

Dark Suspense Reverse  
Harem Romance Novella

# SPINNING DARK REVERSE HAREM

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# SIN PUBLIC ITY

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# **Simplicity**

By: Whitney Edes and Em Torrey



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Quote:

*You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have - Bob Marley*

Dedication:

To Lacey, for the most selfless act we've ever witnessed.

Trigger Warning:

This book is meant for readers over the age of 18, readers discretion advised for explicit content including but not limited to:

Death, Dub-Con, Multi-partners, mental health issues, Alzheimer's, and other possible triggering moments.



# Prologue

## Conner

Birthdays are for those who want to celebrate their loved ones, but no one ever cared that I was alive enough to celebrate my birth. So for me, it's just another day. The laughter behind me pulls my attention, I turn to see a little boy dressed like a superhero. The bus offers me something that driving doesn't. The ability to be around people without having to interact with them. Even if it smells like dog piss and old woman. I'm not sure why 'old woman' is a smell, but for some reason when someone says oh that smells like an old woman, people just seem to know what you mean.

"Happy How-o-ween," the little boy says as the bus stops, his mother takes his hand ushering him out quickly before I can reply to him. The bus moves through a few more stops before finally reaching the one I need to get off at. Pushing up off the bus seat, I grip the bar above me and find my way off the bus, feeling my shoes stick to the floor as I walk.

Staring up at the tall building, I let out a sigh. My office is up there. My father made sure to make a name for himself; he worked for the Jameson's for a long time before stepping out on his own. The only problem, everything was left to me. Maxwell Inc. My office resides on the top floor, but there are businesses all over that are under my corporate umbrella. For today's hat, I'll be Mr. Maxwell, CEO of Maxwell Inc. I have one meeting today, and it's for some side business. I'm trying to undermine a rival of mine, and I can't wait to fuck with him.

I scan my badge as I step through the rotating door, entering my building through the front. Usually I come up from the basement, but that's when I drive. "Good morning, Mr. Maxwell," the woman at the front desk says. Her dark brown hair is combed back into a tight ponytail that pulls her

eyebrows back, making her look like she's made of plastic. Sometimes, there is such a thing as trying too hard.

“Good morning, Davina,” I reply, trying to match her enthusiasm. I try to remember the names of all the employees under my charge, not that I talk to them all. I walk past her to my private elevator, so it'll take me up to my office. You have to have a special key-card to get it to work, and I have one. Obviously, since I own the fucking building.

When the elevator dings, alerting me that I've made it to the top floor, I walk into my office and find a man standing there, waiting for me. His navy suit is crisp, and as I walk around him, I notice the fake Rolex on his wrist. He's trying to keep up the facade of having money, but I can see through it.

“Mr. Wilkins,” I say, reaching my hand out to greet him. My wrist carries a real Rolex, but not by choice. It was a gift, and I broke the watch I liked more.

“Mr. Maxwell,” he says, taking it with a strength I wasn't expecting. He's a bit skinny, but he's dressed to impress, like he's trying to showcase that he has money, even though it's a facade. “I was told you were looking for someone to help you with a legal matter.”

“In a way. I need you to do a job for me, but it'll need to be of the utmost secrecy. No one can know you're working for me,” I say, taking my seat at the desk and gesturing for him to take the chair across from me. He unbuttons his jacket, pushing it to the side as he takes a seat.

“As a lawyer, I have to have everything written out and a hard copy, or I can't guarantee the outcome,” he explains, acting like he's in charge of this conversation.

“I mean no disrespect, Mr. Wilkins.” I open the file on the desk which is full of information about him. “I see here, you owe my bookie over twenty grand, not to mention you're about ten grand behind with another bookie.” I raise an eyebrow when I see a name in the folder, Skylar Graham. I know that name. “I can wipe out the debt and then some if you complete this job for me. It will be under the table, and there will be no paper trail that you were ever employed by me.”

I look up to see him staring at me like I've got something stuck on my face. His mouth is hanging wide open. "You're gonna catch a fly with your mouth open like that," I laugh.

"How do you know what I owe?" he asks, clearing his throat.

"I know more than just what you owe, Mr. Wilkins." I flip through another page in the file. "I see here you're two payments away from losing your house, that your car is about to be repoed. So, if you agree to the job, I'll pay half up front and the other half when the job is complete." I close the folder and sit it down in front of me.

"How much are we talking?" he questions, shuffling his hands in his lap. He's nervous. I like nervous; I can work with that.

I write down the number on a piece of paper and slide it to him, watching as his eyes go wide. "All that for one job?"

"It's a little involved, and if you get busted, I won't be there to bail you out," I say, standing up from my chair. "So do we have a deal?" I offer my hand.

"Yes. Of course." Mr. Wilkins stands up with a smile from ear to ear and shakes my hand.

"From what I've found out, Merrick needs a new lawyer for the guy's he has in county. I want you to fail. Make sure they stay in. Present yourself. You're a well known lawyer, tell him you'll offer your services pro bono to show him what you can do. When he asks why, just explain that you want to be on his payroll and that you don't want to take his money until you prove yourself. He'll eat that shit up."

"So just be my normal lawyer self and lie to get my way. I can do that." I hand him a folder, this one will have everything he needs in it for Merrick and the guys in prison. "Thanks. When can I expect the first payