’ve been back. She just hasn’t seen me.”

“And why hasn’t she seen you?” I walk to the dresser and grab my phone, slipping it into my pocket before I turn toward him with my hands on my hips.

“Why would I?”

“Why wouldn’t you is the better question.”

“I can’t get too close, Juno.”



“You’ve already been too close.”

“You’re right, and I’m rectifying that by staying away.”

“They said she was crying,” he adds. He knows how much I love the tears of a woman.

“Stop.”

“That’s what Sara said. Said she cries a lot in the shower.”

“Probably has nothing to do with me,” I tell him.

“You don’t know that. You did finger fuck her and walk away.”

“What was I supposed to do? Propose marriage?”

“You could have gone back and seen her or taken her home. Fuck, you haven’t even had your cock in her yet,” he laughs. I flip him off.

“Come on, we have shit to do,” I tell him. He climbs off the bed and follows me out into the hallway.

“What are we doing?”

“Going to my father’s.”

“He isn’t home.”

“No, shit. That’s why we’re going over there.” He follows me down the steps and out the front door before climbing into my car. I climb in and start it up before pulling out of the driveway.

“What are we doing there?” he asks.

“Looking for shit. I told you, I want to know everything that’s fucking going on. He wants me to take over this empire and Belmont one day. I want to know what the fuck I’m getting into.”

“You weren’t joking?” he asks as I shake my head.

“No. Why would I? You know as well as I do that he’s hiding something as well as your father.”

“I don’t give two shits about my father.” Juno has never liked his father. They never got along, and after his mother

took off, he had no reason to care about him. He blamed him for her leaving. Still does. And I can't blame him either, but I don't think that's all. There's more to the story we don't know yet, and I will find out what it is.

"I know you don't. And I know that deep down you think this shit is off too."

"I don't know, Ares. Sometimes I don't get it, sometimes I do."

"That's why we're going to find the truth. Don't you want to know the real reason behind hurting those women?"

"They never have given us a reason, have they?"

"No. Just that they did something wrong." I pull into my father's driveway and kill the engine before we both climb out. I walk up the steps with Juno behind me before opening the door and nodding at the butler. He smiles my way before going back to what he was doing. I start for the stairs when Juno catches up with me.

"He has cameras," he says.

"I'm going to put them on a fucking loop. Why don't you calm the fuck down?"

"I just don't want any trouble, Ares."

"We are fucking trouble, Juno. That's all we do." He chuckles and nods his head.

"Yeah, you're right." With that settled, we head to my father's office. I shove the massive door open and walk inside, heading for his desk. I sit down, open his laptop, and go straight to the cameras. It doesn't take me long to do what I need to do to those. Then I'm opening every goddamn file I can find on there.

"It's all encrypted," I tell Juno. He walks around the desk and stands beside me, resting one hand on the desk.

"Shit. Figured that much," he mumbles. "Can you break it?"

“Probably, but it’s going to take time. I’m going to send this shit to myself and work on it at home.” Juno nods as I send myself file after file, backtracking and deleting all my tracks. I pull up a few more things, and all I find is how much we’re being paid to handle each woman. We make good fucking money doing what we do.

“Damn, that’s a lot of money,” Juno says.

“No shit. You think we’re going to find anything else?”

“Aside from that encrypted shit? Doubt it. They aren’t stupid, Ares. Our fathers have been doing this for years.” He’s right; they aren’t stupid. They wouldn’t leave anything out in the open for anyone to find.

“I’m going to figure this shit out.”

“Yeah, you probably are, and then what? What are you going to do with that information?”

“I don’t know yet. It depends on what I find.”

“Okay, say it’s something you don’t like. Then what?”

“Then I deal with it the way I see fit.”

“And what about the heir thing? You haven’t even been looking for a girl, Ares. He’s going to start to get pissed.” I smirk at my friend. He should know me better than this.

“Come on, Juno. You honestly think I give a shit if he’s pissed or not?” Juno chuckles and shakes his head.

“Not at all.”

“Let’s go. I have all I need for now. I want to hit the gym for a while and train.” Juno nods as I close the laptop and head back out of the office. We walk down the hall and the stairs with no issues. I’m thankful we don’t see Juno’s father here, although he can work from home. Just as we step outside, my cell rings. I pull it from my pocket and see it’s my father.

“Shit. It’s my father.”

“Oh fuck,” Juno says under his breath as I press the answer button.

“Hey.”

“Ares, how are things?”

“Good. Everything has been taken care of. The women are on their way back to where they belong as we speak.”

“No loose ends?” he asks.

“Has there ever been a loose end?”

“Watch your tone. There’s always a chance for mistake.”

“I don’t fucking make mistakes,” I say through gritted teeth.

“Not as of yet,” he adds, just to piss me off.

“Not ever. Can I say the same about you?” I want to test his patience and know exactly how to do that.

“Are you saying I make mistakes, Ares?”

“I’m saying there’s always a chance.”

“And what would my mistake be?”

“I haven’t figured that out yet, Father, but I’m sure in due time I will.” He laughs now. Let him laugh. He doesn’t know what I know. He doesn’t know I can break his goddamn encryption. He doesn’t know I possess those skills. There are things my father doesn’t know about me, and I’d like to keep it that way.

“What about a woman, Ares? Have you found one of those, or shall I do that for you?”

“Why the hell would you do it for me?”

“Because you haven’t presented me with one. I assure you if one isn’t found by the time I get home, I will choose one for you.”

“Which is when?”

“In a week.” With that, the line goes dead, and anger surges in my veins. I shove the phone back into my pocket as Juno looks at me, waiting.

“What did he say?”

“He is going to find me a suitable woman when he gets home if I don’t find one first.”

“When is that?”

“In a week.”

“Fuck, Ares. What are you going to do?” I shrug as I walk the rest of the way to my car and climb in. I start it up and pull out, heading toward the main gate.

“Where are we going?”

“To see my girl.”

“Are you going to talk to her?” I shake my head. Fuck no, I’m not. I’ve already gotten too close to her. I shouldn’t have touched her, but I did, and now the feel of her is cemented in my mind. I can still feel the silkiness of her pussy on my fingers.

“No.”

“Seriously? Just fuck her, Ares.”

“Mind your own fucking business, Juno, or get the hell out of my car,” I growl. He chuckles, but I’m not joking.

I drive until I reach their neighborhood and pull off on the side of the road.

“Can I at least go fuck Sara?” I chuckle this time and nod my head.

“Yeah. Go fuck Sara. Wait. Weren’t you just with her before you came over?”

“Yeah, so?”

“She isn’t going to think it’s weird that you’re coming back already?”

“No. She knows her pussy is good.” We climb out of the car. He heads for the front of the house while I head around the side. I wait a few minutes when I don’t see her. Then, just like magic, my beauty appears. She closes the door behind her before dropping on her bed. I watch her lie there for what seems like forever before she slowly runs her hands over her

chest. I know exactly what she's doing. You can hear Juno and Sara fucking in the next room.

So listening gets my little lamb hot and bothered, huh? She grabs her breast in her hand and squeezes as her lips part. I watch her caress herself, running her hand down her stomach before she parts her legs. I have the perfect fucking view of her little black panties. I pull out a cigarette and light it up as I take in the view.

She uses one hand to tug her panties to the side, revealing her glistening pussy. I'd give anything to be inside her right now or at least touching her.

She slips a finger inside and arches her back. Then she slips in another.

"Do it, Little Lamb. Fuck yourself just like I did," I whisper to myself as I watch her. She does it too. Almost as if she can hear me, she starts to fuck herself. I can't take my eyes off the perfection in front of me. She's it, she's perfect.

Her fingers glide in and out before she pulls them free and circles her clit. She likes to come like that, playing with her clit. I've watched her do it numerous times while I've been stalking her. And each time, my cock begs to be inside her, feeling her pulling, clenching, coating my cock in her wetness.

She's close.

"Where are you?" she says loud enough I can hear her. "Why did you touch me like that and disappear?" She's thinking of me as she gets herself off.

"Right here, Little Lamb. I'm right here," I say as I blow smoke into the air. She circles her clit a few more times before I hold the cigarette between my lips and pull my cock free. I spit in my hand, grab my cock, and stroke that motherfucker quickly until I can't take it. Like a little fucking boy touching a woman for the first time, I spray my release all over the ground in front of me as I groan. Sage comes as I watch her, but when she stills, I know she heard me. With my cock in hand, I step back into the brush and tuck my shit back into my

pants and snuff out my cigarette just in time. Sage is at the window in seconds, peeking out to see who made that noise.

“Hello?” she calls softly as I smile. She didn’t see me and had no idea it was me. She looks around, and I watch her slowly drop the blinds into place and move away from the window. That’s when I step out and move closer to the window. I know it’s all kinds of fucked up, but I want to see her. The blinds sway slightly, but I can still see through the broken one. And there she is ... fuck.

She’s staring right back at me.

**S**ome would panic right now, others would run, but not me. Instead, we stare at each other as if we don't know what to say to the other.

“What are you doing here?”

“Watching you,” I tell her truthfully. She tilts her head to study me before pulling the string and raising the blind.

“Why?”

“Why not?”

“You're very cryptic.”

“As I should be.” I start walking away from the window, knowing I need to end this shit here and now, but her voice stops me.

“Wait.” I don't know why I listen to her, but I stop walking and turn back to face her. She has her head stuck out the window now as I walk closer.

“What?”

“Why are you outside my window?”

“I told you that already. I was watching you.”

“You couldn't just knock on the door?” she smiles slightly. Fuck, that smile is perfect too.

“No.”

“Why?”



“That would mean you would know I’m here,” I tell her. Her smile fades as she looks at me as if I’m crazy, and I am. I shouldn’t be telling her any of this. Not a single word, but what does it matter now that she’s seen me?

“I don’t understand,” she says softly. “You didn’t want to see me?”

“I didn’t want you to see me,” I tell her.

“Why not?”

“That would defeat the purpose of me stalking you.” Her head jerks back, and she scoots herself away from the window. She doesn’t know what to say now. She doesn’t know how to feel knowing I stalk her. I remain a moment longer when she moves back toward the window. My little lamb is intrigued now.

“What do you mean by that?”

“You know what stalking is, yes?” She nods her head. “Then you understand exactly what I meant.” Instead of waiting for her to say anything further, I turn and walk away.

I head back down the block and climb into my car when I see her. She’s walking down the street directly toward me. I sigh and pull out a cigarette, lighting it up as she approaches my car. She bangs on the tinted glass, and I roll the window down.

“Get out,” she demands, and my cock hardens. Fuck, listen to her talking to me like that.

“No.”

“Get out of the fucking car!” This time, her tone is harsher, and I love it. I open the door, climb out with my cigarette hanging between my lips, and stare at her, waiting for her next move.

“You can’t just do that.”

“Do what?” I ask.

“Stalk me, asshole. You can’t stalk me!”

“I can and I will. I have for a long time.” Now, she steps back a little, and I counter that step. I step into her space, causing her to suck in a breath.

“What did you say?”

“I said I have been for a long time now. Almost eight months, to be exact.”

“What? Why?”

“Why not? I see something I like to look at,” I tell her.

“What is there to look at?” she asks as if she has no idea. Maybe she doesn’t. Maybe she doesn’t realize she’s beautiful to me.

“You.”

“There’s nothing about me worth looking at.” Now, I take a drag from my cigarette and blow smoke into the air before flicking it to the ground. I step closer to her, cupping her cheek in my hand.

“Then you aren’t looking, Sage.”

“What exactly do you want from me?” she asks softly. I chuckle darkly as I shake my head.

“Nothing. I don’t want anything from you.”

“Then why are you stalking me?”

“Okay. I do want something from you, Sage. I want to look at you.”

“Why?”

“Because I know beauty when I see it. I like to look at beautiful things, and you, Sage, are beautiful.” Her eyes fill with tears, but I shake my head. That’s not what I want to see. “No tears. I don’t like tears, Sage.” She blinks rapidly and reaches up to wipe her eyes, almost as if she wants to please me. That alone makes me harder than I was. I start to step away from her, lowering my hand when she counters my step. I raise an eyebrow, wondering what she’s doing. She’s braver than usual, and I don’t know how much I like that. She grabs

my face in her hands, pulling me toward her. I grin and shake my head.

“Are you telling me I can’t kiss you?”

“That’s exactly what I’m telling you.” Shock is written all over her face as she drops her hands and steps back. Then I see the confusion in her eyes. I roughly grab her cheeks, pulling her face toward mine. She swallows hard.

“If I kiss you, Sage, there’s no going back. What I’ll do to you, there’s no stopping it, and believe me, you won’t like what I want to do to you.”

“What do you want to do to me?”

“Bad things, Sage. Very bad things.” She licks her lips, and I watch her tongue move over them. I can’t fucking stop myself. I pull her face to mine, and I kiss her. I let my lips collide with hers, and it’s everything I thought it would be. She tastes like fucking heaven on my tongue. I deepen the kiss, tasting her, needing her, wanting her. Then I hear Juno whistling as he comes toward us. I pull away, breaking our kiss as Sage gasps for air. I release her face and step back, nodding toward the house.

“Go inside,” I tell her. She shakes her head as I scrub my hand over my face. Juno comes to stand next to the car, chuckling.

“Should I give you some time?”

“No. Sage, go inside,” I order this time. My tone should say it all. She huffs out a breath, turns on her heel, and walks back toward the house.

“What was that?”

“I’m going to say something you might not like, Juno.”

“What? What is it?”

“Something we’ve never done before.”

“Which is?”

“Something I can’t stop thinking about.”

“Spit it the fuck out, Ares.”

“Kidnapping.”

**J**uno hasn't questioned me much over the last few days about what I said in the car. He has made a few points but hasn't tried to talk me out of it until now.

"I just don't think it's wise, Ares," he tells me.

"Why not?"

"What do you plan on doing with her?"

"Keeping her in the basement."

"In the basement? Are you serious?"

"Why not? Everything she needs is there," I remind him. He runs his hand through his hair as he looks at me. Now he knows I'm truly insane.

"Okay. Forget that for now. Your father will be home in a few days, and you still haven't found a woman to present to him." That thought has crossed my mind more than once as well. What Juno doesn't know is I will present Sage as the woman. He must see the look in my eyes as I look at him. He shakes his head.

"Fuck no. Are you fucking crazy, Ares?" I chuckle now.

"Extremely."

"You can't present Sage to him!"

"Why the fuck not?"

"She isn't up to his standards, and you know it," he tells me. He's right, she isn't, but that doesn't mean shit to me. I

want Sage. That's the end of that.

"And?"

"And what if he says no?"

"I'm not letting Sage go."

"Jesus, Ares. You've been stalking her for close to a year. You've talked to her twice, and now you're just going to kidnap her?" I nod my head. That's the plan.

"Yes."

"And you think she's what? Just going to fall in line with that?"

"Absolutely not. She isn't going to go along with any of this. That's why it's called kidnapping, Juno."

"And what if he says no to her? Then what?"

"As I said, I'm not letting her go."

"And how do you plan to keep her?" he asks. So many questions. I'm tired of his questions. I'm sick of him doubting me.

"You know, for my best friend, you are questioning me a lot today, Juno."

"For good reason, Ares. This is insane, even for you." I walk over to the bar and pour myself a drink before turning to face him.

"You've known me since you were born, Juno. You're nineteen. You've been by my side for those nineteen years, and now, you decide to question me?" He sighs and drags his hand over his face before walking over, taking my drink from my hand and bringing it to his lips. I watch him take a drink before passing me the glass back.

"You're right, Ares. If this is what you want to do, I'm here for you. Tell me what you need me to do."

"A distraction."

"Of who?"

“Your little girlfriend, Sara. I need her out of the way while I get to Sage.”

“That won’t be a problem.”

“Good. Then let’s go,” I tell him as I down what’s left of my drink.

“Now?”

“I need to get her before my father comes home, so yes, now.”

“Are you even prepared for this?”

“The basement is soundproof. She won’t be able to get out, and no one will hear her. Everything she needs is down there. It’s perfect,” I explain. I grab our masks off the table and toss Juno his. He looks at it as I grin.

“You want me to scare her?”

“No. I don’t want her to know it’s us.”

“You said to distract Sara,” he states, confused.

“And you can’t do that wearing the mask?”

“I was just going to fuck her.”

“And you can just keep the mask on.” Juno shakes his head as I head for the door. I don’t want them to know it’s me just yet.

I climb in the car and shove my mask next to the seat as Juno climbs in and does the same. We pull out of the driveway and head for the main gate. The man comes out and nods at me before opening the gates, allowing me to leave. I pull out and head toward her house, but Juno seems on edge.

“What’s bothering you?”

“I don’t know, the fact that you’re about to kidnap someone!”

“We do a lot worse than kidnapping, Juno.”

“Yeah, I know, but we don’t do this. We don’t kidnap, never have. What if she screams?”

“She won’t.”

“How do you know that?” I slip my hand into the center console and pull out my knife, flashing it at him.

“That’s how.”

“You’re not going to cut her, Ares.”

“How the hell would you know?”

“You like her.”

“And? That means nothing, and we both know it.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right.” The rest of the ride to her house is quiet. He doesn’t say another word as I pull around back this time. I glance around to make sure that this is the best place to park to get her in the car before grabbing my mask.

“Actually, lose your mask.”

“What? Why?”

“They aren’t just going to open the door and invite you in with a mask on. I’m going through her window.” Juno sighs once more and climbs out of the car, walking around the front of it.

“You owe me for this,” he mumbles as I smirk. I nod as he walks toward the front of the house, and I go around the side. As usual, her window is open. I grab the ledge and hoist myself up before climbing through. I pull my mask into place and walk over to her bed, picking up her pillow and bringing it to my nose. I inhale her scent and fuck do I love it.

Tossing it back onto the bed, I walk and stand behind the door. I heard Juno talking to Sara before the bedroom door closed. I know it’s only a matter of time before Sage comes in here. My little lamb likes to listen to them having sex. It turns her on.

I wait a few minutes before her door opens, and she walks in. Then I move, wrapping my hand around her head, covering her mouth as I move the knife to her throat. She sucks in ragged breaths as I move her toward the door. She doesn’t



fight me, her fear not allowing her to. We move through the house with ease and out the back door. Her body is trembling with fear, but I keep moving toward the car. When I'm close, I lower the knife and pop the trunk open. That's when she starts to fight. She bucks and bites my hand, but I love the pain, so I don't let go. She screams around my hand as I reach into the trunk and grab the syringe I had prepared for this.

Sage keeps fighting like a good girl until the needle enters her neck. I toss the syringe back into the trunk as her body slowly relaxes.

“Just sleep for me, Little Lamb.”

**S**he lays there, still and silent. So goddamn beautiful it hurts. I wish she could see what I see. I want her to see what I see.

“Are you going to stare at her all night?” Juno asks as he drops onto the couch next to me and passes me the joint.

“I like to look at beautiful things, Juno.”

“Even while they sleep?”

“More so while they sleep.” He huffs a laugh as I take a long drag from the joint and pass it back to him.

“You really are crazy.”

“I don’t think you know just how much.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“Just what I said. Why are you still here anyway?” I ask, looking over at him. I figured he’d be gone by now, but here he is.

“Figured you might need some help with her when she wakes up,” he says. I snort a laugh.

“You think I can’t handle her?”

“You can, but I just wanted to be here in case you needed me.”

“I don’t need you. Leave,” I demand. Juno doesn’t move immediately. He sits there for a second longer. Then, he finally shoves himself off the couch and moves toward the door.

“Call me.” I flip a wave over my shoulder as I keep my eyes on her. I can’t take them off her. And I don’t want to. Long black hair splays around her as she lies there sleeping. Soon, she’ll wake up and realize what happened to her. I sigh as I shove off the couch and walk over to her, kneeling next to the bed. I brush her hair away from her face before leaning in and breathing her in.

“You’re going to be perfect for me, Little Lamb. You’re going to be even more perfect when my child fills your stomach,” I tell her sleeping form.

I sit here, taking her in until she begins to squirm on the bed. Then I stand and walk over, grabbing my mask off the table and pulling it over my face. I don’t want her to see me just yet. I don’t want her to know that I have her. So I stand with the mask in place, waiting for her to open those ice-blue eyes. And when she does, I let out a breath.

Sage blinks rapidly, trying to get her vision to focus. When she looks up at me in the mask, she screams and crawls to the top of the bed. I cock my head and take her in. I’ve never thought about it before, but I like her being afraid. Maybe I should keep with the mask for a while longer.

“What do you want? Where am I?” she asks, glancing around. As much as I’d love to talk to her and tell her she’s here with me, I can’t let her hear my voice just yet.

“Do you want money?” she asks quickly. I shake my head.

“What ... what do you want?” I don’t say a word. Her eyes are wide with fear and the unknown, and I like it. I step closer to the bed and reach out my hand to her, but she shifts and scoots further away.

“Are you going to kill me?” I shake my head. “Hurt me?” Now, I nod my head. I will hurt her in ways she’s never been hurt before. I see her body tremble as I step back and turn to walk away.

“Are you just going to leave me here?” She calls out to me. I turn back to her and nod toward the chain attached to her

ankle. She looks down and realizes she isn't going anywhere. A soft sob leaves her throat before she looks back at me.

"If you just let me go, I won't say anything. I swear." I shake my head. No way am I letting her go. She's mine. "Please. I'll do anything you want."

I want to speak so badly. I want to ask Sage what she'd do to earn freedom, but at the same time, I know it isn't enough for me to let her go. Now that I have her, there's no way I can let her leave me. I have to keep her. She has to be mine.

I turn my back on her and walk up the steps, pulling my mask off as I go. When I reach the top, I shove the door open and step into my living room. I blow out a breath. Keeping her here is dangerous not only because of my father but because of me. How will I control myself with her when I want her as much as I do?

I stalk to the kitchen and grab something to eat. When finished, I walk to the living room, grab my laptop, drop onto the couch, and open it up. Then I get to work. Whatever my father is hiding, I'm going to find out. I go through his files one by one until my eyes start to cross and my head aches. I figure it's about time to feed Sage and return to the kitchen to make her something to eat before pulling my mask back into place and walking back downstairs. She sits in the same spot I left her, with tears running down her cheeks. She reaches up and wipes them away quickly when she sees me coming. I watch her straighten her back, keeping her eyes on me the whole time.

I walk closer and set the plate of food on the bed. Sage shakes her head.

"I'm not touching that." I chuckle darkly and nod toward the plate. "It could be poisoned." I shake my head.

"You kidnapped me. You could be lying." Again, I shake my head.

"I don't trust you," she declares. I smile behind my mask and point to my head, letting her know it's smart of her not to trust me. She shouldn't trust me. I nod toward the plate once

more, but she still doesn't move to grab it. Then I walk over and pick up the sandwich, holding it to her mouth. When she doesn't open up, I growl low in my throat and reach for my pocket, pulling my knife free. I flip it in my hand so she can see I mean business. She's shaky, but she opens her mouth and takes a bite. I nod and press the remainder into her hand before sitting back and watching her eat it.

It doesn't take her long to finish when I nod, indicating the water in front of her. She picks it up and glances at it before uncapping it and drinking.

"Happy now?" I nod my head. "What are you doing with me?" I wish I could answer that for her, but I can't. Not until the time is right. Instead, I walk over, drop onto the couch, sit back, relax, and watch her. I could fucking watch her for hours and never tire of it.

"Are you just going to watch me?" she asks. I nod once more. "Why?" I shrug this time. I know why I just can't tell her right now.

The night continues much like this. I check my phone for messages and emails, but that's about it. For the most part, I just sit and watch Sage. She must get tired because she finally lays her head on the pillow and closes her eyes.

““**W**hat’s on the agenda for the day?” Juno asks as I yawn and lean my head back on the couch.

“Father will be home tomorrow,” I tell him.

“And you’re ready for that?” I turn my head and look over at him.

“No.”

“Why? Afraid of what he’ll say about Sage?”

“Partially. I don’t intend to let her go anyway,” I remind him.

“You’ve said as much.”

“I just don’t know how he will react.”

“Have you finished decrypting the files?” I shove myself up, grab the laptop off the table, and flip it open, powering it on.

“A few things. Not sure they make any sense right now, though.”

“What is it?” I open a few files and turn the computer so Juno can view the screen.

“Adoptions? Who was adopted?” he asks as he looks at me funny.

“I don’t know. That’s as far as I’ve gotten. His encryption is pretty good.”

“Nothing you can’t handle,” he adds. I nod my head.

“You’re right. Nothing I can’t handle. I’ll figure it out.”

“I know you will,” he says. “Have you slept at all?”

“Not much. I watched her.”

“Watched her as in all night?” he asks, raising his eyebrow.

“What difference does it make?”

“You’re going to end up off your game, Ares. You need rest.”

“I’ve gone on less before. I’m fine,” I remind him.

“So what are we doing today?”

“I didn’t plan on doing anything. I wanted to work on these files a little more.” No, I want him to leave so I can go back downstairs with Sage. I want to look at her, tempt her. I want to show her my face, but I’m also hesitant to do that. I do have other plans for her, though.

“If we don’t have plans, I’m going to see Sara.” I nod my head as I look back over at him.

“Then go.”

“Fine. I’ll see you later then?”

“Yeah, we’ll meet for dinner and discuss anything I’ve found.”

“Sounds good to me. See you later,” Juno says as he stands and walks toward the door. I watch him go before grabbing my laptop and heading for the basement. I pull the mask over my face as I head down the stairs and see her sitting on the edge of the bed. She looks over when she hears me and watches me back.

Then I walk over and put the laptop on the couch before pulling the blindfold from my back pocket. I hold it up for her to see the closer I get to her. She doesn’t move or scream like I thought she would. Instead, she watches me intently.

I move closer and wrap the fabric around her eyes before grabbing her hand and helping her to her feet. Then I lead her

toward the other side of the room I'm sure she's seen since she's been here. I let go of her hand and stand in front of the snake's tank. I've had this snake for years. Years of taking care of him and being the only thing he knows.

I open the secured door and reach in, lifting him. I know Sage is scared of them since I overheard her talking about it once with her friends when I was watching her, and I'm surprised she hasn't said anything about it being down here with her.

Gently, I set the snake on her shoulder and watch as he slithers around her neck. Now she trembles.

"What the hell are you doing? Are you crazy?" she asks, trying to keep herself from moving. I smirk. He wouldn't hurt her. He wouldn't hurt anyone. He's docile.

"Please, get it off me," she begs as her voice quivers. Halo, my snake, slithers around her shoulders before resting there like I knew he would. Nevertheless, Sage is trembling, and I love it. I reach up and remove the blindfold. I love the fear I see in her eyes. I step around her and stand in front of her, watching her as she watches me. Tears fall down her cheeks as her chest rises and falls.

"Will it bite me?" I shake my head.

"Will it choke me?" Again, I shake my head. She still doesn't make a move to touch him or try to move him. Instead, she stands still, keeping her head held high. That's my girl. That's what I wanted. I wanted to see her stand her ground. If she's going to be mine, she will have to toughen up. This isn't a world for the weak.

"You had to know," she says softly. I tilt my head to the side and look at her. "That I was afraid of snakes." I nod my head because she's right; I did know that.

"And this is punishment?" she asks. I think about that one. This isn't punishment. This is more than that. But in reality, it is not. So I shake my head.

"Then you just do this for fun?" Now she's getting it. I shrug my shoulders because I don't know if this is actually



fun, but I guess it is.

Once I've had my fun, I take Halo, placing him back in the habitat. Sage watches me before I turn, walk back to the couch and sit. She returns to the bed and sits on the edge as I pull out my laptop and get to work.

She's silent for the most part, aside from clearing her throat. I ignore her and keep working until I look up, and our eyes lock. It's like the air in the room has thickened. I try to focus on what I'm doing, but she's a fucking distraction, one I welcome.

When I can't handle it anymore, I slam the laptop closed, shove out of my seat, and move toward her. She leans back as I invade her space, grabbing her around the throat. I bend at the waist and breathe heavily in her ear.

"What are you going to do to me?" A low growl leaves my throat, sending a shiver through her body. I can feel her trembling as I squeeze her throat lightly; all I can think about is being inside her. I reach down with my other hand and grab Sage's hand, bringing it to my cock. I squeeze her hand around it and force her to stroke it through my jeans.

"Are you going to rape me?" Another growl leaves my throat because I would never rape her. When she finally has my cock inside her, she will beg me for it. I shake my head and press my lips to her neck through my mask. I can feel her pulse thumping against my lips. This turns her on. I can tell by the way her heart is beating.

I can't fucking wait to be inside her.

**T**oday's the day. My father has returned home, and it's time to introduce Sage to him. Am I nervous? Absolutely not. I don't get nervous. I don't feel fear like a normal person would.

"You sure you want to do this?" Juno asks me as I grab my mask off the table.

"I'm sure."

"What if he says to get rid of her?" I look over at him because we've discussed this already. I refuse to get rid of her. She's mine.

"That's not an option."

"What if he doesn't give you an option?" Juno pushes. I move quickly toward him before wrapping my hand around his neck and slamming him against the wall.

"What part of she's mine do you not fucking get, Juno? Huh?"

"Calm the fuck down, Ares."

"Calm down? You want me to calm down? You're over here talking shit, and you want me to calm the fuck down?" I roar this time. He watches me, looking me in the eyes. I want to beat his ass, and the thought has crossed my mind more times than I care to admit. Lately, he's been getting on my nerves more than usual.

"Sorry, man. I didn't mean to piss you off," he says.

“Then keep Sage out of your fucking mouth. She’s mine, and the next time you have something to say about her, I will slit your goddamn throat, Juno.”

“You like her that much?”

“You don’t understand what I feel for her,” I growl at him.

“Okay. I got it, Ares.” I release my hold and step back a little. Juno adjusts his shirt and rubs at his neck where I was holding him.

“Are you coming with me?” I ask him, looking over my shoulder at him.

“You want me there?”

“Doesn’t matter. I figured we both should hear what he has to say,” I tell him. He nods and steps toward me, placing a hand on my shoulder.

“I’m sorry, Ares.”

“It’s fine. Just watch what you say about her.”

“I got it.” We pull our masks over our faces and head for the stairs. We walk down and stop at the bottom when I see Sage. She stands quickly as I walk toward her. Sage looks between us, unsure of what to say or do. I pull the cuffs from my back pocket and wrap them around her wrists. Then I lean down and undo the one on her ankle.

“What’s happening?” I don’t say a word, and neither does Juno. I grab the middle of the cuffs and drag her toward the stairs before Juno moves in and wraps a blindfold around her eyes. I lead her up the stairs and into the living room. Then we head outside, where I help Sage down the stairs so she doesn’t fall. I lead her to the car, and Juno opens the back door. I usher her inside.

I settle her in, climb into the front seat, and start the car. I pull out of the driveway and onto the road, driving toward my father’s. Anticipation courses through my veins as I pull into his driveway and park the car. Juno and I share a glance before we both climb out. I move to the back door and pull it open, pulling Sage out of the car.

As we walk up the front steps and into my father's house, Sage doesn't say a word, and that's exactly how I want it. We enter the den, and that's when my father turns to face me.

"What is this? Why the masks? And who the hell is this?" he asks, nodding toward Sage. I look at her and reach up, pulling the blindfold free so she can see my father. She looks at me but still doesn't say a word.

"Ares? You want to tell me what the fuck is going on here." I can hear the anger in his voice, but it doesn't throw me off even a little. I pull my mask off, allowing Sage to see it's me for the first time in days. She gasps as she stares at me.

"You wanted me to present you with a woman, and I did just that." Now, he looks back at Sage and eyes her up and down.

"She isn't what I was thinking for you," he states.

"What does that mean?"

"That means she isn't good enough, Ares! I give you one simple task, just one, and you couldn't even do it!" He roars. Sage jolts slightly at his tone, but I keep a firm grip on the handcuffs.

"She's perfect. Look at her," I say as I turn to eye her up and down myself. I love every fucking thing about her.

"She's much too big, Ares. And black hair and blue eyes?"

"I have black hair and brown eyes, Father."

"Blonde's, Ares! We go for blondes. This isn't what you want. Do away with her," he says, waving his hand and dismissing us. Anger seeps into my pores as I lick my suddenly dry lips.

"No."

"What the hell do you mean no?"

"I said no. You want me to produce an heir. It will be with her."

"What?" Sage chimes in now.

“You heard me. He wants an heir, and you will carry that heir,” I tell her. She shakes her head and tries to pull away from me but doesn’t get far. I yank her back next to me with the handcuffs.

“You can’t force me to have your child! You’re a fucking stalker!” Now I chuckle.

“It seems I don’t have to stalk you anymore, do I, Sage? You’re here now.”

“Let me go,” she sneers.

“Not a chance in hell.”

“Oh, she is leaving, Ares. You aren’t keeping her.”

“Yeah, you’re going to let me go,” she snaps. That’s enough of that. I move quickly, wrapping my hand around her throat and walking her backward until she hits the wall.

“You know what you’re going to do, Little Lamb? You’re going to be quiet. You’re going to stand here quietly and listen. That’s it. Do you understand me?” Her eyes widen at how I talk to her, but it needs to be done. She needs to understand that now isn’t the time to grow a backbone. Now’s the time to listen and understand. I raise my eyebrow as if to ask her if she understands. She nods her head.

“Enough of this, Ares. I’ll find you a suitable woman,” my father says. I step away from Sage and release my hold before turning to him.

“Will you? I don’t think so. I will kill every woman you put in my path, Father.”

“That’s nonsense, Ares. Why would you?”

“Because I can. You want an heir, then I will pick the woman I shall have it with.” I watch him look at Sage once more before shaking his head.

“We don’t have a deal, Ares. She’s not good enough,” he tells me. Rage shakes me to my core. How dare he say my little lamb isn’t good enough to have children with. She’s perfect. She’s everything a fucking man could want in a woman.

“You’re wrong about that.”

“I’m done arguing. Do away with her, Ares, or I will.” That’s the end of the discussion. That’s all he has to say as he turns and walks to his bar, pouring himself a drink. I look at Juno, who has also removed his mask, but he just shakes his head. He knew this was going to happen; he warned me. I swallow hard and grab the handcuffs again, jerking Sage. No one speaks as we leave and climb back in the car. Sage sits in the seat, looking out the window as I didn’t bother to blindfold her this time. Juno climbs in the passenger seat and looks over at me.

“Now what?”

“The plan doesn’t change,” I reply.

“Even after that?”

“Even after that,” I tell him. I pull out of my father’s driveway and head back to my place. Juno climbs out when I park the car, but I don’t. I remain in the car, thinking about what I will do next. I watch Juno walk inside as I look in the rearview mirror at Sage. She stares back at me. Her ice-blue eyes shine with anger and fear.

“Let me go,” she says. I shake my head. There’s no way in hell.

“You’re mine. Remember that night in the pool?” I ask her. Her lips part as she looks at me and shakes her head.

“You don’t know me.”

“I know you, Little Lamb. More than you know,” I inform her.

“Why do you want me? I’m nothing special.”

“That’s where you’re wrong. You don’t see what I see, Sage. I see you. I see what I want and what I’m going to keep.”

“What do you mean? How could you want me?” Tired of hearing the same thing, I fly out of the car and rip the back door open, dragging her out. She cries in pain from the cuffs cutting into her flesh, but I don’t care. Not right now.

I stomp up the front steps and in the front door as Juno watches me.

“You good?” he asks.

“Fuck off,” I tell him as I drag Sage through the room and up the stairs, not stopping until we reach my room. I shove the door open and drag her inside, slamming the door behind us. Then I walk her over to the floor-length mirror hanging on the wall. I don’t bother removing the cuffs. I move straight to her shirt, ripping the front of it open and tearing it from her body. Sage startles and a gasp rips from her lips, but I move to her jeans next. I tear them down her legs, forcing her to step out of them. When she’s in nothing but her bra and underwear, I groan.

“Look at yourself,” I order. She shakes her head in denial, but I stand behind her, grabbing her face and forcing her to look. Tears fill her eyes as she stares at herself in the mirror. “Everything about you is perfect, Little Lamb. Everything.”

“How can you even say that?”

“Because I’m looking at you.”

“You’re not.”

“I am. I’m looking at everything in front of me, and there’s nothing about you I don’t like, Sage.” She looks harder at herself, taking herself in. Her eyes move down the mirror, taking her whole body in.

“I’m not skinny,” she whispers.

“I don’t want you to be.”

“I don’t look like they do,” she adds.

“I don’t want you to,” I tell her. She looks at me in the reflection, unsure of what to say. Our eyes lock.

“What I see is beauty. When I first saw you, I knew there was something more to you I wanted, but I couldn’t take it yet. I knew this obsession, this need would end up breaking me, Sage, and that’s why I stayed away from you. I couldn’t allow myself to get too close and lose control.”

“And now?”

“Things changed. My needs changed.”

“What does that mean?” she asks.

“It means you’re mine, Sage. I’m not now or ever letting you go.” Her eyes widen, and she doesn’t know what to say. She stands here looking at me in the mirror, hesitant about what to do. My admission changes nothing. She’s mine. My father’s word changes nothing. I’m not letting her go.

“Your father doesn’t want me here,” she adds, having heard what he said. I grin a dark, sinister smile.

“What part of your mine don’t you understand?”

“And if I don’t want to be yours?” Now I laugh loudly.

“That’s too bad, Little Lamb.”



I chained her back to the bed so she couldn't run. If given the chance, I'm sure she would. What my father said changes nothing. Juno thinks it has, but it hasn't. He's made himself scarce since the meeting with my father yesterday. Not that I mind because that leaves me alone with Sage.

"How long will I be chained up here?" she asks as I work on the laptop.

"Until I say otherwise."

"Which is when?"

"When I say, Sage," I tell her as I keep working on the laptop. She huffs out a breath that makes me laugh.

"You think this is funny? Kidnapping me and holding me hostage?"

"I think your attitude is funny."

"I don't have an attitude." I look up from the laptop now and shake my head.

"You do. And I like it, Sage. It makes me fucking hard for you." Confusion dances in her eyes at what I said.

"Are you insane?"

"Yes." She doesn't blink or slink away from me this time. She just stares at me.

“If I were to ask you questions, would you answer me?” she asks. I shrug.

“That’s a tough one. It depends on the question.” I sit up a little straighter. I knew she would have questions for me; I just wasn’t sure if I would answer them.

“Where are we?”

“My house.”

“Which is where?”

“You don’t need to know that right now,” I tell her.

“Am I safe here?”

“As safe as you can be considering who I am.”

“What does that mean? Who are you?”

“Ares Scott.”

“I’ve never heard of you,” she says. Now I laugh. No, she wouldn’t have heard of me. No one has heard of me because that’s the way we keep it. We’re anonymous. No one knows who we are.

“I would suppose not.”

“What do you do?”

“As far as?” I know what she’s asking, and there’s no way in hell I will tell her I torture women for my father.

“Your job. What do you do?”

“That’s not up for discussion,” I tell her.

“Why? Why can’t I know?”

“It’s not any of your concern, Sage. Let’s just say you wouldn’t be happy if you knew.”

“I’m not happy now,” she retorts. I set the laptop to the side and push to my feet, walking toward her. The pull is there just like it’s always been. I want her, there’s no doubt about that. But she doesn’t want me, at least not yet.

I stop in front of her, grab her hand, and lift her off the bed. Sage stands in front of me but doesn’t say a word.

“You have questions. I expected as much. But don’t think I will give you every answer you want, Little Lamb. It won’t happen.” I bring my fingers up to her cheek, and she flinches as if I’m going to hit her. It pisses me off because she’s never done that before, although our only interaction was in the pool that night. Nevertheless, I let my fingertips trail down her cheek until I reach her chin. Then I lift her head a little so she’s looking up at me.

“I do bad things, Sage. Things that would scare you and haunt your dreams. You wouldn’t be able to sleep at night if you knew what I did,” I tell her. She watches me, not saying anything until she nods her head slowly.

“How long are you keeping me here?”

“Forever, Sage. You’re mine. We’re going to be married.” Sage tries to pull away from me, but I don’t allow it. I keep squeezing her chin in my hand, keeping her right where I want her.

“You can’t make me.” I smile at her.

“I can do what I want, Sage. You don’t have a say in this.”

“What if I want a say in this?”

“Then you act accordingly, and we’ll see how things go. When I can trust you, I mean truly trust you, then you can have a say in things.” She licks her lips, and I want to fucking bite them. So I do. I lean in, biting her bottom lip between my teeth until I taste blood. Sage gasps and tries to pull away but keeps her eyes on me. I can taste her blood on my tongue, and it’s the best thing I’ve tasted in a long time.

“What if I don’t want this?”

“Want what?”

“Any of this,” she says. I smirk at her now. I like that she thinks she has a choice in the matter. She doesn’t.

“That’s too bad, Sage. I’m a man who gets what he wants, and what I want is you.”

“I don’t understand why,” she says softly.

“Then we have work to do,” I tell her. I caress her cheek, and her eyes flutter.

“What do you mean?”

“You’re going to see, Sage. You’re going to see exactly why I want you. You’ll see why you’re better than what you think you are. You will be mine, Sage. If I’m the king, then you are my fucking queen!” I roar in her face. She jerks back a little as I laugh manically. Then I step back, pulling away from her, but I don’t get that far. She reaches for me, grabbing the front of my shirt and jerking me back into her. Her lips hover closely to mine, but she doesn’t make the final move to kiss me.

“What are you going to do, Sage?” I challenge her. I want her to make the first move. I want her to fucking kiss me so I can devour her. Her breathing is sporadic as we stand here face to face. I know she feels something for me. She has to. She wouldn’t be acting like this if she didn’t.

“It’s your move, Little Lamb.” I can feel her warm breath dancing over my flesh as she leans closer. Her lips barely touch mine, and fire rips through my body. My cock hardens, my chest rising and falling rapidly as I wait for her to make a move. Then she presses her lips gently against mine. It’s too much, and it’s not enough. I need more. I crave more. But I let her take her time. She slowly kisses me, and I let her.

Her lips move over mine, but I don’t kiss her back. I can’t. If I do, I’ll lose control.

“Kiss me back,” she whispers.

“I don’t think you know what that means, Little Lamb,” I warn her.

“I don’t care what it means. Just kiss me back,” she repeats, her tone a little steadier than it was.

“You’re making a mistake,” I warn.

“Then let me.” She kisses me again, and I lose it. I fucking lose it. I slide my hand around her neck, holding tightly as I kiss her roughly. It isn’t a gentle kiss. This is more, so much more. Our lips collide in a way that will leave bruises. Her

taste explodes on my tongue as I devour her mouth with mine. I take from her. I take even if she isn't willing to give. I bruise her mouth with mine, and our teeth clink together. I squeeze her throat harder as my cock strains in my jeans.

I reach for her hand and pull it to my cock. She wraps her hand around it on her own and slowly strokes it. I pull back long enough to say, "Harder." Then my mouth is back on hers. She does as she's told and strokes me harder. I groan and rock against her. She's making me crazy, and I don't know how long I can hold back.

Her hand moves faster and faster until I have to break the kiss. I reach down, moving her hand to unzip my jeans and pull my cock free. Then I reach for her hand and put it back where it was. Her hand is so fucking soft as she wraps it around me and tugs at my cock. I watch her hand as she does it. I don't look at her face; I look at her hand. I want to see what she's doing to me.

"Watch what you're doing to me, Sage," I tell her. She lowers her head and looks down at her hand as she fucks my cock. I groan, and she moves her hand faster.

"You want to make me come, Sage? You want to see what I have for you?" She moans softly but keeps going. She doesn't answer me, and that pisses me off. "Answer me!" I yell. Her hand stops. I grab it in mine and force her to stroke me. I force her to make me come. We both watch as I fuck her hand harder. Then I fucking come hard.

I blow my load all over the front of the T-shirt I gave her to wear. Cum paints her thighs, and all I can think about is getting between those thighs. I reach down with two fingers and swipe some of the cum and bring it to her mouth. At first, she doesn't open, but then I cock my head, and her lips slowly part. I thrust both fingers into her mouth, and she surprisingly sucks them clean as I watch her. Then I pull them free.

"You see what you do to me?" I ask her as I look her in the eye.

"Why did you make me do that?"

“Make you? I made you?” I raise an eyebrow.

“I mean ... not exactly.”

“You kissed me, Little Lamb.”

“And you liked it.” Now, I smile at her.

“You’re goddamn right, I liked it.”

I walk Sage into the bathroom and unhook the chain from her ankle before starting the shower. She doesn't try to run, and that makes me wonder why. Or maybe she knows she won't get far. Either way, she stays in place as the shower warms up.

I reach over my shoulder and pull my shirt off before tossing it to the floor. Her eyes trace over my tattoos, my scars. She doesn't say anything, and that makes me happy. I don't want to shoot her down right now, but I will. I finish stripping out of my clothes until I'm completely naked.

"Am I going to be able to get my clothes?" she finally asks.

"You don't need them."

"What do you mean?"

"You don't need clothes here, Sage. That's what I mean. I want you naked or in my shirt."

"Your shirt barely fits me," she tells me.

"It fits you just fine."

"It's too small."

"Exactly how I like it," I tell her. She looks at me like I've grown two heads, but I don't care. I grab her hand and pull her into the shower with me. The warmth hits my skin, and I sigh, knowing what I have to do today. I'm not fucking happy because I have to leave Sage for a while to handle things.

I grab the sponge and wet it before squirting soap on it. I lather it up and hold it out to Sage. She takes it but isn't sure what to do with it.

“Wash me.”

“What?”

“Wash me.” Sage hesitates at first before moving closer to me. She reaches out and runs the sponge over my skin as I watch her. She works my body over, cleaning me. I shouldn't like making her do things, but I can't help it.

“Turn around,” she says, and I do as I'm told. She washes my back and down my legs, before she stands, and I turn back to face her. Then she continues to wash the front of me, stopping when she reaches my cock. I nod my head for her to keep going, and so does. She scrubs my length as I groan out loud. Her eyes shoot to mine and remain there for a long second before I take the sponge from her.

“I don't have girly shit, but I want you smelling like me,” I tell her. She still doesn't speak as she watches me. I begin to wash her, making sure to pay extra attention to her breasts and nipples. I scrub the sponge over her nipples a little harder than the rest of her body until she gasps.

“The things I want to do to you, Little Lamb.”

“What do you want to do to me?” she asks, unable to stay quiet.

My body surges with energy. She has no idea what I'd do to her.

“Bad things, Little Lamb. Bad things.”

“Like what?”

“You really want to know?” I ask her as I keep washing her. She nods, and all I can do is moan at how she feels. I drop the sponge at our feet and grab the soap, lathering my hands. Then I'm back on her. Feeling her skin beneath mine is driving me crazy.

“First, I want to watch you come. I've seen you come so many times, but I was always on the outside looking in. I want



to be there, up close and personal,” I tell her as my hands massage her waist. “Then, I want to grab you by the throat while I fuck you hard. I want to touch you, tease you, drive you as fucking crazy as you make me.”

Her lips part as she stares at me. She wants it; I can see it in her eyes.

“I want to taste every inch of your skin. I want to fuck every hole. I want to watch you come apart for me. I want you begging for me,” I say as my hands slip down her thighs. Sage sucks in a breath as I shove her legs apart with my foot.

“I want your pain, Little Lamb. I want your pleasure. I want fucking everything from you.”

“Why?”

“Why not? You’re smart, beautiful, and full of life. You just don’t see what I see, Sage.”

“How can you see all that?” she asks as I inch my hands between her thighs. I massage her inner thighs, watching as her breathing picks up. Her breasts rise and fall rapidly as my hands get closer to something I’ve wanted to touch for a long time.

“Because I’m looking, Sage. You’re not.” Then I slip my soapy hand over her pussy, and she moans. I grab her mound in my hand and squeeze roughly. She lets out a little whimper, and I know I hurt her a little. That’s what I wanted to do. Slowly, I slide my fingers between her folds and slip two inside her. She’s so fucking tight, just like I knew she’d be. I bend my fingers and get a good rhythm, working her up. I fuck her pussy so good with my fingers she reaches out to hold into me. This is new too. Her touching me, and I fucking love the electricity that shoots through my body when she does.

I keep going, knowing she’s getting closer and closer. I pull my fingers out and find her clit and circle it, just like I know she likes. I put extra pressure as she rocks her hips into me, and I pull away as I feel her tense up. Sage cries out, and her closed eyes now pop open. She looks at me with anger in her beautiful blue gaze.

“You want to come, Sage?”

“Yes,” she snaps at me.

“I’m not ready to let you come yet.” I grab the shower head and pull it down, rinsing both of us before spraying her clit. She gasps and arches her back as I keep teasing her. Again, when she’s about to fall apart, I pull away. I reach around her and turn the water off before stepping out and grabbing two towels. I offer her one, which she snatches from my hand while I dry off with the other.

“That’s fucked up,” she says as I watch her dry herself.

“Is it?”

“Yeah, it is. Why would you do that?”

“I like to see you worked up. I like to see you on the verge of coming. Do you have any idea how fucking gorgeous you look like that?” Her cheeks turn pink as she wraps the towel around herself. I shake my head and reach for it, snatching it off her body and tossing it to the floor. Then, I lean down and replace the chain around her ankle. As I usher her back into the living room, she doesn’t say anything. I nod toward the bed, and she walks over and climbs in, pulling the cover over herself. I follow behind her, climbing into the other side.

“What are you doing?” she asks.

“Going to bed.”

“You’ve never slept down here,” she says. I nod my head before flopping back on the pillow.

“I know that.”

“So why are you tonight?”

“Do you want me to leave?” I ask, nearly snarling at her. I wait for a long second for an answer before I sit up and start to climb out of bed.

“No.” My chest seizes. She wants me to stay. I lay back down and motion for her to do the same. She pulls the blanket around her neck as if that will stop me. If I wanted to get to her, I’d rip that blanket to shreds. Just thinking about her

naked body has my cock hard once more. She notices too. I can see how she licks her lips as she looks at it.

I don't touch myself. I just lie here watching Sage watching me. I close my eyes, letting the darkness consume me once again. Dreams, visions, I don't know what the fuck they are, but they haunt me. They tug at my subconscious and wreak havoc on my sleep.

It feels hard to breathe; something is choking me. I reach up just as my eyes snap open, and that's when I realize what's happening. Sage is straddling me with the chain from her ankle wrapped around my neck. Our eyes lock, and air whooshes from her lungs as she realizes I'm awake. I smirk even as the chain cuts into my neck. I look her in the eyes before I reach for her, bucking my hips to make her fly forward before I flip us in one move. Now, it's my turn.

With the chain now in my hand, I press it to her throat, one hand on either side of the bed holding it down. Her eyes widen as her air supply is cut off.

“What were you doing? Trying to run from me? If you run, I'll find you, Sage. If you leave me, I will hunt you to the end of the fucking earth and drag you back to hell. Don't you get it? You're mine.” I watch as she gasps for air, mimicking her with my mouth open. She doesn't know what to do. Sage reaches up and grabs at my arms, but it does no good. I'm stronger than she is. She can't move me. Sage bucks her hips the same as I did, but I still don't move. Her mouth moves, but the words don't come out.

“You ready to be a good girl, Sage?” I ask her. She nods rapidly before I release the chain and pull it away from her throat. She gasps, sucking in air as I roll back onto my back and close my eyes. I don't think she'll try that again.

“**W**hat the fuck happened to your neck?” Juno asks as I drink a cup of coffee. I glance over at Sage, where she sits with her breakfast, his eyes following mine. “And her neck?”

“We had a little issue last night,” I tell him. He chuckles and scrubs his hand over his face.

“A little issue?”

“Sage thought I was asleep. She tried to choke me with the chain,” I explain, nodding toward the chain around her ankle.

“No shit?”

“No shit. I challenged her right back,” I tell him. He lets out a low whistle before grabbing his fork and eating his breakfast. I cooked today, which isn’t something I always do, but I know Sage needs to eat, and I need to provide that for her. I keep glancing over at her to make sure she’s eating.

“You ready for today?”

“Just another day, right?” he nods his head. Today is just like any other day. We handle business. I keep digging away at the secrets my father hides. Another day, my father will present me with another woman I’ll say no to.

“Do you think he’s getting tired of bringing in women for you yet?” Juno asks. I can see Sage listening this time. She’s perked up, wondering what the hell I will say.

“If he keeps bringing them, I’ll start killing them.” Now, she jumps a little before looking back down at her plate. I smile and laugh. She still doesn’t get it; she’s the only one I fucking want. And there’s nothing that’s going to change that.

“Have you learned anything new?”

“There’s a lot of adoptions. I just don’t understand how they tie into Bellmont.”

“Yeah, I don’t get it either. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“None at all. But I’m not done digging yet. There’s more,” I tell him.

“You think you’re going to like what you find?” I take a deep breath and think about that question for a minute.

“I doubt it. It feels like he’s hiding more than we know, and I hate that. I want to know everything if he wants me to run his empire. I don’t want to find out later,” I admit to him.

“That makes sense. I would want to know, too,” he adds. We finish our breakfast and clean up. When we’re done, I walk over to Sage and sit on the couch next to her. I know she wants to say something, but she remains silent.

“Spit it out, Sage. I know you want to say something.”

“No, I don’t.”

“Yeah, you do. What have I told you? You’re my fucking queen, which means you say what you want to say.”

“Fine. You said you’d kill them. Did you mean it?” She looks over at me now, and I nod my head.

“My hands are stained with blood, Little Lamb. Killing some bitch my father drags home for me is nothing.” I watch her swallow hard before she licks her lips.

“Would you kill me?” I smirk at her.

“Not a chance in hell.”

“Why?”

“Do I need to keep telling you why? You’re mine, Sage.”

“You keep saying that.”

“Because it’s true, Little Lamb.” I brush her hair behind her ear as her lips part. She stares at me for a long second before leaning in. Now I laugh at her. I can’t help it. She pulls back instantly as if I’ve slapped her.

“You’re an asshole.”

“You tried to kill me in my sleep, Little Lamb.”

“I ...”

“Don’t need an excuse. I get it. I kidnapped you, right? I stole you, and now you want revenge.”

“I want to see my friends. I know they’re looking for me,” she says.

“They’re not your friends. They’re bitches. People who aren’t even worth the air you breathe. You don’t need to see them.”

“Why? They’re all I have.”

“They don’t care about you, Sage. Not like I do.”

“You call keeping me chained to a bed and choking me with a chain caring?”

“You started that, don’t forget,” I remind her, pointing my finger at her chest. Sage takes a deep breath and moves toward me quickly. Then her lips crash into mine. I can feel her heat. I can feel her nipples as they harden through her thin shirt. Her fingers find their way into my hair, tugging just enough to get a growl out of me.

I hear Juno mumbling something, but I don’t listen to him. I focus on her. I focus on the feelings coursing through my body. Reaching up, I wrap my hand around her throat, squeezing slightly. She sucks in a short breath before she’s back, kissing me again. And I let her. I let her do what the fuck she wants to me because this is the Sage I want to see. The one I knew was hidden deep inside. The one who can stand up to anyone, including me.

When she’s panting and gasping for air, I release my hold and pull away. I shove her back on the couch and spread her legs for me. Then I lean down, dipping between her parted

thighs. She isn't wearing panties since I haven't given her any. Her pussy is wet, waiting for me.

I lean closer, inhaling her scent before sticking out my tongue and dragging it over her clit. Sage gasps and arches her back as I dive in. I shove my tongue inside her, fucking her with it as she presses her body against my face. Juno groans as he watches from the other side of the room. Not that I care, because I don't. He can look all he wants, but if he lays one finger on her, I will cut it the fuck off.

I glide my tongue over her wetness and bite down on her mound. Sage cries out from the pain and the pleasure. I devour her pussy, eating her like she's never been eaten before. She writhes against me before her hands find their way into my hair. She tugs, and I growl as I continue. I can tell she's close, and this time, I plan on letting her come. I suck her clit into my mouth, and that's all it takes. Sage comes hard, her juices flowing from her. I lick every last fucking drop from her before raising my head and looking at her.

"You didn't stop," she says softly.

"I told you I wanted to see you come."

"You usually stop," she repeats. I climb up her body and kiss her, shoving my tongue into her mouth. I want her to taste herself. I want her to see what it's like for me, but I nearly come in my jeans when she sucks my tongue into her mouth. I pull away from her quickly before smiling down at her.

"I have shit to do."

"That's it? That's all I get?"

"What do you want, Little Lamb?" I ask her, knowing exactly what it is she wants. She doesn't say anything; she just bites her lip as she looks at me.

"If you don't tell me, you won't get it." With that, I pull away from her and stand, adjusting my cock in my jeans. I reach for my mask that lies on the table as I make my way to the stairs. Juno follows behind me as we stomp up the steps.

"That was fucking hot," Juno says.

“Everything I do to her is hot.”

“You haven’t fucked her?”

“No.”

“Why the hell not?”

“I want her begging for it,” I reply. He chuckles.

“You sick fuck.”

“Exactly. Now let’s go deal with this shit,” I tell him. We walk out to the car and climb in, heading toward my father’s house. We pull into his driveway and park before going inside.

“Father?” I call out to him.

“Upstairs,” I hear him call back. I glance at Juno briefly before we head for the stairs and go up. When I reach his office, I step inside and stop.

“Another one?” I ask, nodding toward the girl who’s standing in front of his desk. She turns her head to look at me, a slight smile crossing her face. I just roll my eyes and look at my father.

“What’s wrong with this one?” he asks, nodding toward her. I walk over and run my fingers along her cheek before wrapping my hand around her throat. I squeeze hard until she claws at my hands.

“I don’t want her. I don’t like her,” I tell him as she keeps trying to break free from me. My father looks between her and me, but I don’t let go. In fact, I tighten my grip. Her face is beginning to change colors as we stand here.

“Fine! Release her!” I do as I’m told, releasing the hold I have on her neck. The girl immediately falls to the floor, gasping for air. She coughs and sucks in as much air as she can as I move toward my father. I rest my hands on the desk that separates us, looking him in the eye.

“Do not bring any more women here. I wasn’t joking when I said I would kill them all,” I tell him.

“And where are you going to find one, Ares?”



“I had one!”

“She wasn’t suitable for you, for this life.”

“Why is that, Father? She didn’t fit in your little mold?”

“She doesn’t fit in here in Bellmont.”

“No. She didn’t fit with you. She was perfect for me,” I remind him. That’s why I kept her.

“If we’re finished here, you have work to do.” Is he dismissing me? I chuckle darkly as I stand up tall and look at him.

“Are we? In fact, finished here?”

“If you’re referring to the women, yes. I can’t have you killing them.”

“Why are they so different than the ones we torture?”

“They just are.”

“In what way?”

“Why all the questions, Ares? Just do what you’re told to do,” he roars. I nod my head as I shove my hands in my pockets and turn, heading for the door. Juno isn’t far behind me as we make our way down the basement. Once we’re down here, I roll up my shirt sleeves as I look at the women kept in the cages like fucking animals.

“Do you see what I mean now?” I ask Juno.

“About how secretive he’s being? Yeah, I see it.”

“There are secrets here in Bellmont. And I’m going to discover them.” He nods his head as we pull the first woman from the cage and strap her to the table.

**J**uno went home after we handled business, and I headed to the basement at my house. I saunter toward Sage, grabbing her wrist and ripping her off the couch she was sitting on.

“You want to see the real me, Sage?” I roar. She looks at me but doesn’t say a word. Then, her eyes slowly travel down my body, noting the blood staining me. I lift my bloody hands and show her, front and back covered in blood. She takes a step back, and I counter. I get in her face, letting her see me.

“Why are you doing this?” she asks.

“So you see what you’re dealing with. See the monster I am.”

“What did you do?” she asks tentatively.

“What I was raised to do,” I tell her.

“Which is?”

“Torture, Sage. I torture women.” Now, her mouth falls open as she looks at me worriedly.

“You hurt women?”

“Yes.”

“But you don’t want to hurt me?” she questions. I shake my head as she continues to stare at me with a confused look on her face. I get it; I do. It makes no fucking sense to her, and I understand that.

“No, Sage. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Do you enjoy it?”

“To a point, but mainly, I’m confused,” I admit to her.

“Why?”

“I don’t know why I’m doing it.”

“That doesn’t make sense, Ares.” Fuck me. That’s the first time she’s said my name. The first time it’s fallen from her lips.

“Say it again,” I demand.

“Say what?”

“My name, Sage. Say my fucking name again,” I growl this time.

“Ares.” The word rolls off her tongue so goddamn perfectly that I can’t stop myself. I rush toward her, grabbing her around the throat as I walk her backward, slamming her against the wall. The force of it pushes the air from her lungs in a whoosh. I can’t stop myself. My lips crash into hers, kissing her like I’ve never kissed a woman before. I devour her mouth with mine.

Then I’m reaching between us, unzipping my jeans before grabbing my cock in my hand. That fucker is hard as a rock, and all it fucking took was her saying my goddamn name.

“Spread your fucking legs,” I order, and much to my surprise, she does. She spreads her legs, and I grab one, lifting it over my arm. I step closer, using the other hand to grab my cock and find her pussy. One thrust. That’s all it takes to be buried inside her. She cries out for me, calling my fucking name as I fuck her against the wall. She’s making me crazy, and she has to know that.

I thrust into her as hard and as fast as I can, but it isn’t enough. I need more. So I pull out of her, much to her dismay, and drop her leg before shoving her to the floor.

“Hands and knees,” I tell her. She quickly gets into position as I kneel behind her. I run my hands over her ass,

loving every inch of her before spreading her wide for me. Her pussy glistens as I watch my cock sink back inside her. I take my eyes off where we're joined. I watch my cock as it slides in and out of her. My body is on fire, like an internal inferno. Sweat drips down my temples, landing on her ass before I raise my hand and slap it hard. Sage screams when I do it again and again. I know it hurts, and I don't care.

I pound into her, my body slapping against hers. The sounds we're making are feral and something I fucking love.

"You're going to come on my cock, Sage. Do you fucking hear me?" I yell at her. She doesn't say a word as I keep pounding into her. Harder and harder until I can feel her tense up and her pussy clench around me.

"Just like that, Sage!" And then she comes milking my cock for all I have, and I let her. I fucking let her take from me over and over again.

I keep my cock tucked inside her as I grab her and roll us to the floor. We lie here, catching our breath. My cock twitches a few more times inside her, but I have no interest in taking it out of her. Instead, I let her warmth wrap around it as I pull her against me.

"Will you eventually want to kill me?" she asks. Now I chuckle.

"No, Little Lamb. I won't ever want to kill you."

"Then why do you torture them?"

"It's what I was raised to do. Here in Belmont, there are secrets. Things I don't yet know," I tell her.

"Am I a secret?" I breathe in her scent and sigh.

"For now, you are. My father can't know you're here," I tell her.

"Would he kill me?"

"I don't know the answer to that."

"Has he killed before?"

"Yes."

“Who?”

“My mother.” I feel her tense as I wrap my arm around her and pull her closer to me. I don’t want her to be afraid, but I don’t want her to be comfortable, either. I don’t know how much I want to tell her.

“The scars? Are they from him?”

“Most of them.”

“And the others?”

“I was told my mother made them.”

“You don’t remember? Were you young?”

“I was ten when she was killed. I remember the blood, the life slipping away from her, but the rest of it is just a blur. The doctors told my father I chose to block those memories for some reason.” Sage sighs and pushes back against me.

“No one wanted me. I was adopted when I was a baby. My adoptive parents didn’t really want me either. They kicked me out when I was eighteen and said they did their part,” she tells me. Those words send rage coursing through my veins. Hatred for the ones who made her feel unwanted. I want to find them, and maybe I will. Then, I’ll make them feel exactly what they made her feel.

“You’re wanted, Sage.”

“By who?”

“Me.”

“Should that scare me?” she asks.

“Yes.” And it should. Nothing good comes from me.

I fell asleep with Sage in my arms the past few weeks. Things have been hard, harder than I thought they would be. My father has kept after me about finding a woman, and I've been so lost in finding the goddamn truth I can't even see straight. Things don't make sense.

My father's men have been around more often than not, too. Which is a big red fucking flag for me. Yes, they all live here in Belmont, but that doesn't mean we see them routinely. Everyone has their own house here, and they handle their own business the way they see fit. But lately, they've been out and about, and that unsettles me.

"You see David?"

"Yeah, patrolling around the property. What the hell do you think that's about?" I ask Juno. He shrugs.

"I don't know. It's weird. Are you having any more luck cracking that shit open?" he asks. I shake my head.

"More and more adoptions, but what's crazy is they're all girls. All the babies were girls."

"That is weird as fuck," he declares as I nod my head. I watch Sage out of the corner of my eye as she walks to the refrigerator and grabs two drinks. I don't make it obvious I'm watching her when she walks over and passes me one. I take it, eyeing her as I do.

"What?"

“Come here,” I tell her. She moves closer, and that’s when I lean down and unlock the chain from her ankle. She looks at me a little crazy, as does Juno, but things have changed with us. Things are deeper, and we’re more connected. I drop the chain to the floor and nod for her to go, but she doesn’t move. Instead, I reach for her and pull her into my lap. I spread her legs and slip my hand between them as I bring my beer to my lips. Sage slaps my hand away, which is the first time she’s done that. I look at her, a little crazy.

“I started my period. You didn’t get me anything to use,” she tells me. Another growl rips from my throat as I sink my hand back between her legs. I dip a finger inside her before pulling it out and looking at it coated red. Then I bring it to my lips and lick it off while she watches me.

“Don’t ever remove my hand from what’s mine,” I tell her. She nods her head as I get back to the conversation.

“What do you think all that means?” Juno asks as I finger Sage. She wiggles in my lap, but that doesn’t stop me.

“I don’t know, Juno. I think I’m going to have to make a trip into the city,” I tell him as I slide my fingers in and out of Sage.

“To find what?”

“Anything I can. Those kids were adopted somewhere. I want to know where they came from and where they went,” I reply as wetness coats my fingers. Sage’s breathing is sporadic as I continue my assault on her body.

“You think this has anything to do with Bellmont?”

“It’s possible. That’s what I want to find out,” I answer. Juno nods as he looks down at Sage’s spread legs. I release a growl, telling him he better stop, and he does. He snaps his eyes back to mine, and that’s where they stay.

“I don’t know, Ares. Is that smart? To go snooping around outside of Bellmont?”

“Why not? My father has no real power outside these walls,” I remind him. He shrugs and nods.

“True. When do you want to go?”

“Soon. I need you to stay back and keep an eye on Sage,” I tell him. She’s so fucking close right now. I keep going until her body begins to tremble, and she lets go. She comes for me, just like I knew she would, her pussy leaking all over my jeans. She calls out my name as she reaches back and wraps her arm around my neck. I lower my lips to her neck and press a soft kiss before biting down on her flesh. She lets out a small whimper before I lick the spot I bit.

“You’re going to be a good girl for Juno, right Sage?” I ask her. I pinch her inner thigh when she doesn’t answer me right away.

“He won’t touch me?” I wonder why she asked that. Does she want him to touch her? Anger begins to consume me as she turns in my lap to look at me. That’s when I see the look in her eyes. She doesn’t want anyone but me touching her.

“He won’t touch you, Little Lamb. He’ll just be here to keep you safe.”

“From who?”

“Everyone.” She nods her head before laying her head on my shoulder and getting comfortable. Her warm breath dances over my flesh, igniting another fire inside me.

“I don’t know about this, Ares. This doesn’t sound like a great idea.”

“Why not? I want answers, Juno, and this is how I have to get them.”

“What if he finds out about her?” he asks, nodding to Sage.

“He hasn’t yet.”

“But there’s always a chance.”

“Why are you talking about this? Are you trying to tell him she’s here?” I ask angrily.

“Of course not, Ares,” he replies quickly.

“Then don’t worry about it. No one knows she’s here,” I remind Juno. I’ve kept her a secret. I’ve kept her out of sight



in the basement.

“Yeah, you’re right. Let’s do this then. Let’s figure this shit out.”

“What if you learn something you don’t like?” Sage asks. I turn my head and press a kiss on her forehead.

“Then I’ll deal with it.”

“How?”

“I have my ways. This isn’t anything for you to worry about, Sage. I don’t want you thinking about any of this except me.”

“That’s all I’m thinking about.” I want to believe her yet this is all so new. We’ve developed a bond over the last few weeks, and it’s a bond that will never be broken. I rest my hand between her legs, lightly stroking her pussy. I don’t care that she’s bleeding. I don’t care if people think this is disgusting. Every bit of this girl is mine, and that includes what comes out of her.

“I take it you don’t have my baby in you yet,” I say, since she’s bleeding.

“No.”

“We’ll fix that once this is done,” I tell her. She sighs and stays curled into me as me and Juno finish talking. Then I send him off to get her some feminine products and underwear so she will at least be a little more comfortable while I’m gone.

“No fucking tampons. The only thing going inside her is me,” I call out to him.

But for now? I need to be inside her. I need to feel her wrapped around my cock once more. I shove her to her feet after watching Juno leave, pulling my jeans and boxers down before motioning for her to come to me.

“Turn around and face away from me,” I tell her.

“Are you sure you want to do this while I’m bleeding, Ares?”

“I love the blood on my cock. Now sit down, Little Lamb!” Sage backs up and lowers herself down as I angle myself at her entrance. Then she slowly slides down my length, taking me all the way inside her.

“Just like that,” I tell her as she slowly begins to ride me.

I made sure Sage had everything she needed before I got myself ready to go. She has food, drinks, and anything she might need in the basement with her. I gave Juno rules too. Even though he's my best friend, I want him to know I will slit his throat if he so much as touches her. He went upstairs, and now it's just me and her down here.

"You comfortable?" I ask her. She nods her head, but I can see there's something else bothering her. "What is it?"

"Do you have to go?"

"I can't be with you all the time, Sage," I tell her, even though I'd like to be. I need to finish this, figure this shit out, so I know what I'm stepping into with my father.

"Am I still a captive?" she asks. I chuckle now. Captive. I supposed, to a point, she is just that. My captive.

"Let me ask you something. If I gave you a choice right now to leave or stay with me, what would you choose?" She narrows her eyes at me as she thinks over my question.

"Are you giving me the choice?" she asks, still sounding unsure of her answer. I shake my head because I'm not letting her go.

"No."

"Then why ask?"

"I'm curious, Sage. Would you leave me?" I watch her take a drink from her water and recap it before she looks back

at me.

“I’ve lived my life feeling unwanted, Ares. I was given up as a baby because I wasn’t wanted. This is the first time in my life someone has actually wanted me for me.”

“What’s the answer, Sage?” I need to hear her say it. I need those words to leave her lips before I can even leave her. I don’t know what I’d do if she said she would go. I’d probably chain her to the wall by her ankle again.

“No, Ares. I wouldn’t leave you.” Just like that, everything else seems to fade away. The world doesn’t mean shit anymore. All that matters is Sage is with me, wants me, and isn’t going to leave me.

“Come here,” I command. She moves toward me slowly and stops right in front of me. I lift my hand and place it on my favorite spot around her neck.

“You know I do things, bad things, Sage. And for the time being, I don’t see that changing. There’s nothing I can do to stop it right now,” I tell her.

“Do you want to stop it?”

“Do you want me to?”

“I don’t want to change you, Ares, but I don’t want to see you bloody all the time either.”

“Understandable. I don’t know how to live in the real world. I’ve never had that luxury.”

“I don’t think it would be as bad as you think it is,” she says.

“If only it were that easy,” I tell her before dropping my head and pressing my lips to hers. I kiss her roughly before pulling away from her. “I need to go. I won’t be gone long. A few days at most.”

“And I’ll be here when you get back,” she says softly. I nod my head and release her throat before sliding my hand into my pocket. I pull out the cell phone I got for her and pass it to her.

“This will only call me, Sage. I programmed it that way. It won’t allow you to call for help or call your friends. Only me.”

“You’re a little controlling.”

“You haven’t seen shit yet. What’s mine is mine. And you are mine.”

“Can I play games?” I chuckle now.

“Yeah, you can play games on it, read on it, but you can’t access anyone else.” She nods her head before kissing me this time.

“Thank you, Ares.” I pull away from her and head for the steps. The faster I get this shit handled, the faster I’ll be back home to her. Something tugs at me, though. Something that isn’t right. I can’t explain it, but I can feel it.

I’m up the stairs, grabbing my bag and heading for the door when Juno stops me.

“You sure about this?”

“I’m sure. Just keep her safe,” I tell him. He nods his head as I walk out the door. I climb into my car and head for the gate. As I drive, I see a few more of the men who live here in Bellmont. To say this place is secretive would be an understatement. These walls hold more secrets than any of us know, but I will uncover them all.

I drive up to the gate and watch as the man steps out of his booth and nods his head at me. I nod back and wait as the gates open, and I pull out. Turning onto the main road, I head toward town.

As I drive, I take in everything. The trees, the cars, the people. People who live a normal life with the ones they love. People who don’t keep secrets from the other. People who don’t torture women for reasons unknown to them.

Something doesn’t settle in my gut. Something about all of this doesn’t make sense. Maybe I’m going soft. Maybe she’s making me soft. I chuckle at the thought. Sage isn’t doing anything but making me stronger. Making me a better person. She doesn’t want to change me. Sage wants me the way I am,

and that isn't something I can say about many women. I've learned a few things in the past with women. Most of them want to change who you are, or at least the ones I've encountered have.

That isn't me. That isn't who I am. I would never let a woman change me.

I pull up in front of a set of offices and climb out of the car. I crack my neck from side to side and pray to the devil my father doesn't hear about me being here. He doesn't have many ties to the outside world, or so I think. That doesn't mean he wouldn't find out what I was doing.

I step inside, and I'm greeted by a woman at the front desk. Her smile is bright white with red lipstick and a fancy blouse.

"Can I help you?"

"I'm here to see Mr. Ranger."

"And you are?"

"Ares Scott." At the mention of my name, her smile fades. I narrow my eyes as I watch her fumble with the computer on the desk in front of her. Her hands are shaking, almost trembling, as she picks up the phone and dials someone.

"An Ares Scott is here to see you." She hangs up and then nods toward me.

"He will see you now."

"You're nervous. Why?"

"I'm not. I'm fine."

"You're lying to me," I growl a little. She shakes her head in denial, but I can see the lie in her eyes.

"I'm not. If you would follow me," she says as she steps out from behind the desk. Before she can get too far, I grab her wrist and spin her to face me.

"I want answers."

“I don’t have any to give you,” she replies, trying to remain polite. I step closer to her, invading her space as she looks into my dark eyes.

“I know a liar when I see one. Unless you want to feel my wrath, you better start talking.” She opens her mouth, but words don’t form. I tilt my head as she opens and closes her mouth before she blurts out words I never thought I’d hear.

“I was born in Bellmont.”

I had my meeting with Mr. Ranger, but it was the woman who intrigued me more, which is why we're now sitting at a small diner together. She's nervous around me, and I like that. She knows who the fuck I am, but how? Why?

"I know you want answers," she says before taking a drink of her water and glancing around.

"And you're going to give them. Ranger gave me some, but I want more."

"I was born a year after you. You were one at the time. My mother, my real mother, she ... she still lives there as far as I know."

"I want a name."

"I can't give you that," she responds quickly.

"If you know who I am, then you know what I do. I want a name." She swallows hard before running her fingers around the edge of her glass.

"Emily White."

"David's wife?" She nods her head.

"That's my father."

"How do you know?"

"Mr. Ranger. He worked closely with your father and the men of Belmont many years ago. That was until he caught wind of what they did there."



“And by that, you mean what?”

“The torture, the women.” She glances around again as if she’s going to be caught.

“And what do you know about it?”

“That’s what I know. They beat and torture them.”

“Do you know why?” I ask, pressing her for the information I need. She looks at me, a little confused, before she speaks again.

“You have no idea, do you?”

“I’ll be honest with you here, Andrea. I was raised to do as I was told. I was beaten when I didn’t. I was always told beating a boy was different than a girl. The boys needed it the most. And yet, the ones we torture are women. It makes no sense. My father wants me to take over the role he plays in the future, but I can’t do that until I know what the hell I’m missing.”

“You really don’t know anything, do you?”

“No, I don’t.” She licks her lips and checks her surroundings yet again.

“It’s insane, Ares.”

“What is?”

“Women in your world are hated. They’ve been hated for as long as I can remember hearing the stories. According to your father and the other men, women are cursed. Women are to be obedient to their husbands and children. And when they aren’t, they are sent to you.”

“I don’t understand. Can’t these men handle the women themselves?”

“There’s an old legend that says the Scott’s are the greatest of Gods, Ares. A man, especially a man from Bellmont, wouldn’t dare lay a finger on a woman if they didn’t want to be cursed.”

“There are few women at Bellmont. Why?” I ask her.

“They were chosen. They won’t be there forever, Ares. In fact, once every twenty-one years, they hold a ritual.”

“What kind of ritual?”

“They offer sacrifices, Ares. I honestly can’t believe you haven’t heard of any of this,” she says, shaking her head.

“He keeps a lot of secrets. Who do they sacrifice?”

“The girls.”

“What girls?”

“Have you never wondered why there are no girls in Belmont?” I nod my head. “They give them up for adoption when they’re born because girls hold no power in their world. Only men. Yet every twenty-one years, they will hunt them down, kidnapping them, and sacrifice them. Ares, I have to go.” She starts to scoot out of the booth when I stop her. I throw my leg up, blocking her exit.

“We’re not done here.”

“I can’t say anymore. Don’t you get it? I’m twenty-one, Ares. It’s been twenty-one years since the last ritual.” Something gnaws at my insides, and I don’t know what the fuck it could be. This is unbelievable, even for my father.

“How do I know you’re not lying to me?”

“Why would I? What reason would I have?”

“The women we torture?” I ask, shaking my head.

“They didn’t follow the rules.” Her answer is simple, but I can’t wrap my head around it. For years, we’ve been torturing women and sending them back to where they belong, and it’s all because someone out there thinks we’re Gods. In the back of my mind, I like the fucking idea of it all. I like that they fear us, fear me, but on the other hand, what the hell has my father gotten us into? What makes him believe this shit?

“You’re going to run?” I ask her.

“Yes. What other choice do I have?”

“They’ll find you. If they want you, Andrea, they will find you. I will find you because that’s my goddamn job, isn’t it?” I roar a little louder than I need to this time.

“You can change your mind, Ares. You don’t have to do this,” she nearly pleads with me. But this is who I am, isn’t it? I’m a fucking Scott. I do have to do this.

“Don’t run, Andrea.”

“I have no other choice.”

“I’ll find you,” I tell her. She shakes her head, tears filling her eyes as she looks at me.

“I told you what you wanted to know.”

“The other girls? Do they know about this?” Andrea shrugs her shoulders.

“Not that I know of. How would they?” That makes sense. They wouldn’t know. They wouldn’t have a fucking clue they were about to be hunted like a goddamn animal. Anger claws at my insides as I think about things. Is this what he’s been hiding from me? Is this what really happens in fucking Bellmont every twenty-one years?

“If you’re lying to me, I will hunt you like a goddamn animal, and I will kill you.” It’s a warning, but judging by the look in her eyes, she isn’t lying to me.

I took an extra day to clear my head and think about things. As much as I wanted to get back to Sage, I needed that time alone to process what Andrea had revealed to me. I still can't believe it's true. A part of me wants to believe it, but another wants to call her a liar. Rituals? Why have I never heard of this before? One would think if their father were planning something like this, I would know about it. I shake my head and run my hand over my face before grabbing the liquor bottle off the table and bringing it to my lips. I enjoy the burn as it goes down, trying to make sense of any of this.

The girls make sense. That would be why there are no girls at Bellmont. They were given up, being seen as the weaker sex, the cursed. I take another long pull before finally laying back on the bed. Thoughts run wild through my head, and none of them make any kind of sense. I just don't understand. How could he have kept this from me, of all people?

Closing my eyes, I let sleep tug me under. It doesn't take long for the dreams to come. They always do, and I welcome them with open arms. Evil. That's all I see in my dreams, and maybe that's all I should see. I am evil, after all. I'm the son of a killer. I kill. That doesn't make me much better than him, does it? I toss and turn as visions of my mother play out in my dreams. The whistle of the whip as it travels through the air and the scent of blood. When I look at her, it isn't her face I see. What the fuck? It's Sage.

I wake with a start, sitting straight up in bed before rubbing my hand over my face. It was too real, too vivid. The

thought of calling her crosses my mind until I look over and see it's two in the morning. I'm sure she's asleep right now. Instead of waiting any longer, I throw my legs over the side of the bed and grab my clothes, pulling them on quickly. Fuck this. I want to go home. I want to be closer to Sage. I need that connection right now.

I grab my shit and check out of the hotel, climbing in my car and taking off. I drive as quickly as possible while running things through my mind. Was I going to have to be a part of this ritual? Was he even going to tell me it was happening?

I speed through the near-empty streets until I reach the gate at Bellmont. As usual, the man steps out and checks who it is before opening the gate and waving me through. Then, a thought hits me. Is this why we can operate outside the law? Are we that safe in Bellmont?

I drive down the road and pull into the driveway, killing the engine before I climb out and grab my bag. Then I go inside, locking the door behind me. I don't see Juno, so he must be downstairs with Sage. I set my bag on the couch and make my way to the stairs, opening the basement door. I hurry down the stairs and flip the light on when I reach the bottom. Juno is passed out on the couch, but when I look at the bed, I don't see Sage. My heart begins to pound against my ribs as I walk closer. Rage, anger, it all whips through me at once, thinking she left me.

I take one more step, and that's when I see her. She's on the floor next to the bed, curled into a ball. Why is she on the floor? I kneel in front of her, and her head pops up, fear in those icy blue eyes. I narrow my eyes, trying to understand what the fuck I'm seeing. No. This isn't right. This is all wrong, all fucking wrong!

I lift my hand and reach for her face, but she cowers away from me. I shake my head, warning her not to do it again. Then I bring my hand to her cheek and run my thumb down the trail of blood. It wipes off, but more blooms. I try to take slow, deep breaths as I look down.

“Stand up,” I snarl. Sage shakes her head, but the anger is too intense. I wrap my hand around her throat, jerking her to her feet. Sage stands before I speak again.

“Turn around,” I tell her this time. She looks at me, really looks at me, before slowly turning around to face the wall. Then I see more. Marks. Blood. Whip marks. I shake my head as I process what I’m seeing. Her body, her perfect body. I reach for her shoulder and turn her back to face me.

“Who did this to you?” She doesn’t open her mouth to say anything. No. That’s unacceptable. “Who. Fucking. Did. This. To. You?” I ask through gritted teeth. Her eyes move, but she still doesn’t speak. I follow her gaze to where Juno is still sleeping on the couch. He wouldn’t have done this. He knows she means too much to me to do that to her. No fucking way.

“No.” I take a step back and point at her. She’s lying. “No. No fucking way.”

“You ... you think I’m lying?” her voice trembles as she speaks.

“He wouldn’t do this,” I argue, keeping my eyes on hers the whole time.

“You think I did this to myself?”

“Don’t say it, Sage. Don’t you fucking tell me he did this,” I warn, keeping my voice low so as not to wake him just yet. Sage laughs. It’s not a normal laugh. It quickly turns maniacal before I move in and slap my hand over her mouth. “You’re lying,” I seethe. Sage reaches up and pries my hand off her mouth before I see the tears in her eyes.

“You left me to him, Ares. You told me I was safe here. You lied to me.”

“He didn’t do this,” I roar this time. Juno stirs on the couch before sitting up and looking over at us. His eyes widen as he looks between the two of us.

“Juno, you didn’t do this,” I say louder this time. Juno shoves off the couch and walks over to us, his hands in the air.

“Ares, come on. We’re like brothers,” he says as he steps in between the two of us.

“We’re like brothers,” I repeat his words back to him. “Brothers.”

I reach for him, resting my hands on either side of his head, holding him like that as I lean in and rest my forehead against his.

“You didn’t do that, Juno,” I repeat once more. Rage isn’t a strong enough word to describe what I feel right now. There’s nothing to describe what I feel right now. Something hot boils in my veins. Sweat begins to trickle down my temples.

“It’s me, Ares. It’s Juno. Come on,” he almost sounds like he’s pleading with me. Is he pleading? For his life right now?

“It’s Sage, Juno.”

“I know it is. It’s Sage, Ares.” I lick my lips, keeping my head pressed against his as I sniffle.

“She’s mine, Juno. Mine.”

“I know she’s yours, Ares. She’s all yours.”

“What did you do, Juno?” I ask, squeezing his head a little harder between my hands.

“I ... I lost it, Ares. I’m sorry. She kept going on and on about you. She asked about your scars, and I ... I just gave her some to match, you know? Showed her what it felt like to be you.” His words shatter me. *He* marked her. He put *his* marks all over her body. She’s a monster now, just like me. Anger claws at my stomach, up my throat. I scream, keeping his head pinned between my hands.

I release him and take a step back, just looking at him.

“Ares, I know you’re mad, but it’s what we always do,” he whines.

“It’s what we do,” I repeat the words.

“Yeah, it’s what we do. She wanted to know what it was like for you growing up, Ares. I showed her. I showed her exactly what it was like.” I cock my head and look at him. He

saw what happened to me. He saw the marks, the scars, the pain. He saw it all, and now he's given it to her. Sage didn't deserve this. She isn't one of us.

"Sage, go in the bathroom and take a shower," I instruct her, but she doesn't move. Instead, she moves toward me, wrapping her arms around my waist and resting her head on my chest. I know she can hear my heart hammering inside me. I know she can feel me vibrating with anger.

"Sage, I mean it. Go take a shower." She shakes her head when I grab her shoulders roughly in my hands. I jerk her away from me and hold her at arm's length. My chest is heaving now as I look at her. "I'm going to lose control, Little Lamb." She still doesn't move. She stands her ground as I nod my head. Then I shove her to the side and pull my fist back, slamming it into Juno's face. He stumbles back but quickly rights himself. What he doesn't do is make a move to fight me back.

"Come on, Juno," I taunt him. He shakes his head as I pull the knife from my jeans and move toward him. I plunge it into his side before pulling it free as he yells in pain.

"You don't want to fight me back?" I ask him.

"You aren't going to kill me, Ares." Now I laugh manically. He doesn't think so? Oh, how wrong he is. He did damage to something that was mine. He ruined her. Ruined my little lamb, and he thinks he's going to live?

I step in again and slam the knife into his shoulder. He cries out in pain but still doesn't move to fight me back. This goes on for a few more minutes until he realizes I'm not playing with him.

"You aren't going to kill me," he repeats, sounding like he doesn't believe that anymore. I smirk at him. I walk over to Sage and grab her face in my hands roughly, forcing her lips to part. Then I take the bloody knife and wipe it on her lip. She tries to pull away, but I don't let her. I laugh in her face before I release her and turn back to Juno.



I don't need to speak. I don't need to tell him anything. Instead, I walk behind him, trailing the blade across his shoulder before grabbing his hair in my hand and yanking his head back.

"You still believe I'm not going to kill you after what you did to her?" I ask him. He nods his head, and I laugh louder before pressing the knife to his neck. Then I drag it across his throat. It only takes seconds for him to bleed out when I drop him to the floor. I hear Sage gasp, her hand covering her mouth. I look down at Juno lying lifeless on the floor. Then, I move toward Sage. She wraps her arms around herself, watching me warily.

I bring my hand up to cup her face for the briefest of seconds before I spin her around to face the other way. Then I'm shoving her down over the back of the couch, pulling my cock free and taking her wildly. Sage screams for me, just like always. Maybe more so this time. I don't take it easy on her. I fuck her roughly and hard. I fuck out all the anger and rage that sits inside my chest.

I keep going, pumping my hips into her as she pants and moans. My little lamb likes to be fucked like this. Wildly. She's enjoying it.

I reach down and grab her hair in my hand as I take her harder. I jerk her head back so it's bent at an awkward angle, but I don't care if it hurts her.

I don't ease up either, not until I come. I shoot my seed inside Sage, filling her and not caring if she comes this time or not. I pull out of her and examine the marks on her back. They need to be cleaned and taken care of, but now isn't the time.

Instead of cleaning her up, I grab her hand and drag her toward the bed. I pull the blanket back and motion for her to get in. She climbs into the bed carefully, no doubt still in pain. I climb in next to her and pull her toward me. Sage doesn't deny me what I need right now. She moves closer and rests her head on my chest as I breathe.

**W**e lie in silence for a long time before Sage breaks that silence.

“I was going to call you,” she admits.

“Don’t talk, Sage,” I warn her.

“He took the phone and busted it.”

“Be quiet,” I tell her this time.

“He said this is what you do to women,” she adds.

“I said shut up, Sage!”

“Is that what you wanted to do to me? Are you mad that he did it first?” She doesn’t understand how pissed I am right now. I just need ... silence. I need to hold her and not hear her.

“You think that’s what I wanted to do to you?” I ask, trying to keep myself calm.

“I don’t know, Ares. Maybe you told him to do it.” Now I’m even more pissed. I jerk my arm out from under her and sit up quickly in the bed.

“My tortures are just that, Sage. Mine. If I wanted to hurt you, I could have. If I wanted to mark you, I would have.”

“Then why did he do it?” She cries this time. She’s breaking me. She’s fucking breaking me down, and there’s nothing I can do to stop it.

“He was jealous of you. Since we were kids, we are all the other had. We grew up together, trained together, and learned

how to be monsters together. You have to understand when I brought you here, that changed things, Sage. Maybe I was fucked up to do it. Maybe I was the selfish one here.” Now Sage sits up and moves up next to me.

“You aren’t selfish for taking what you want, Ares.”

“Look what he did to you, Little Lamb. Look at your face.” She reaches up her hand and runs her fingers over the mess on her cheek.

“Who did it to you?”

“My father. He said a true warrior has battle scars. Although my father claims it was my mother, I only remember it being him. A true warrior wears them with pride. What we do to those women, he did to me,” I tell her. “It was his way of teaching me, but he always blamed my mother. I try to remember back then; I really do. I try to remember if she hurt me or hit me, but I come up blank,” I admit to her.

“Do you think she did it?”

“No.”

“Then why do it for him?”

“I didn’t know why I was doing it until recently,” I confess, telling her exactly what Andrea said to me. I tell her everything. We sit and talk for hours when I hear the thunder.

“Come with me,” I tell her. She nods her head as I climb off the bed and wait for her. I offer my hand, and she takes it as I lead her up the steps.

“Are you sure this is safe?”

“I have a privacy fence. We’re only going on the porch,” I reassure her. We walk up the steps and out the back door, where I sit on the bench and pull her down next to me. I look up at the sky just as the rain starts to fall. I close my eyes and let the rain hit my flesh when Sage speaks.

“Pluviophile.” I turn my head to look at her now.

“What?”

“It means a lover of storms.”

“And how do you know I love storms?” I ask her.

“There’s always a storm brewing in your eyes, Ares. There has been since the day I met you. I can see how happy a storm makes you,” she says.

“Happy? I don’t think I’m happy.”

“You are. I can see it in your eyes.”

“What else can you see?”

“There’s a mask you keep in place. One that was placed there long ago. You don’t think you can love or be loved. You don’t really know what love is, but you feel strongly. So strongly, it eats away at your insides. It devours you whole.” I stare into her eyes even as the rain comes down harder.

“How do you see all that?”

“You let me see it, Ares.”

“Things are going to get bad, Sage. So much worse than they already are.”

“I know that.” I lean in closer, our breath mingling as one. There’s something else bothering me. Something more, and I can’t pinpoint it.

“I killed for you. I killed my best friend for you,” I tell her truthfully. I reach into my pocket and pull the knife I picked up off the floor before coming out here. I grab Sage’s hand in mine and place it palm-side up.

“You’re never going to leave me, Sage. Do you understand?” She nods, but I shake mine. “No. I need to hear the words.”

“I’m never leaving you, Ares.” With that, I press the tip of the knife against her palm and pull the blade along her flesh until I see the blood mix with the rain. Then, I flip my hand over and do the same before grasping our hands together.

“This means we’re bound forever, Little Lamb. There’s no way you’re leaving me now.”

“I didn’t want to anyway.”

“Even if you did, death would be the only way out of this.”

“What is this, Ares?” she asks as our blood mixes.

“This is forever.” After what seems like hours, I pull her off the bench and take her back inside. She yawns, and I know this night has been long and hard on her. The rain washed away the blood from her body, so there was no need to put her in the shower.

Instead, I lead her inside and back down the stairs.

“One day, we’ll sleep upstairs,” I tell her. She nods her head as I walk her to the bed and lay her down on her stomach. Then I go into the bathroom and find some cream to put on her wounds. Once I find what I need, I come back out and walk toward her.

“Does it bother you?” she asks.

“What?”

“That he’s lying there,” she nods toward Juno’s body.

“No. I’ll clean it up while you’re sleeping.”

“You’re not leaving me?” she asks as I apply the cream to her back. I roll her onto her side once I’m finished and look her in the eye.

“I’m never leaving you, Sage.” She smiles at me even as her eyes close. I know she’s worn out from everything that’s happened, so I lay down beside her. But I can’t sleep. I prop myself up on my elbow and look over at my dead friend. How did my life come to this? Killing my best friend for a girl. If someone had told me that a year ago, I would have laughed in their face, but I didn’t know Sage then. Now? There’s no way I’m going to let anyone touch her again. No one. She’s mine and only mine.

I take a deep breath and blow it out before looking back down at her. I watch her sleep. That’s probably one of the new stalker traits I have now. I sit up at night and watch her sleep. I reach over and run my fingers along her cheek, where the blood has dried.

“You’re more like me now, Little Lamb, and I don’t know how I feel about that.”

I got rid of his body. In fact, I took it out of Bellmont to get rid of it. I couldn't risk anyone here finding him. Now, no one will ever find him. It was a bittersweet feeling, disposing of someone you killed who was once your brother.

Sage has been a little distant since then. It's been a few weeks, and people are asking questions about Juno. Mainly my father. Wondering where he is and who he's with. I haven't told him shit, and that's exactly the way it's going to stay. I said he had a girlfriend outside of Bellmont, and he's probably spending time with her. He bought it for a while, but now things are changing. Things are starting to heat up.

"I think we're going to have to move," I tell Sage as she sits on the couch, lost in her own little world.

"Where are we going?"

"I don't know. I need to find us a place outside of Bellmont. It's dangerous here after what I did to Juno." She nods her head, but she still doesn't look at me. She stares at the wall, not saying a word.

"Fine."

"That's it? Just fine?"

"What do you want me to say, Ares?"

"I want you to say what the fuck your problem is, Sage! You've been like this for weeks," I roar at her. Now, she turns her head and looks at me, and I can see the sadness in her.

“I was attacked, Ares. Now, not only am I fat, I’m also ugly.” That’s it. I’m on my feet and moving toward her before she has the chance to move. I rip her off the couch and drag her to the bathroom, where I stand behind her, forcing her to look in the mirror. I grip her chin in my hand as we stare at the reflection in front of us.

“You, Sage, are fucking perfect. I don’t know how many times I have to say that.”

“You think what you say changes things?” she asks me.

“Do you trust me?” I ask her. She swallows hard as she looks at me in the mirror.

“Yes.”

“Then when I say you’re the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen, you believe me, Little Lamb.” Just to make my point, I press my hard cock against her.

“He said things to me, Ares.”

“Who?”

“Juno. He didn’t know why you were with me when you could have someone like Sara.”

“I didn’t want someone like Sara. I wanted you.” She doesn’t say anything as she looks at me. I loosen the grip I have on her chin, and that’s when she spins in my arms. She stares up at me, and I smile at her.

“I know this isn’t something you want to hear, but I love you, Ares.” Shock. That’s what I feel. I’m fucking shocked the words even left her mouth. She loves me? No one has ever loved me. No one at all. Not my father, not my mother.

“I ...”

“Don’t say anything, Ares. I just wanted you to know what I feel,” she says. I nod my head because, frankly, I don’t know what to say. I can’t say those words back to her.

“You’re the reason I wake up in the morning. You’re the one I hate the least.” Sage laughs, and it’s like a song. It’s perfect. At least I’m telling her how I feel in my own way.



“Thank you, Ares.”

“For what?”

“Telling me that. It means a lot to me.”

“Now, are you going to stop the self-doubt, or am I going to have to fuck it out of you?” She grins at me, and I know exactly what it is she wants. Sage turns around and pushes her ass against my cock. I groan and undo my jeans, letting them and my boxers fall to the floor. Then I’m taking my cock and placing it at her entrance. One thrust has me buried inside her. One thrust was all I needed.

With her hips in my hands, I fuck her. I squeeze, leaving my marks on her.

“Look at us, Little Lamb,” I demand. She lifts her head and looks at us in the mirror as I fuck her.

“Ares,” she moans.

“We look perfect together, don’t we? Just like we were made to be together. You were put on this fucking planet for me, Sage.” Her moans spur me on. The way her eyes are glossy as she looks at me makes me harder.

I grip her hips tighter in my hands until she cries out a little. I know it’s hurting her, but this is what I need right now. I need to feel her, and I need her to feel me. I hit every inch of her, taking her roughly.

“You’re going to come for me. You’re going to cover my cock in you, Sage.”

“Ares,” she whines as I reach around with one hand and find her clit. I play with it, circling and flicking it. Her body begins to tremble just as I touch it again. Then she falls apart for me just like every other time I’ve been inside. I find my release, shooting my seed inside her. Once I’m sated, I pull out, spin her around, and drop to my knees in front of her. Sage watches me, unsure of what I’m doing, before I spread her legs for me. Then I lean in, licking her dripping pussy. Yeah, I taste myself on my tongue, but I also taste her. I lick her all over until I have her trembling again.

“Ares, it’s too much,” she whimpers.

“It’ll never be enough,” I tell her before I get back to work. I lean back in and continue my sweet torture until she comes again. When I pull back, she’s panting, and I run my fingers through the mess she made, shoving it all back inside her. I get what I can on my fingers before thrusting them into her pussy.

“What are you doing?”

“You’re not going to let go of a drop of me. I want all my cum inside of you.” I look at her and see the blush on her cheeks. That’s what I like to see. Her just like that. I stand to my feet and pull her body against mine.

“Are you okay with moving?”

“I’ve been a prisoner here long enough,” she says.

“I like keeping you as my prisoner.”

“Do you?” she asks while she smiles.

“Yeah, I do. I can chain you up and watch you sleep all night.”

“You watch me sleep?” she asks, confused by what I just said. I nod my head.

“Yeah, I watch you a lot when you’re not looking. I like it. I like looking at you.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re everything I could have ever wanted, and you’re mine. I like to look at beautiful things, Little Lamb. I’ve told you that.”

“Where would we go?” I sigh now and pull her into my chest.

“I don’t know yet. I’ve already transferred all my money into your account,” I admit. Sage pulls back and looks at me strangely.

“What? Why?”

“Because everything I have, everything I am is for you.”

“I don’t want your money, Ares.” I chuckle now.

“You don’t?”

“No. I don’t care about money.”

“What do you care about?”

“You.” That’s my girl. And I can honestly stand here and be man enough to say that if she wanted to take all my fucking money right now and walk away from me, I’d let her. Then, I’d hunt her down because she is mine, and nothing is going to change that.

**T**he secrets of Belmont run deep. I've come to realize that too late. I've dug deeper into the world that those before my father created, and I don't like what I see.

I stand in front of the mirror and look at my reflection. Is this the man I was meant to be? Is this what a twenty-one-year-old is? I don't know life outside these walls. I don't know what normal would look like. But I can't keep living this way, can I? Won't I eventually break or become something I'm not? Or am I already too far gone?

I look into my eyes and see the darkness in me. I see the anger, the hate, the need. He made me this way. He made me what I am today, and I can't say I totally hate the man staring back at me. But at the same time, I can't go on being who he made me out to be. There's a whole world outside these walls, and I want to see it with Sage.

"Would you teach me to be normal?" I ask her as she sits on the edge of the bathtub next to me.

"What do you mean?"

"You're normal, Sage. You did normal things before I stole you."

"I didn't do much of anything. I went to a few classes because I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life."

"What do you want to do with your life?" I ask, turning to face her now as I lean my hip against the sink and cross my arms over my chest.

“I wanted to travel. I wanted to see different parts of the world.”

“And what stopped you?”

“I don’t really know. I guess I just didn’t want to do it alone,” she replies.

“Do you still want that?”

“It would be nice,” she says with a smile.

“Then we’ll do it. We’ll travel,” I tell her.

“Do you want to do that?”

“I want whatever you want, Sage.”

“That’s not how it works, Ares. You have to have your dreams and your wants, too. You want to be normal, as you call it, then you have to think of the things you want.”

“I want you.”

“You have me.”

“I wouldn’t mind seeing the world with you. Life inside these walls for the last twenty-one years has made me who I am. And honestly, I don’t know who that is anymore,” I admit to her.

“You haven’t found yourself yet. You are what your father made you to be. That isn’t the person you are deep inside.”

“Do you believe that?” She nods her head as I laugh. “Then you’re as crazy as I am.”

“I mean it, Ares. There’s a man yearning to be let free deep inside of you. You can find yourself. I know you can.” She stands and walks closer to me, wrapping her arms around my waist. It’s her new favorite thing to do.

“And you’ll help me?”

“Of course I will.”

“Where would you want to go first?”

“Paris.” I chuckle now.

“Paris it is. I need to look at a few places today. I can’t take you just yet,” I tell her. She nods her head but keeps herself pressed against me.

“I’ll be fine.”

“I know you will. You’re stronger than you think, Sage. That’s why you are who you are.”

“And who am I?”

“My queen. My beating heart. My everything.” Tears fill her eyes as she smiles up at me.

“My king,” she says. I nod my head before kissing her.

“I need to get going, or I’m going to be late,” I tell her.

“What exactly are you going to look at?”

“A few houses.”

“We’re going to live together?”

“Aren’t we now?”

“Yeah, because I didn’t really have a choice in the matter.”

“Are you saying you don’t want to live with me?” Anger burns through my body as I think about her living somewhere else.

“I didn’t say that. I just-”

“What?” I snap at her. Sage steps back out of my arms and rests her hands on her hips.

“You wanted to be normal, Ares! Normal people don’t kidnap others and force them to live together.”

“I cut your hand that night, and you bled like I bled. Our blood mingled, mixed. We’re one now!” She raises her eyebrow to challenge me, and fuck do I like it. That’s my girl. That’s my little lamb growing a fucking backbone and taking her place as my queen. That’s exactly what I wanted her to do.

“Yeah, that’s not normal either, Ares.”

“You want hearts and flowers? I can give you blood and skulls, Sage. What we did,” I say, pointing at my palm,

“Means more than any marriage could ever mean.” Her eyes widen as she thinks that over. Her mouth falls open, but nothing comes out.

“Marriage?”

“Isn’t that normal?” I ask her.

“Well, yeah, it is, but I didn’t think you’d want that.”

“What part of I want everything with you, don’t you understand?”

“You ... you want to marry me?” I go for my favorite position, wrapping my hand around her neck.

“You either don’t get it, or you’re trying to push my buttons, Sage. Without you, I’m nothing. Without you, I have nothing. So, yes, Little Lamb, I want to marry you. I want to fuck you. I want to put my baby in you.” Tears begin to fall down her cheeks when I lean in and lick them away. I run my tongue up her cheek before moving to her lips. I take them with mine, devouring her in a single kiss. When I pull away, she’s breathless.

“You’re making me late.”

“Then go.”

“You make me want to stay,” I tell her.

“Then stay with me. Fuck me,” she urges.

“Look what I’ve turned you into, Little Lamb. Begging me to fuck you.” Her cheeks turn pink, and I smile at her. She likes this. She likes what I’m doing to her.

“I’ll be back soon. It shouldn’t take long,” I tell her. She nods her head, and I kiss her once more before heading out of the bathroom and grabbing my phone. I walk up the steps, making sure to close it and lock it on my way out.

I take in my surroundings as I walk to my car. I’m on edge, and with good reason. I still haven’t heard from my father about the ritual. It’s starting to grate on my nerves. The not knowing is slowly eating away at me.

I climb into the car once I'm satisfied there isn't any around and start the car up, pulling out onto the road.

I let my mind wander as I leave Belmont. Leaving here was never something that crossed my mind. I had no reason to. Everything I know, everything I am, is here. And now it's not. Now I realize it's all been a lie. It's all been for nothing. What I did, what I do, who I am. It was never me.

Yet, I don't know how to be anything different outside these walls. I don't know how to be what Sage needs me to be. Will she fully accept me for who I am? I suppose, in a way, it doesn't matter because Sage is never leaving me now. She's mine.

I drive down the road just thinking about life. My life. Her life. What I took from her, and I took a lot from her. I know I did, but she got me in return, and in my sick mind, that's all she needed. She needed me; she just didn't know it yet.

Maybe I am sick. Maybe I am fucked up, but does that really matter now? I can give her a good life. I can take her places she's never been before.

I stop at the first house and pull into the driveway. Then I sit in the car and stare up at the front door. A house. My house. Outside Belmont. The thought doesn't make much sense. I've never thought of leaving, and yet here I am, looking at a goddamn house. Since when is this me? Since her, that's when. Sage makes me want things I never knew I wanted. I didn't want kids. I didn't want a child to live through what I did, but now? I look at Sage, and I can see me being a father. I wouldn't be anything like mine. Or so I tell myself.

Blowing out a breath, I climb out of the car and walk up to the front door to meet the realtor. She opens it before I even get the chance to knock, a smile plastered to her face.

"Are you Mr. Scott?" she asks.

"I am," I say as she holds her hand out to me. I don't want to touch her. I don't want anyone touching me except Sage, but this is the real world, right? So I stretch my hand out to her and take hers in mine.



“I’m Karen. You want to look inside?” she says. I nod my head and follow her inside and around the house. White walls. White floors. This isn’t anything I’m used to. Belmont is full of darkness. Dark houses, dark cars, dark people. My heart starts to kick up a notch, wondering if I’m doing the right thing. I keep repeating it in my head that this is about us, Sage and me.

“It’s very ... bright,” I tell her.

“You can always paint it to your liking.” I nod my head and follow her through the rest of the house. It’s the perfect size for us. Maybe too big. I don’t know. My house in Belmont is huge. It’s more than I could need, but that’s the way we live there.

Karen gives me a minute to myself as I walk over and stare out the window. Sage would love the backyard, I think to myself. There’s a gazebo and a pool. I take it all in, memorizing it all so I can tell her about it later. I still have two other places to look at before I make a decision. I wish she were here to see them, but it’s just too dangerous right now.

The cut healing on my palm begins to itch. I look down at it, and a bad feeling forms in the pit of my stomach. Something’s wrong or about to go wrong. I can feel it.

I left the house quicker than I expected to. I didn't bother with looking at the others. Something is gnawing at the pit of my stomach, telling me there's trouble. I hauled ass back to Belmont only to find the house empty. The front door was broken in, and the basement door busted from the hinges. Violence is in my blood. Anger is a part of me. And right now, it's at an all-time high.

I take slow, deep breaths, trying to calm the frenzy in me. Then I walk back up the stairs and up to my room. Opening the closet door, I walk inside and straight to the vault I keep in there. Pressing in my code, I pop it open and pull out my guns. Whoever touched Sage, whoever took her, will pay with their life.

I check for ammo before shoving a gun into the back of my jeans, one on each side and one in the front. Then I turn and head back out of my room and down the stairs. I'm out the door and striding down the street toward my father's house. I can't explain the turmoil inside of me right now.

When I get to his house, I shove the front door open and storm inside.

"Where are you?" I roar. I hear footsteps coming from the kitchen when my father steps into the room.

"Ares? What's going on?" he asks.

"You're going to tell me where she is, Father. You're not going to play games with me," I warn him. He looks at me, clearly confused by what I'm talking about.

“What? Who?”

“Sage. What the hell did you do with her?” I snarl.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Ares.”

“She was in my basement. My door has been kicked in and ripped from the fucking hinges. This is your domain! Your neighborhood! Now, where the hell is she?” My voice grows louder and louder, but he doesn’t act as if he knows anything.

“Ares, I don’t have a girl here, nor did I know you kept her.”

“Then who? Who the hell else would have taken her?”

“I don’t know, but we need to talk.”

“About what?”

“What’s going to take place in three days.”

“Which is?”

“There are things you don’t know about Belmont. Things I’ve kept from you.” Now I laugh at him. I shake my head and step closer to him.

“The rituals? The reason you trained me to torture women? Oh, I know the sick truth, Father.” He narrows his eyes at me, wondering how I know that. I won’t tell him the truth. I won’t tell him who told me either.

“You know?”

“As if you could keep secrets like that from me. Did you think I would never find out?”

“I didn’t know. I knew you were smart, but this only comes around every twenty-one years,” he answers, waving his hand through the air.

“When did you plan to tell me? Am I a part of it?” Now, he smiles.

“Oh, Ares. You play a major role. You’re the prince, after all. Set to take over after me. This year, you will participate in the ritual.” No. I’m not going to go along with his sick fucking plans. Not anymore.

“I want to know where she is then.”

“Ares, truly. Forget the girl. She wasn’t right for you anyway.” I ball my fists at my sides as I step closer to him.

“You know where she is, though, yes?”

“No. As I said, I didn’t know you kept her.”

“Well, I did. And now someone has her. She has to be here, in Belmont.”

“What makes you think that?”

“No one in, no one out, right?” he nods his head as he thinks about that.

“You’re right. But who here would want her, Ares? She just wasn’t the right girl.”

“She’s my girl! Mine!” My father takes a step back, looking at me as if I’m crazy, and that’s exactly what I am. I am as crazy as he made me.

“Okay. I see you aren’t going to let this go. I’ll make some calls and find out what’s going on. Where’s Juno, by the way? His father says he hasn’t seen him in nearly a month.”

“How should I know?”

“You should know, Ares. He’s like your brother,” he tells me as he pulls his phone out and makes a call. I listen to him talk, picking up bits and pieces but not the full conversation. Maybe because I’m too pissed, I’m too angry, and my mind isn’t letting me focus on anything but her.

When he’s finished, he shoves the phone back into his pocket and looks at me.

“Where did you meet this girl, Sage?”

“What fucking difference does that make?”

“It makes a difference, Ares,” he retorts, watching me like a hawk.

“Where the fuck is she?” I ask through gritted teeth as I pull the gun from my jeans and point it at him. He chuckles and shakes his head.

“Pull the trigger, and you never see her again, Ares. It’s that simple.”

“You know where she is?”

“I do now. And if you pull that trigger, you’ll never find her,” he tells me. Fury courses through me. I lower the gun and shove it back into my jeans before I move. I ball my hand into a fist and swing before he has the chance to move. His head snaps back from the blow before he rights himself.

“You’ve always had anger issues, Ares.”

“I wonder why that is?”

“Because I made you that way. I made you into who you are today.”

“A fucking monster.”

“No. A leader. A fearless leader at that.”

“If anyone lays one fucking hand on her, I will kill everyone in Belmont,” I warn him.

“As you did, Juno?” How does he know that? He couldn’t know that. I look him in his eyes and see he’s just pulling at straws here. But that’s okay. The truth will set you free, is what they say.

“Unlike how I killed Juno, I will draw your death out. I will make it as painful as my childhood. I will make you scream louder than the little boy I once was.”

I pace the house, not knowing what to do with myself. She isn't here, and that's eating me alive. I need her here. I need her close to me, but she isn't, and that bastard knows who has her. She has to be here, in Belmont. There's no way they took her out of here. I could go door to door. I could kick in every fucking door to find her, but I'd be shot before I had the chance.

I stop pacing and sit on the edge of the couch with my head in my hands. This is twice now. Twice, I told her she was safe when she wasn't. The words claw at my insides. There's a beast in me, rattling his cage. I'm going to lose it; I know I am, and then what? No. I have to try and calm myself down. I can't go around just killing everyone, even though the thought is there. My father would have her killed first if he hadn't already. I pull my hands away from my face and look at the scab on my palm. She's it. She's my forever, and I'm going to do anything I have to to get her back.

Shoving off the couch, I rush out the front door and out to my car. I'm in it and down the road and out of the gate as quickly as possible. I drive until I get to Ranger's office and rush inside. Karen looks up from the desk, and her eyes widen.

"What are you doing here?"

"They took her. They took my girl."

"Who?"

"I don't know. Someone in Belmont."

“Oh my God, Ares. You have to find her. If you care about her at all, you have to find her.”

“I know that! I just don’t know how!” I snap loudly this time. It only takes seconds before the door opens, and Ranger steps out to see what’s going on. He looks between Karen and me before looking back at me.

“What’s going on?” he asks. I tell him. I tell him how I stole Sage and kidnapped her. I tell him how she’s mine now. I tell him how someone has taken her when he furrows his brows.

“That doesn’t make sense, Ares. Why take her?”

“To get back at me? I don’t know,” I tell him.

“No. It goes deeper than that. Come into my office,” he tells me before turning and walking back into his office. I look at Karen, but she just shrugs, so I follow him. Once inside, he motions for me to sit down, which I don’t. Instead, I cross my arms over my chest and stand in front of his desk.

“I didn’t know if I could trust you the first time you came in here. I was being wary of you,” he admits.

“Meaning what?”

“Her name. What’s your girl’s name?” I tell him Sage’s name and where she lived. I tell him everything I know about her and watch as he types away at his keyboard. My heart is hammering in my chest as I think about what might be happening to her.

“I’ve been looking into Belmont for a very long time. The things I was told and things I’ve seen never added up. Nothing made sense.” He doesn’t look up from his computer; he just keeps typing.

“I didn’t know the half of it until I came here,” I add.

“That’s the point. The prince, or you, in this case, is kept in the dark. They don’t know anything until it’s time for the ritual. I don’t know all the inner workings, but I have pieced things together over the years,” he explains, still typing.

“What else do you know?”

“I know after twenty-one years have passed, they come back for the girls. Not all of them, just certain ones. They are to be sacrificed to the Gods. You will be the one doing the sacrifice, at which time you’ll be crowned as the next king of Bellmont.” I shake my head. This is all too much. It doesn’t make any sense.

“What if I refuse?” Now he looks up from his computer and eyes me.

“Would you?”

“They took my girl, Ranger!”

“That’s not what I’m asking you. Would you refuse?”

“For her? Yes.” He nods his head, looking back down at the computer for a long second.

“How far are you willing to go for her, Ares?” That’s an easy answer.

“Into the depths of hell. I’m already in too deep.” Ranger smiles when he looks back up at me.

“Then I’ll help you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just as I said. I’ll help you.”

“Why would you?” Ranger looks at me for a long second before he looks at his door. Then it all clicks, making sense. He cares about Karen.

“Does she know?” He jerks his eyes back to mine, shaking his head.

“No. I haven’t attempted to tell her either. I know she worries about this stuff, and one night, she actually confided in me. She told me everything she knew about it, and I knew she feared them. I vowed that day to protect her from them, and I’ve built an army of my own to do just that,” he informs me. I raise my eyebrows, a little impressed by what he’s saying to me.

“An army? Such as?”



“Old army friends. All they need is for me to say the word, and we take them down.”

“And you’re willing to help me?” He nods his head.

“I am. For her,” he nods toward the door.

“So you understand what I’m feeling then?”

“More than you could know. I understand the anger and helplessness. I never once thought I’d be helping a Scott do anything, though, I must say,” he chuckles.

“I can understand that. If it weren’t for her, I wouldn’t be standing here either. I’m sure life would have gone on as usual.”

“I’m glad you’re starting to see the truth, Ares. I’m glad she found you in time.”

“Me too. Now, what do we need to do?” I ask him.

“First, you have to play the part your father wants you to play. The only time all the men and members will be together in one place is at the ritual.”

“I don’t know if I can wait that long,” I tell him truthfully. He nods his head as if he understands, but he doesn’t. He doesn’t understand this need, this obsession I have with her.

“You don’t have a choice here, Ares. If you want to get her back safely and in one piece, then you will listen to what I say to you.”

“How can you be sure they won’t hurt her?”

“The ritual.”

“What about it?”

“The reason they won’t hurt her before then, Ares, is because she’s the main sacrifice.” I’m confused. I don’t understand, but when he spins the computer screen around to face me, the air leaves my lungs. I feel lightheaded. There she is, right there on the screen, ice-blue eyes staring back at me.

“How ...”

“She was adopted, Ares,” he tells me. All the puzzle pieces slowly begin to fall into place. They click and form the perfect fucking puzzle in my mind.

“She was born in Belmont.”

**I**t's like a slap to the face. It's like a stab wound to the chest. It feels like my chest has been ripped open, and my heart falls to the floor. How? She doesn't look like anyone in Bellmont that I can recall.

"I see the look on your face. Why don't you sit down," Ranger says. I walk around and sit in the chair in front of him. "The story the mother gave me was she had an affair. Her birth father isn't in Bellmont. Her mother was. I can't say for sure she's still there. If they found out about the affair, she would have more than likely been killed."

"So she gave the baby up because it was a girl."

"Yes. As you know, girls don't belong in Bellmont."

"The women who are there? Karen said they were special somehow."

"Those women were chosen. They're breeders," he says. Now I'm as confused as ever.

"What?"

"They're breeders. That's all they're used for. A majority of the girls are siblings. Same mother, different fathers." It feels like my brain is going to explode with all this new information. How can that be? They're forced to have children, to produce boys, and when it happens to be a girl, they just discard her like she's nothing.

"This is insane," I say more to myself than to him.

“It’s life in Bellmont, Ares. I’m surprised you hadn’t picked up on more sooner than this.”

“He’s very good at keeping secrets.”

“I can see that.”

“How many other girls have been taken for the ritual?”

“Twenty-one. That’s the rule,” Ranger replies.

“And Karen?” Now I look up at him.

“She was a lucky one. I’ve had men on her since I found out who she was. I’ve kept tabs on her, kept her safe at a distance. The closer it got to the ritual date, the more I had her watched. She wasn’t chosen.”

“How do you know that?”

“Today was the last day. The final girl was picked today. They will prepare them for the ritual now that takes place in three days.”

“That’s why he said three days. He knew who she was,” I say. How didn’t I know this? How the hell did I let this get so out of control?

“Don’t blame yourself, Ares. Your father is a smart man,” he tells me.

“He wasn’t too smart. He took something that holds value to me. He took what wasn’t rightfully his to take.”

“I know you’re angry and want to get this over with, but we can’t move for three days,” he tells me.

“What do you want me to do? How the hell am I supposed to control myself without her?”

“Just remember you’re doing all of this for her.”

“And you’re sure they won’t harm her?”

“No. They want them as pure and clean as possible for the ritual,” he says.

“Juno. He fucking cut her, marked her.”

“And I assume he was handled?” I nod my head.

“He was.”

“Keep calm. Stay out of your father’s way and let him get the preparations in order. I’ll assemble my men. The ritual will take place at midnight, Ares. It will begin, and the girls will be presented to you, including Sage.”

“Then what?”

“From what I know, they won’t hurt them. That’s your job during the ceremony. You kill them and sacrifice them to the Gods, but they’ll save her for last. She’s the most important,” he says.

“Why is that?”

“She’s the one with the ice-blue eyes. The gene runs in the families in Bellmont. Where most come out having dark brown eyes, like you, very few have blue. Those are to be sacrificed to the highest God.”

“She had bad luck? Is that what you’re telling me? She fucking had the luck of being born with the blue eyes?” I snarl at him.

“Yes. That’s basically what it is.”

“What else do you know?” I growl this time. It’s hard trying to keep my anger under control right now. I want to lash out and hurt someone. I want to take my anger out on anyone, but who?

“That’s about all I know, Ares. I’m sorry.”

“Do you think he knew where she was this whole time?”

“I’d say he had an idea. I’m not so sure he knew you were stalking her or you finally kidnapped her.” I shake my head. He couldn’t have known that. I was too good. Too careful.

“He didn’t know.”

“We’re going to end this, Ares. But are you prepared to end Bellmont? This is your home. It is all you’ve known.” I smirk at him, a dark, sickly smile.

“Look at me, Ranger,” I say, pointing to my face and the scars. “He did this to me plus some. My body is covered in

scars. I've hurt women, women who more than likely didn't deserve it. He's going to get everything that's coming to him." Ranger nods his head when Karen walks in with two cups of coffee. She hands him one and then comes to offer me one. I reach out and take it, watching her for a long second.

"I don't say thank you. I never have. Never had a reason to, but you helped me, and for that, I'm thankful," I tell her. She nods her head, a slight smile crossing her face.

"I'm glad I could help. All these years, I felt so helpless. I know Ranger has been doing everything he can, and that's enough for me."

"It's not enough. It isn't going to be enough until they're all dead for what they've done. I can't say I deserve to live either," I admit.

"You were doing what you were raised to do, Ares. Don't put yourself down like that. If you had the choice back then, this wouldn't be you now." I don't know if she's right. I don't know if I know that much about myself. Yet, I nod my head and watch as she walks out of the room once more. I take a sip of my coffee and sigh.

"You're doing the right thing, Ares. You're young. You can start your life over with Sage."

"I don't know how to get rid of the darkness that surrounds me, Ranger."

"You work hard. You let her help you. You do whatever you feel you need to do in order to survive this," he advises. I nod my head once. Maybe he's right. Maybe I can overcome this. I think with Sage, there's a lot I can do. But without her? If something happens to her? That will end me. I will never be the same, and I don't think I can pull myself out of the darkness if that's what's to come.

It's time to make a choice. End myself. Or save her.

I came home after talking with Ranger in a little more depth. He called some of his men while I was there and worked out a plan. I was glad he let me be a part of it. I needed a way to get out of my head for a little while. Now, I'm in my father's basement, looking at the empty cages. The cages have held so many women. Women I've tortured. Women I've broken and abused.

"Do you need something to do?" I hear his voice. I don't look over at him, and I don't have to. I know this amuses him. He fucking knew about her. He denied me having her because he knew, ultimately, I was going to be the one to end her.

"It's been too quiet," I tell him.

"It has. Things will pick back up after the ritual takes place."

"Will it?" Now I turn to face him. I look a lot like my father, and I'm a lot like him. We're both disgusting bastards who hurt others. We're both fated to go to hell at some point. And maybe I'll welcome it with open arms. Maybe they'll do to me as I've done to them.

"It will. Not to worry, I know how you get when you don't have anything to do, Ares."

"And how do I get?"

"Restless. You need the blood. You need the thrill you get when you torture," he answers.

“And you used to do this?” I ask him. He nods his head as I pull out a cigarette and light it up.

“When I was younger, yes. My father, your grandfather taught me as I’ve taught you.”

“You don’t bear the same scars as me.” He chuckles.

“I was a better learner than you, Ares. I didn’t give him as much trouble as you gave me.”

“What was my mother like?”

“She was an evil bitch. I wish you’d remember. She beat you for no reason at all. She tortured you in her own ways,” he tells me.

“I don’t remember any of that.”

“I’m well aware.”

“Then remind me.” He nods and walks around, clasping his hands behind his back as he takes in the tools of torture.

“She used to hate that you looked like me. That you acted like me. She would take out her anger toward me on you,” he says.

“How many others?” I ask as I blow smoke into the air.

“Other what?”

“Kids do you have.”

“You’re the only boy,” he tells me. I want to push him; I want to know more. I want to know if I have siblings out there somewhere, but what good would it do me?

“And you never had another boy?”

“You were enough. I didn’t need more than one son.”

“And girls?”

“Are you really asking me this, Ares?” I nod my head and take another drag from my cigarette.

“I am.”

“Ten, if you must know. All ten were girls.” Fuck me. I have ten sisters out there in the world I never knew.



“Older than me, yes?” he nods his head. “And it doesn’t bother you?”

“That I got rid of them? Not at all. Women are weak. Women are useless unless they are to bear children.” I try to keep myself from punching him again. I focus on the smoke billowing from my lips instead.

“I need to take a shower,” I tell him. He nods as I head for the stairs. That’s when he calls out to me once more.

“Ares?”

“What?”

“You’re going to make a great king one day,” he says. I grit my teeth as I walk up the stairs and straight out the front door and down the steps. I head toward my house, glancing at the other houses on my way. Is Sage in there? Are the other girls? Too many thoughts cross my mind as I make my way home. When I get there, I toss the rest of my cigarette and pull my shirt over my head. Thunder rumbles in the distance as I walk around the side of my house and pull the gate open. I step into my backyard just as the rain begins.

Tipping my face to the sky, I let the rain fall on me. I ball up my fist and pound it against my chest in anger. I keep pounding until it hurts. I pound it to the sound of the thunder. Then, I release a roar that could shake anyone to their core.

My chest is heaving as I let the cool rain pelt my flesh. I wish Sage were here. I wish she were experiencing this with me. She’s right; there is beauty in the rain, in the storms. And she was right. There has been a storm brewing in my eyes since the day she first saw me. And now that storm has developed into a fucking tornado that is going to rip this fucking place to its foundation.

I sit outside until I’m drenched. Then I drag my ass inside and down to the basement. I don’t want to be upstairs; I want to be where Sage’s scent lingers.

I walk over to the bed and drop down on it, laying back on the pillows. I can feel her. I can fucking feel her with me. Is it

insane? Probably, but I know what the hell I feel, and it's all her.

I raise my hand so I can look at the scab on my palm, knowing she has the exact same one on hers. I run my fingers along it.

“You're mine, Little Lamb. You're mine to fucking sacrifice as I see fit. Our blood is one,” I say to myself, wishing she were here to hear me.

I drop my hand to my side and close my eyes, letting sleep pull me under. The dreams come as always. The blood, the whips. Is this going to be my personal hell? These dreams? The memories? It's what I deserve.

Darkness snakes its way in and around me, and I let it. The dreams morph into something else. The female isn't my mother lying there any longer; it's Sage, and I'm standing over her with a sword in my hand. Her eyes plead with me not to do this. She's gagged, so she can't scream. Fire burns all around us, and I stand over her with the sword raised in the air.

I raise it higher and higher as it's poised over her chest. A few deep breaths, the others chanting. My father is off to the side, watching me intently. I crack my neck from side to side before glancing at my father one last time. He nods his head, a smile on his face. Then I turn back to her, my little lamb lying there so fucking helpless. So fucking beautiful. And so fucking mine.

I raise the sword just a little higher, and then I bring it down, slamming it through her heart. I wake with sweat dripping off me. I can't catch my breath. I gasp for air as I look around the room, my eyes falling on the blood stain on the floor from Juno. I reach up and wipe the sweat from my face before throwing my legs over the side of the bed and standing. I can't do this. That dream was too real, although I'd never go through with it. I'd never hurt Sage like that.

I walk to the bathroom and turn on the shower, stripping out of my clothes before stepping into the cold water. It hits me, and I shiver, but I need it. I close my eyes and lean in, letting the water hit my face. Visions of Sage's naked body fill my

mind of her looking at me the way she does, kissing me. Sage has come a long way in the short time we've been together. She's grown and changed. I know she still has some bad thoughts in her head about herself, but she's come so far. She's starting to see the beauty, the queen I see. She's starting to come out of her shell. She's becoming who she was truly meant to be before life and society beat her to the ground and left her to fend for herself.

And when this is all over? She will come out of it on top. She will come out as my queen, my equal, my everything.

**M**y fucking head pounds. The past few days, I've drunk myself to sleep. I couldn't stand it anymore. I need her. I want her back. The thoughts that run wild in my head aren't good ones. There's so much rage in me I can hardly see straight. I can't focus on anything other than finding her.

Tonight's the night. I checked in with Ranger to be sure we're all set. He was ready to go. His team is ready to go. I can't wait. I've already taken anything out of the house that meant anything to me, which wasn't much. Mainly, it was an old necklace that was my mother's, although I don't know why I wanted it if she was as bad as my father says she was.

Now, I pace the floor in my living room, waiting on orders from my father. He told me to be here and be ready, and I am. I just don't know what's going to happen. I don't like the unknown. I want to know how this is going to play out. I need to know Sage is safe and in my arms. My heart hammers against my ribs as the front door opens and my father enters. In his hands is a robe of sorts, black in color.

"What the hell is that?" I ask, nodding toward it.

"Your robe, Ares. Once you finish the ritual, you will be gifted a red one," he explains. I nod, although I don't know why. I'm not going to do this. I'm not going to kill those girls. He just doesn't know it yet.

"And I have to do this?" I ask. I need him to believe I'm going to do it. I need him to think his plan is working, just like

Ranger said.

“Yes, Ares. You do. It’s the way of the Scott’s. We were all kings at one point,” he tells me.

“If that’s what you want,” I tell him. He smiles now, thinking he’s won this war. He hasn’t.

“It’s what we need, Ares. We need to secure the next king, and that is you. After this day, I will expect you to find a suitable woman,” he says.

“And if I don’t?”

“Then I’ll choose for you.”

“Like before?”

“I thought we were past that.”

“We are. I’ll find someone,” I tell him with a sigh. He nods his head and walks closer to me. That’s when I pay more attention to what he’s wearing. He’s in a red robe. He’s the king, the god.

“This is yours. Wear it with pride,” he instructs. I reach out and take it from him, holding it up to look at it.

“And my grandfather had one as well?” I ask the obvious questions to make him think I’m really going along with this shit.

“He did, as did his father before him. And it will continue to your child, Ares.” I lift the black robe and turn it around to examine it. It even has my fucking name sewn into it.

“What will we be doing tonight?” I ask as I slip the robe on. My father smiles at the sight before him. He likes this shit. He believes in this shit. My stomach rolls as I think about harming Sage.

“We will all meet tonight. We will light the godly fires, and we will start the ritual.” I nod my head as he turns and heads for the door. He pulls it open and turns, waving me out. I walk out the door with my heart still hammering in my chest. I walk down the stairs and then wait for my father. He walks in front of me, and that’s when I notice the others. They’re all outside

waiting on me. The whole fucking neighborhood. They're all dressed in white robes. I take them all in before my father turns to me.

"They wear white. They don't get to wear the colors of the God's."

"Is this everyone who lives in Bellmont?" I ask as if I didn't know. I just need him to think I believe in all this shit.

"It is. Even the women are to attend."

"Why?"

"Some bore these children, Ares. They have to be witness to the ritual."

"You make them watch their children be killed?" I ask. I'm sick, but even that is too much for me. There's no way I could ever make my child watch something like that.

"Those girls mean nothing in the greater scheme of things. They were born for this. It's their job," he tells me. Their job? Live for twenty-one years and then die? That's their fucking job? Anger courses through my veins as I think about what he's saying. I could kill him now with my bare fucking hands. I could strangle the life right out of him.

Instead, I follow him as we walk out into the street. He motions for me to stand next to him, so I do. The others stay behind us as we walk through the neighborhood. No one speaks. No one says a word until we round the corner, and I see it. The fire. The fucking fire from my dream. There are two lines of fire about six feet apart. In the middle is something like an altar. I look at my father, but he doesn't look at me. He keeps his eyes trained on the fire in front of us.

We keep walking as I take in the scene. There are knives laid on the ground in front of the altar. I count them quickly. Twenty-one. One for each of the girls. One for Sage. I take deep breaths so I don't do something stupid like kill him first. My father leads me to the altar and motions for me to stand behind the table that sits in front. I take my place as the others come to take theirs. My father bows his head and mumbles things I can't hear. I watch him as he does it, then raises his

head and smiles at me. He raises his hand and motions for someone. Then I see a few of the men are bringing the girls down blindfolded.

I run my hand over my face as the girls are led in front of me and lined up near the fire. I count them to be sure, but there are twenty-one, including Sage. The others? They're blonde. All have blonde hair, but Sage and I see her standing at the end of the line.

"We shall begin the ritual," my father announces loudly. I turn to face him as he picks up a glass from the ground I didn't see before. He takes a sip and passes it to me, nodding for me to take one as well. I do, and that's when I taste the blood. I know that taste, but whose is it? I don't have time to question him as he begins to speak. For the most part, I drown out his words and focus on her. My eyes find Sage's body, and that's where I look. I know I shouldn't be doing it, but I can't stop myself. She's a fucking magnet that tugs me to her. She's mine.

When my father stops talking, I turn to face him. I don't know the exact time, and I don't know if Ranger's men are out there. I hope to fuck that they're ready when this shit goes down because there's no way I'm going to kill these girls.

"Are you ready to begin?" he asks.

"What do I do?"

"Pick up the first knife," he nods toward the line of them. I walk over and pick up the first one before he motions for me to come back to my spot. I do and stand with the knife in my hand. Carved on the handle is number one.

"Bring the first sacrifice," he yells. Two of the men move, grabbing the first girl and bringing her toward us. I'm a little uneasy because they aren't screaming. Why aren't they screaming? There is no sound. This doesn't make sense. Shouldn't they be fighting? Protesting? Trying to get away?

"On the table," he says, nodding toward it. They lift the girl, and still, she makes no sound. This is all so strange. What could they have done to them?

The girl is strapped onto the table, spread eagle. Her arms are at the top corners, and her legs are at the bottom. She's then stripped of her clothes and left naked on the table.

“What now?” I ask, hoping like hell Ranger and his men get here soon. I can't fucking do this. I can't stab this girl.

“You raise the knife and offer the gods your sacrifice. You will do so for each one of them,” he nods toward the other girls. I take a long look at them before looking back at the one on the table when my father nudges me. I step forward and raise the goddamn knife in my hands. I feel like my heart is going to beat out of my chest. I can't do it. I'm not going to do it. My father steps closer to me, nudging me a little more. I look over at him, and he nods his head. Then I look back at the girl, keeping my father in my line of sight.

I raise the knife higher and hold it directly over her chest. Then, I move quickly and slam the knife into my father's chest. Everything else happens so quickly. I hear men screaming and people rushing toward us. There are sounds of things exploding, but my focus is on Sage. I run down the line, grabbing another knife as I go. When I reach her, I rip the cover off her face and cut the binds from her wrists.

“Sage?” She looks at me, but she isn't there. They drugged them. They fucking drugged them, and that's why they aren't doing anything. I glance around to see men in army gear grabbing girls. I slip my arm around Sage and force her to move with me. She stumbles a little, but I keep us moving toward where Ranger said to meet him. I move as quickly as possible when I see him. Ranger steps out of a Jeep parked along the concrete fence.

“They drugged them,” I yell at him.

“Figured as much,” he says as he pulls the back door open and ushers us in. I don't want to go, I'm torn. I know this is what we planned on doing, but I want to go back and end those motherfuckers.

“I need to make sure he's dead,” I tell him. Ranger shakes his head as I get Sage settled in the car.



“We don’t have time.”

“Ranger, I need to do this.” He sees the look in my eyes when he nods his head. I lean in and press my lips to the side of Sage’s head before turning and running back. I see Ranger’s men taking care of the others. A few glance over at me and then turn back to what they’re doing. I rush over to where I left my father on the ground. I see him moving around, and as I approach, he looks up at me.

“Help me, Ares.”

“Help you? No. I want to watch you die,” I tell him. He shakes his head like I’m wrong.

“You can’t do this.”

“It’s already done. You should have never touched her. You should have let me have her, Father, and then maybe this shit would have gone on. I ... I don’t fucking know. Maybe I would have said no, maybe I would have said yes.” I reach for the knife in his chest and pull it free. I know I don’t have much time left. I know Ranger’s men have this place wired to blow. I swallow hard as I raise the knife and watch the look in my father’s eyes. He’s afraid. Something I’ve never seen in him before.

I keep looking into his eyes when I slam the knife into his chest. I pull it free and do it again. Over and over. I keep slamming the damn thing into him as if that’s going to make a difference. I don’t stop either, not until I feel hands on my shoulders. I whip around and fall to my ass to see Ranger standing there.

“Come on, Ares.” His tone is low and full of comfort. It’s not something I’ve heard before. I don’t know what that means. Is he helping me?

“Why?”

“Ares, come on. He’s dead.”

“I need to make sure,” I tell him with a growl.

“Look at him!” I turn my head and look over at my father. His body lies there motionless, his chest torn to pieces. I did

that. I killed him. Ranger comes closer and helps me off the ground. I stand and look down one last time.

“Sage needs you,” he says. Sage. My little lamb. She does need me. I need her. In all this fucked up darkness, I need her. I don’t know how to fix this. I don’t know how to change it. I’m in too deep, and there’s no way out of this.

“Just take her,” I tell him.

“Not without you.”

“Don’t you get it, Ranger? I’m too far gone! I’m too fucked up!” I roar at him, shoving him away from me.

“No, you’re not. You can beat this, Ares. You and her. You can get through this, and she’s going to need you to do that!”

“She doesn’t need me. She just thinks she does. I’m stuck, Ranger. It doesn’t matter if you blow this place to hell. I’m still stuck here!”

“It doesn’t have to be that way, Ares. Come on. Just come with me,” he pleads. I shake my head. I can’t do it. There’s no fucking way. I’m too far gone to be good for her. I’ll only hurt her more. I’ll tear her apart, and it’s all because of the bastard at my feet.

“Take care of her, Ranger.” With that, I shove away from him and take off running. I hear him calling out to me, yelling for me. I ignore his pleas and keep going. His men are all headed for the exits, the spots in the fence they’ve blown up. Houses begin to blow and crumble. I hear the explosions one by one. And one by one, they all fall down.

I keep running until I get to the front gate, and then I run out. I don’t know where the fuck I’m going or what I’m going to do. I just ... run.

I checked into a shit hotel after everything happened. I'm still here six weeks later. My heart sits heavily in my chest. Some days, it doesn't even feel like it's beating.

I did something, though, in those six weeks. I searched found my sisters. I know where they are. Some are still in the state, others not. From what I could find, they are all happy and healthy. I don't know why it was important for me to find them. Maybe I just needed to know they were safe. It wasn't much different to what I did to Sage. I stalked them and watched them.

I watched them go on with their lives. I watched them live without a care in the world, and I even saw them smile. They fucking smiled. They're happy, and that's all I want for them. They didn't have to live the life I did, and I suppose that's a plus. They didn't have to do the things I did or hurt anyone the way I did. Just knowing that gives me some sense of peace.

The police are searching for what happened in Bellmont. They still have no leads and have no clue how it happened. According to Ranger, they never will. His men made sure none of it was traceable.

Now, I sit here, watching her with a cigarette between my lips. So goddamn beautiful it hurts. She's everything. She's perfect. And she's still mine whether she sees it or not.

"You could go talk to her." I look over my shoulder and smirk at Ranger.

“You’re almost as good of a stalker as me,” I tell him as he comes to sit next to me.

“She misses you, Ares.”

“I know she does. I miss her too.”

“Then why don’t you just go to her?”

“It’s not that easy, Ranger. I still feel, and I probably always will,” I inform him.

“Feel what?”

“The darkness, the need, the urge. Do you know what I’ve thought about doing to her?” I ask, shaking my head. He has no idea the things that have gone through my head.

“But you wouldn’t do it, Ares. I know you wouldn’t.”

“That’s the thing, Ranger. I don’t know that I wouldn’t.”

“You love her.” I shake my head.

“I don’t hate her,” I tell him. He chuckles because if anyone understands what I feel for Sage, it’s him.

“You’ve taken enough time for yourself, Ares. You should go to her.”

“Do you think it’s that easy?”

“She’s having your baby,” he says. I know she is. He told me a few weeks ago. I nod my head and take another drag of my cigarette before blowing smoke into the air.

“She’s going to be a good mother.”

“And you?”

“She doesn’t need me for that,” I tell him.

“If you think she doesn’t need you, Ares, you really are crazy. That girl cries herself to sleep at night calling for you.” My chest aches at what he’s saying. It’s not that I don’t want to go to her. I do. I wish it were that easy, but in my mind, she’s better off without me. She has a life ahead of her. She has goals and a future.

“I need to go,” I tell him, flicking my cigarette to the ground and stomping it out. I take one last look at Sage as she smiles at Karen before I turn and walk away.

“Ares,” he calls me. I turn to face him.

“Yeah?”

“Don’t put off your future forever. She’s right there waiting for you.” I nod my head and walk back to my car, climbing in and taking off.

I drive until I make it back to Bellmont. I pull in past the destroyed guard shack and drive to where my father’s old house would have been. When I climb out, I look around at the ashy remains. There’s nothing left. Nothing at all. Even the fucking concrete wall has been taken down. I kneel and sift the ash through my fingers.

“There’s so much more I wanted to do to you. What you got just wasn’t enough. I wanted to drag it out and torture you the way you did me. I wanted to take my time and make you feel every ounce of pain Sage felt. I wanted your death to mean something,” I say out loud. He can’t hear me, but a part of me wishes he could.

“All of this was for nothing. You didn’t win in the end, did you, Father? I won. I fucking won, and now I’m the fucking king. You’re nothing. Not anymore.” I toss the rest of the ash onto the ground before wiping my hands on my pants. Then I turn and head back to the car. I know what I have to do. I know what I need to do.

I pull out and head for the realtor’s office. Sage has been staying with Ranger and Karen since everything happened, but she needs a place of her own. She needs a place to raise the baby, and I’m going to make sure she has that.

It doesn’t take me long to do what I need to do, and the keys are in my hand. Then I head to the store and buy everything she’s going to need. Same day fucking delivery is amazing. They’ll have the house set up for her tonight. I know she isn’t going to take the keys from me and be happy. So I have a plan.

Instead of dealing with any more tonight, I head to the local bar to grab a drink. I sit on the stool and order round after round. I drink until everything is hazy and the room starts to spin. I drink until I can't fucking see straight, and then I pull out my cell phone. I'm stupid. I'm drunk. I know this is wrong, and yet I do it anyway.

"Hello?"

"Do you know what the fuck I want to do to you?" I hear her sigh on the other end.

"What do you want, Ares?"

"You. I want you."

"You can't have me, not anymore. You fucked up. You left me."

"I want to hurt you, Little Lamb. Don't you get that?" I ask as I stumble out of the bar and toward my car. I climb in and sit in the front seat, one hand on the wheel, the other gripping the phone.

"You did hurt me. More than you know."

"Not that kind of hurt, Sage, and you know it. You remember I killed for you, Sage! More than once, I killed for you!"

"What?" she gasps. "Who else did you kill?" she asks, not knowing I killed my father.

"It's all over, Sage. All of it. He can't hurt you. No one can hurt you but me!"

"Who did you kill, Ares?"

"My father! I fucking killed my father for you, Sage!" I scream into the line. My head spins as I grip the phone tighter.

"Oh my God."

"You didn't know, did you?"

"No."

"Now you do. You remember me, Sage, do you hear me? You fucking remember me forever because that scar on your

palm? That means more than marriage, and you know it,” I remind her. She snuffles, and I know she’s crying. Fuck, I want to see her cry. I want to lick the tears.

“Why did you leave me, Ares?”

“You need to live, Sage, and I need to drown in the darkness.”

“You don’t have to do this,” she sobs into the line.

“Oh, I do, Little Lamb. You don’t want our baby to know who I am or what I’ve done. You don’t want it to be like me, Sage,” I tell her. She gasps once more.

“You know?”

“Of course, I know.”

“And you don’t care? You don’t care enough to be with us?”

“I do care, Sage, that’s why I’m staying away! Don’t you see that? I don’t want to hurt you or the baby. It’s what’s best for everyone.”

“No. It’s what’s best for you! Not all of us.”

“No, it’s for you, Sage. I don’t want to hurt you. I’ve hurt you enough, haven’t I? Or are you like me, Sage? You want the fucking pain and torture? Is that what it is?”

“I can handle it, Ares. You think I’m weak, don’t you?”  
Now I laugh.

“No. You’re far from weak, Sage. You’re the fucking strongest person I know.”

“Then come home, Ares. Come home to me.” I pull the phone away from my ear because I can’t handle it anymore. I can’t hear her beg me to come home. I can’t listen to her say she can handle me. I’m sick. I’m so fucked in the head I don’t think I’ll ever be good enough.

“I’ll find someone else,” she says loudly into the line. I release a roar that should scare the shit out of her before pressing the end key. She won’t find anyone else because I won’t let her. She’s mine. That scar and the baby say so. It

doesn't matter I'm not there. It doesn't matter I can't be with her. Sage will always be mine until I take my last fucking breath.



I don't know if it's anger or the fucking alcohol that's causing me to do what I'm doing. Nevertheless, this is what's happening.

I pull the ski mask over my face as I pick the fucking lock. I already cut power to the house, so the goddamn alarm doesn't go off. I take a deep breath and push the door open, stepping inside. I'm careful as I sneak through the house and down the hall. I stop at the first room on the right. I smirk behind my mask before I open the door slowly and slink inside. She's lying on the bed with her eyes closed, which is going to make this easier for me. I pull the gag from my pocket as well as the knife. Then I move closer to her. When I'm close enough, I press the gag over her mouth, and her eyes fly open. I show her the knife so she knows not to scream.

Her eyes are wide with fear, just the way I want her. I jerk her up, wrapping the gag around her head and tying it so she can't scream. Then I reach for the rope in my back pocket and tie her hands behind her back. With the knife pressed against her neck, I lead her out of her room and down the hall. Her body is trembling as I walk her out of the house and over to my car. I put her in the front seat and buckle her in so I could keep an eye on her. Then I run around, climb into the driver's seat, and start the car.

As I pull out, her chest rises and falls rapidly. She doesn't look over at me, and for that, I'm grateful. Instead, she looks straight ahead. I should have covered her eyes, but I didn't.

I drive a few neighborhoods over and pull into the empty driveway before climbing out and walking around the car. I grab her out and pull her along with me, unlocking the door with one hand and keeping a hold of her with the other. When the door opens, I drag her inside and slam the door, locking it behind me.

Then I take her to the living room, where I sit her on the couch. I pull the knife out of my pocket and twist it in my hands. What do I do with her now?

She watches me intently, unsure of what I'm going to do. Maybe this was wrong. Maybe I shouldn't have done this. I don't fucking know anymore. The line between right and wrong has always been blurred to me. Where I think this is fine, she may not. She probably thinks it's fucked up, but what can I do?

Slowly, I reach up and pull the mask off my face and watch as her eyes widen. She squeals behind the gag and tugs at her hands, knowing she can't get free.

"I didn't want to do this. No, that's a lie. I did want to do this. I wanted to do more," I tell Sage as she struggles. "The things I want to do to you, fuck, I shouldn't even be thinking those things. And yet, seeing you tied up, at my mercy, I can't stop the thoughts. You understand, right?" She shakes her head, and I laugh.

"You do. Because, like me, you're a little dark yourself, right?" Again, she shakes her head, and I laugh more. She's right. She isn't dark like me.

"You're right. Where I'm dark, you're light. And I can't get past it, you know? Because I thought I lived in the grey area in between, but I was wrong. I was always in the dark. There was never anything but darkness for me. But you? You can be the light. You can color my world grey because I can never be like you." She mouths around the gag, but I can't understand what she's saying. Instead of letting her speak, I walk closer and stand her up, walking her down the hall. She tugs at the rope around her wrists, and I groan a little. It's been far too long since I've seen someone struggle.

Once we reach the bedroom, I take her inside and slam the door closed. I walk her to the bed and push her down on it, just her chest, so her ass is in the air. Then I move, yanking her jeans and panties down. She tries to stand and move, but I don't let her. I shove her back down and grab the knife, running it over her ass. The tip barely touches her flesh, but I can see the bumps form on her skin.

"You're going to take my knife like a good girl," I tell her. She thrashes on the bed before I press the knife against her a little harder. "Don't move, or it will cut you."

She stops moving, and I flip the knife in my hand. I bring the handle to my mouth and wet it with my spit before lowering it to her pussy. Then, with ease, I slip it inside her. I work it in and out as she lies there, letting me do it. She isn't fighting me, and I like that.

I fuck her slowly with the knife when I hear her moan around the gag. That's exactly what I wanted to hear. I lean down with the handle still inside her and bite her ass. She squirms now as I look down at my teeth marks on her. Fuck, I like that. It looks so fucking good.

"You like this, right?" I ask her. She doesn't respond, so I fuck her a little harder, faster with the knife. The faster I go, the wetter she gets. When I can't take anymore, I pull the knife free, tossing it onto the bed before I move. I yank my jeans and boxers down before thrusting my cock inside her. She cries out around the gag as I take her hard. I've missed being inside her pussy for so long. I roll my hips, hitting her so deep I never want to come out.

I reach for the knife and cut the rope from her wrists before tossing it back on the bed. Then I grip her hips in my hands and pound into her. I'm getting into a good rhythm when she suddenly moves. She pushes back, and I stumble a little, just enough for her to get out from under me. She climbs up the bed quickly, grabbing the knife as she goes. Then she spins around to face me, tugging the gag from her lips. She eyes me viciously, and I can't get enough of the look in her eye.

“What are you planning on doing with that?” I ask, nodding toward the knife. She moves now, climbing off the bed and coming toward me. I start to reach for my jeans when she stops me.

“Don’t.” I grin as I stand up straight, and she backs me against the wall. I raise my hands as she stares at me with fire in her eyes.

“You want to put that down?” I ask her. She shakes her head and laughs a little.

“No. I don’t.” Then she moves. She grabs my cock in one hand, and I groan at the feel. The next thing I know, she’s got the tip of the knife pressed against my cock. Fuck, she’s doing all kinds of things to me.

“You think you have a right to kidnap me a second time and fuck me?” she asks softly, keeping her tone calm and collected.

“Would you have come if I asked you?”

“No.”

“Then I had no other choice, Little Lamb.”

“You left me for six weeks, Ares. Six fucking weeks!” she screams this time. I nod my head.

“Maybe it should have been longer,” I tell her truthfully.

“Why longer?”

“Because there is still so much darkness in my head, Sage. So fucking much I can’t turn off.”

“So what?”

“So what? So I didn’t want to hurt you, Sage. I didn’t want to hurt the baby.”

“And you don’t think you hurt me by leaving me this long?” she asks, pain lacing her voice. I know I fucked up leaving her, but there was nothing I could do. I needed the space. I needed the time to work on some of the demons inside me.

“You know that’s the last thing I wanted to do to you.” The knife presses into my cock a little harder, causing me to bite my lip. Fuck, she doesn’t know what she’s doing to me right now. Or maybe she does, and she fucking likes it.

“Why’d you come back, Ares?”

“Because you’re mine, Little Lamb. You’re fucking mine, and you have been since the day I touched you in the pool.”

“I’m not yours. You left me. You could have come with me, Ares. You could have been there when I cried at night. You could have been there when I found out I was pregnant or when I felt so fucking alone!”

“You know I was always there, Sage. I’m a part of you, just like you’re a part of me. We shared our blood; we made that deal.”

“You made that deal,” she sneers at me. I nod my head. I get it. I fucked up.

“Fine. Say you don’t want me, Sage, and I’ll leave.”

“What?”

“This is yours. All of it. I wanted you to have a place of your own for you and the baby. This is it.” Her eyes fill with tears before she quickly blinks them away. She shakes her head and swallows hard.

“What do you mean?”

“Just what I said, Sage. This is yours. Say the fucking words, and I’ll leave. Tell me you don’t love me,” I demand. She tilts her head to study me for a long second, but she doesn’t say anything. I reach for her hand and remove the knife from her fingers. I toss it to the floor before I move in on her. Grabbing her around the throat, I pull her toward me.

“You fucked up, Little Lamb. You should have said the words,” I tell darkly.

“Why?”

“Because now you’re mine again, and this time it’s forever.” Before she has the chance to say anything, I crash my

mouth against hers. I kiss her roughly until she gives in to me. She moans into my mouth, and everything else seems to fall into place.

I push her back away from me, and she watches as I kick out of my jeans and shoes. She steps back, climbing on the bed, her legs spread for me. I growl as I climb in between and get ready to take her.

“Are you going to say it, Sage?”

“Say what?” she asks as she watches me. I grab my cock and thrust into her, watching as her eyes roll back and listen to her moan.

“Say it, Sage. Fucking say you don’t love me!” I growl as I lean down and bite her neck. She cries out, and that just makes my cock harder than it was. I fuck her, and I fuck her good. I lift her leg and get in as deep as I can. My body is buzzing, and I can’t seem to stop it. Sage reaches up and wraps her arms around me, holding me to her.

“Ares,” she cries out.

“No. Say it, Little Lamb!” I roar in her ear.

“I love you, Ares. I love you.”

She lays with her head on my chest, breathing softly. Her warm breath dances over my skin, and I love every second of it. This is where she's meant to be. Right here in my arms, with me.

I sigh when my phone rings. I stretch my arm out, grab it off the nightstand, and answer it.

“Yeah?”

“Ares? She's gone!” Ranger yells into the line. I chuckle.

“She isn't gone. She's here with me.”

“What? What do you mean? She didn't say anything to me or Karen.”

“I know. I kidnapped her. You should really get a better system, Ranger. For all the army bullshit, you should be smarter than this,” I tell him.

“You fucking kidnapped her again? Jesus Christ, Ares!”

“You know as well as I do she wasn't going to come with me willingly. I did what I had to do.”

“And she's okay?”

“She's fine. She's asleep,” I tell him. I hear him blow out a breath on the other end.

“You fucking owe me.”

“For what?”

“Cutting my goddamn electricity, asshole.” Now I laugh.

“I got you, Ranger.”

“Where are you anyway? Karen wants to see that she’s okay.”

“Can’t take my word for it?” I ask.

“Not a chance in hell,” he replies, causing me to laugh more. I rattle off the address when he says he’ll see me soon. I hang up and toss the phone onto the bed next to me when Sage pops her head up to look at me. Those goddamn ice-blue eyes that almost got her killed blaze with life.

“He wasn’t happy, was he?”

“No. He didn’t think I should have kidnapped you again, and in thirty minutes, he and Karen are going to be knocking on the door.”

“Why?”

“She doesn’t believe you’re okay,” I tell her. She smiles, and it fucks me up inside. I love that smile. I love that look on her face. “I got you something.”

“What is it?” she asks. I motion for her to sit up, and she does. I follow her, sitting up and reaching into the bedside drawer, pulling out the small box before turning to face her. Sage watches me, unsure what to do.

“I know I fucked up. I know I’m going to fuck up more in the future, but that’s all I want, Sage, is the future. I want you and this baby. I want to do better for her. It’s just hard for me.”

“You’re doing fine, Ares. You’re going to be a great father.”

“I don’t know about that. I don’t know what I’m doing, Sage. I don’t want to fuck this kid up,” I admit to her.

“You won’t. We got this.”

“When I cut your palm, I made you a vow. I vowed I would never be without you, Little Lamb. And I know in your world, the real world, that you want more and need more. So, I got you this,” I tell her as I pop the lid on the box. Inside is a



sparkling black diamond. Sage's eyes widen as she takes it in. Then she looks back up at me.

"Are you kidding me?"

"No. I want to do this right. I want to do what you would do in the real world. I want to marry you, Sage." Now tears leak down her cheeks. I lean in and lick them away. A laugh catches in her throat as I pull back, take the ring from the box, and grab her hand.

"Ares," she says softly.

"I can't promise you I'll always be good. I can't promise I'll always do the right things because this is new to me, Sage. But I can promise to take care of you and this baby and be the best I can."

"I love you, Ares." She leans in and presses her lips to mine, and the world fades away. There's only her and me. Just us.

I let Sage kiss me for as long as she wants before I pull away from her.

"You didn't see the rest of the house," I tell her.

"Like I had a choice," she mumbles.

"True, you didn't. Do you want to see it?" She nods her head as we both climb off the bed. She reaches for a shirt, but I slap it out of her hand. She laughs and wraps her arm around my waist as I lead her naked through the house. I show her each room and the baby's room. She cried when she saw I already had everything set up, even though it was still early.

Then I walk her back into our room.

"We need to get dressed before Ranger and Karen get here," I tell her.

"I have no clothes," she says.

"And as much as I'd like you in my t-shirt if Ranger even glances at your ass in it, I'll kill him." She laughs, but I don't. "Look in the closet." I nod toward it. She walks over and pulls the closet open before turning to look at me.

“How the hell did you get all my clothes from Ranger’s?”

“I fucking kidnapped you, and you think it wasn’t easy to get the clothes?” She shakes her head before walking in, grabbing some clothes out, and tugging them on. I do the same when she walks back over to me. She wraps her arms around my waist and rests her head on my chest.

“You’re too sneaky for your own good,” she says.

“And I think you like me this way,” I tell her. She laughs when the doorbell rings, and she jumps a little. I just hold her tighter.

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. You’re still recovering from a lot of shit, and I didn’t help that any.”

“I’m glad you’re here now, Ares.”

“I’m not going anywhere again. Now let’s go before Ranger has his people kick the fucking door in.” Sage laughs as she pulls out of my arms and walks out of the room and down the hall. I follow behind her, watching her ass she walks. Fuck, I’ve missed that ass.

“What are you doing?” she asks, looking over her shoulder at me.

“Watching your ass.”

“Why?”

“It’s a nice ass, Sage.” She laughs once more before pulling the front door open and letting Ranger and Karen in. Karen moves in, pulling her into a hug as Ranger walks over to stand next to me.

“She looks happy,” he says.

“She should be. This is all for her.”

“You did this?”

“I didn’t want her to want for anything.”

“And what about you?”

“What about me?”

“Do you have what you want?” I look over at Sage and smile.

“I have everything I’m ever going to need.”

**T**here's a ringing in my head, in my ears. One I can't seem to get rid of. I'm doing my best as I hold my head in my hands, sitting in the fucking corner of the room while Sage sleeps in the bed. I glance over at her and watch her sleep. It's like every fucking demon I have is rattling their cages at the same time. All the spirits from the past are coming back to haunt me at the same time. I tug at my hair before letting out a roar that scares the shit out of Sage. She leaps up, sitting up and reaching for the bedside table when she sees me.

"Turn it off!" She quickly turns it off before climbing off the bed and coming toward me. She kneels in front of me and rests her hands on my shoulders before leaning down and looking me in the eye.

"What's happening, Ares?"

"I can't do this, Sage. I can't fucking do this! Don't you see that? I need the fucking blood. I need the torture," I tell her. She shakes her head, tears clinging to her lashes.

"No, you don't. You just think you do. Look at me, Ares. You're here. I'm here."

"And you think that's enough? You think that's all I need?" I scream. I see the pain in her eyes from what I just said. She slowly leans back, and I know my words hurt her. But she's right. She's all I need. She's what I want. When Sage stands, I do the same and grab her in my arms. I pull her toward me, crushing her body against mine.

“I don’t know what to do, Sage.”

“Do you need to talk to someone?” she asks softly. I laugh.

“No. I don’t need to talk to anyone. I need to deal with this in my own way,” I tell her.

“How?”

“I don’t know, Sage. I don’t fucking know. I feel like I’m slowly losing my damn mind.” It’s been months. Months and I’m still not over this shit. I get it; I was born and raised in this shit, so it will be harder and take longer to get over, but when I have Sage by my side, I don’t know why the thoughts keep sneaking back in.

Sage grabs my hand and slowly drags it between us, resting it on her swollen stomach. I sigh and relax a little.

“Think about the baby, Ares. All the good she’s going to bring.”

“She. Our daughter,” I say as if I can’t believe it. And I still can’t some days. I can’t believe she’s a girl after everything I’ve done to women in the past. What kind of sick God would do that? Put another female in my path?

“Yeah, our daughter,” she confirms as she presses her lips to my neck.

“I don’t know what the hell is happening to me, Sage.”

“You’re dealing with it, Ares. You’re doing the best you can,” she tells me, but am I? Am I doing enough? I don’t fucking know anymore. Because most days, I feel like I’m fucking failing, like I’m falling apart, and the only thing keeping me together is Sage and this baby.

“I need to go,” I tell her, pulling away from her. She releases her hold on me and lets me pull back. I turn and head for the bedroom door when I hear her sob. I want to turn back. I want to hold her, I want to fucking love her, but I can’t. Instead, I walk out of the house and out to my car, climbing in and driving to the local bar.

Once I’m inside, I order as many drinks as they’ll give me. A few women approach me, but I wave them off. Fuck them.

They aren't her, and the only one I want is her.

I knock back more drinks than I care to admit when the bell above the door rings, and someone else comes in. I blink my eyes rapidly to make sure that's who I'm seeing when Ranger walks over and drops onto the stool next to me.

"She call you?" I ask.

"She was worried."

"She shouldn't be."

"You've done this three times this week, Ares. What's going on?" I smirk at him and take down another shot.

"My life is going on, Ranger. My fucking life. Do you realize how fucked up I am?" I laugh a little. "I mean, have you really looked at me and seen what the fuck I am?"

"That's your past, Ares. Not your future."

"My past? No, it's my right now! It's my fucking every day, Ranger. Without Belmont, I have no fucking clue what I'm supposed to be doing. What am I supposed to do?" I tug at my hair because frustration has become my new best friend.

"You're supposed to be her rock. You're supposed to be who you're meant to be."

"Which is who? I don't know who the hell that is, Ranger."

"This is all new, Ares. No one expects you to find your way overnight. Things like this take time. You have to heal from your past, Ares. You have to figure out your way and what you want in life."

"I want Sage. That's all I fucking want."

"And you have her. You have her in the palm of your hand, and you're running from her. Have you even talked to her?"

"And tell her what exactly? That I'd like to take her into the garage and whip her? That I'd like to see her blood coating her flesh?" Ranger takes a pull from his beer and then looks at me.

“Yeah. You tell her exactly what you’re thinking, and you work it out together.”

“Work together? How?”

“I don’t have the answer to that. I’m not you, and I’m not her. I don’t know what either of you are thinking.”

“I just told you what I was thinking.”

“Then find an outlet,” he says. Now I chuckle and shove off the stool, stumbling my way outside with him right behind me. I keep walking down toward the alley before I pull the gun from the back of my jeans. I hold it up to him, showing him what I have.

“An outlet? What kind of outlet is there for someone like me?” I ask as I spin the gun on my finger. Ranger looks nervous at first but slowly relaxes as he watches me.

“You like to fight. Why not get into a gym?” I think about that for a minute. He’s right; I do like to fight, but it was always with Juno. Fucking Juno. He would be here right now if it weren’t for what he did to her. My best friend. My only fucking friend.

“Did you know I killed him?”

“Who?”

“Juno.”

“Your friend?”

“Yeah. I killed him right in front of Sage. I left him in charge of her, and you know what he did? He fucking marked her. He ruined her, Ranger. He fucking ruined something that wasn’t his!”

“And you made it right, Ares.”

“A part of me blames her,” I tell him truthfully.

“Why?”

“For being there. Isn’t that fucked up? I blame her for being there when I’m the one who fucking brought her there!”

“You killed your best friend for her. There’s a little tension there.”

“I thought about hurting her for it. I wanted to.”

“But you didn’t. And that means something, Ares.”

“It means I’m weak.”

“No. You’re far from weak. You’re a strong person who had a shit life. You were raised in something you had no control over. You were forced to do things that, if you were raised differently, you wouldn’t have done,” he says.

“Do you really believe that?” I narrow my eyes at him, waiting to see what he has to say.

“Yeah, I do. I think if your life had been different, you would be different, Ares.”

“But it wasn’t, and I’m not.”

“No, you’re not. But that doesn’t mean you have to ruin something good with Sage. She loves you, Ares, and that should tell you something.”

“That she’s as crazy as I am,” I laugh as I scratch my head with the gun. Ranger chuckles, then holds out his hand. I know what he wants, and I’m not sure I’m willing to let it go just yet. I shake my head, but he nods his.

“She loves you,” he tells me once more. He’s right. Sage does love me. I lower the gun and place it in his hand. Ranger shoves it in his jeans before pulling out his cell and calling someone. I don’t listen to what he says, nor do I care for that matter. Instead, I think about Sage and all the pain I’m causing her, and I hate it.

When he’s finished on the phone, he motions for me to follow him. We walk back out of the alley and down to his car, where he opens the door and ushers me in.

“I drove.”

“I know, and you’re sure as shit not driving home like this. I got someone coming for your car,” he tells me. I nod my thanks as I climb in and settle into the seat. He walks around



and climbs in, starting the car and taking off. I watch out the window as we drive down the street. Not many people are out right now unless they're bad, like me.

I shake off the urge to jump out of the car and run as I try and calm myself. We pull into the neighborhood and my driveway, parking the car. I see Sage through the front window pacing back and forth, and my fucking chest literally hurts. I reach up and rub the spot as Ranger looks over at me.

“You know what that means?”

“What?”

“That pain in your chest.”

“No.”

“You're hurting because she's hurting, Ares. That's a good sign,” he tells me. I shake my head because I don't know if that's what that means. Instead of trying to figure it out, I climb out of the car and stumble my way to the porch. The front door opens, and Sage stands there, watching me.

“You okay?”

“Why do you put up with me, Little Lamb? Why do you even bother with me?” Tears fill her eyes, and I want to lick them away.

“Because I love you, Ares, and I believe deep down inside, you love me too.” I wish I could say the words. I wish I could tell her what she wants to hear, but I can't because I don't know what that is.

“You should hate me,” I tell her. She shakes her head and steps back, allowing me to come in. I step inside, and she closes the door, tossing a wave at Ranger as she does.

Then she looks over at me, and I see every fucking reason I want her.

“What are you looking at like that?”

“You're so fucking beautiful, Little Lamb.”

“Let's go to bed.”

“We need to talk,” I tell her.

“I know we do, but you need to sleep first. Then we’ll figure this all out,” she says. I nod my head as she reaches for my hand and pulls my drunk ass along behind her to the bedroom. Once we’re inside, she climbs into bed and motions for me to follow her. I strip out of my clothes and climb in, turning to face her. Then I reach up and run my fingers along the scar on her cheek. The one Juno put there to match mine.

“I killed him,” I whisper.

“I know.”

“He was all I knew, Sage.”

“I’m sorry,” she whispers.

“You mean more to me than he ever did,” I whisper as sleep pulls me under.

**T**he fucking dreams don't stop, not that I'd want them to. I just hate it when she's a part of them now. I don't like seeing her there.

She's on her hands and knees as I stand behind her with the whip in my hand. Blood slides down the leather strip and trickles down her back. I raise it and bring it down once more, searing her flesh. She cries out for me to stop, but I don't. I whip her over and over.

I jerk myself awake, sweat dripping off me. I glance over and notice Sage isn't in bed. Then I realize the sun is out. How long did I sleep? I run my hand over my face and climb out of bed, pulling my jeans on as I go. I walk out of the room and toward the living room when I hear her talking. I stop and listen, being the nosey bastard that I am. She's talking about me. About my dreams. Anger courses through my veins as I storm into the living room to find her and Karen talking.

"You're telling her my business?" I roar as soon as I step into the room.

"We're just talking."

"About me!"

"Maybe I should go," Karen offers.

"Yeah, maybe you should," I snap at her.

"She isn't going anywhere." Sage. My fucking Sage. God, I can't get enough of that girl and her fucking mouth. Sage stands from the couch and glares at me.

“Fine. I’ll fucking go!”

“No, you won’t! I’ve had enough of this, Ares!” She screams louder at me. I turn back around and look at her, hands on her hips, fire in her eyes. Fuck, she looks so goddamn good like that.

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me. I’m sick of this shit! I’m sick of you running off and getting drunk just because you’re scared.” Now I laugh.

“Scared? What the fuck do I have to be scared of?” She laughs this time as she rubs her stomach, drawing my eyes to it.

“This. And me. And the fact you think you can’t love, but you do, Ares. You love me.”

“Stop, Sage,” I warn her.

“No. I’m not going to stop. You’re going to listen to me. I get it, Ares, I do. This isn’t easy for you, but it isn’t easy for me either. I hate to see you like this. I hate to see you so lost and out of control. I want the old Ares back.”

“The one who kidnapped you?” I ask cocking my head to the side. Sage grins a little.

“Yeah, that one. That’s the one who made me feel alive. The one who made me feel cherished. The one who took all my fears and made them disappear.” Now, tears fall down her cheeks as I look at her.

“I thought you were afraid of me.”

“Afraid of what? The fact you cared about me? I mean, obviously, it wasn’t ideal to be kidnapped, but I saw you, Ares. The real you.” There’s still a strong line of anger coursing through my veins as I walk toward her and wrap my hand around her throat. Karen excuses herself, and when I hear the door close, I lower my head.

“You think I care about you, Sage?” She nods her head slowly as she looks into my eyes. Then I lower my lips to hers, kissing her like it’s the last time. Kissing her until I can’t see

straight, can't breathe. Sage moans into my mouth, and I can barely hold on. I pull away from her and stare into the ice-blue eyes that pull me in every goddamn time.

"Ares," she whimpers. I smirk at her.

"What do you want, Little Lamb?"

"You. I want you."

"Don't you know you have me, Sage? You've always fucking had me. From the first day, I started watching you. You. Had. Me."

"Then be with me, Ares. Fight for me. Fight for our baby. Fight for us," she pleads. She's right. I haven't been fighting for her or the baby or even us. I've been a coward. I nod my head as I release the hold on her throat.

"You want me?" She nods.

"Then take me." She narrows her eyes as she looks at me because I never let her be in control. I never let her have the upper hand, and this time, I am. I'm letting her take what she wants from me. I'm letting her have me.

Sage steps closer, tugging my shirt over my head. She then moves to my jeans and boxers. When I'm naked in front of her, she strips out of her clothes. Standing there, Sage covers herself slightly. I reach for her, slapping her hand away as I shake my head.

"No, Little Lamb. Every part of you is mine," I growl this time.

"I've gained more weight," she says hesitantly.

"You look perfect. Look at this," I say as I run my hand over the bump that carries my daughter. "Our daughter."

"Are you happy, Ares? About her?"

"I'm happy, but mostly, I'm afraid of hurting her."

"You're not going to. You're going to be great with her." I move my hands, touching Sage everywhere I can. I touch her in places that I haven't in a long time. Then I turn her around and force her to lean down, hands on the couch. Then I'm

sinking inside her. I grab her hips, and I fuck her. I fuck her to remind her she belongs to me. I fuck her because I need her.

I take her hard and listen as she cries out my name. I don't think I've ever heard my name sound so fucking good as it does coming from her lips. I keep pumping into her until neither of us can take anymore. Sage comes hard, choking my cock as I spill everything inside her. When I finish, I pull out and stand her up straight before pulling her down the hall into our bedroom.

“That was too quick.”

“It was perfect.”

“No. I need more of you, Sage.”

“You have all of me, Ares.”

## EPILOGUE

**T**he months have felt like they've dragged on and on. Most nights, I can't sleep. Insomnia has become my new best friend, but at the same time, I get to do my favorite thing, my favorite pastime. I watch her. I watch my Little Lamb sleep. Like I am now.

Her lips are parted, her hair a mess on the pillow, and she couldn't look any more perfect than she does right now.

I've been doing better, or at least she thinks I have. I do my best to keep the darkest part of me away from her even though she craves it. I know what she wants from me, and I gladly give it to her within reason. Knowing she's going to wake soon, I stand and walk out of the room and down the hall.

Once I get to the living room, I sit down and look at the little girl in my arms. She's asleep, just like her mother. In fact, she looks just like her mother. Same blue eyes that could melt any man inside. Same dark hair. She's the product of my darkness, and that does scare me. I look at her, and I can see the faces of every woman I ever hurt. Every woman I tortured. At times, I feel like shit. If I could hurt someone else's daughter, then why wouldn't I hurt my own? But then I realized deep down I would never lay a hand on her. She's too precious.

The front door opens, and Ranger and Karen walk in. Karen stops and looks at me before looking at the baby and back.

“She looks good in your arms, Ares.”

“This is the first time I’ve held her in a month,” I admit to them. It’s been a month of her being here. A month of her being alive, and I couldn’t bring myself to touch her, hold her. But now? I can’t see myself letting her go.

“Are you serious?” Ranger asks. I nod my head as he comes to sit across from me. “And how does it feel?”

“She’s mine. I won’t let anyone hurt her the way I hurt them,” I tell him.

“You’re going to be a good father, Ares.”

“I’m going to try.”

“Is Sage awake and ready?” Karen asks happily.

“No. She was asleep. This little one kept her up last night,” I tell her, nodding to our daughter, Onyx.

“I’ll get her up,” she says as she walks down the hall toward the room. Today we’re getting married. Today is the day I pledge my life to her and this little girl. Not that I haven’t already done that. It was signed in blood that night in the rain. But this is what she wants and needs, and I’m going to give it to her.

“You ready to be a married man?” Ranger asks. I nod my head.

“This changes nothing for me. It means everything to her,” I remind him.

“You’re putting her first, before yourself. That’s a good thing, Ares. You’ve come a long way in the past few months.”

“I’m doing my best.”

“I know you are, and I’m proud of you,” he says. I turn my head, looking at him as if he’s gone insane.

“What?”

“I’m proud of you. I’m proud of the man you’re becoming and how you’re putting these two girls first. You’re doing great,” he says. I don’t know what to say. No one has ever



been proud of me before. No one. Sure, my father would say it, but he didn't mean it.

"I am too," I hear Sage. My head whips around in her direction, taking her in. Fuck, she looks like a dark goddess. She stands there in a black dress that hugs every fucking piece of her that I love. I lick my lips as I take her in.

"You, Little Lamb, are going to be in trouble later," I warn. She smiles, and it's everything I could have ever wanted. She looks ... happy.

"Is that a threat or a promise?"

"It's a promise you know I'll keep," I tell her as I stand. That's when she sees the baby in my arms. Her mouth parts as she takes me in, holding our daughter. A genuine smile tugs across her face as I close the distance between us. When I'm in front of her, I raise my free hand and wrap it around her neck, pulling her toward me.

"You know what this means?" I ask her.

"What?"

"That you're mine, Little Lamb. Every goddamn part of you is mine." She nods her head before pressing her lips to mine briefly. Ranger clears his throat, and we pull apart.

"You ready?" he asks. I take a deep breath and nod my head as I turn and head for the back door. Neither of us has friends aside from Ranger and Karen, and that's all we need. Stepping out the back door, there's a priest and some dark decorations. You would think it was fucking Halloween, not a wedding. I smile as I take it all in.

"You like it?" Sage asks me. I turn to look at her and nod.

"It's perfect, Sage."

"I'm glad you like it." I nod once more as we walk toward the priest. Sage reaches over and tries to take Onyx from me, but I shake my head.

"No. She's part of this," I tell her. She smiles bigger, and it takes my breath away. The priest does his thing, and we say our vows when Sage looks over at me.

“We might fail sometimes. We might fall, but we’ll always rise and do our best.”

“Sage, you don’t know what you mean to me, and I don’t have the fucking words to tell you. My heart beats for you. Any light I have in me is from you. You gave me that. There’s no one in the world I’d rather spend eternity with.”

“You love me,” she says smiling at me. I smirk and pass Karen the baby before reaching for Sage’s throat and tugging her to me.

“I don’t hate you.” Then I kiss her. I kiss her like my whole life depends on this moment and it does. Because this is the moment I pledge the rest of my life to her. She’s going to be mine in every sense of the fucking word. I have Sage and Onyx now, and there’s nothing else in the world I could ask for.

I may still have issues that need to be dealt with, and I may still have urges, but what I feel for the two of them far outweighs anything else I might feel.

“Come on, Ares,” she begs me. I shake my head before smiling at her.

“Will it make you happy?” She nods her head. “Okay. I love you, Sage.”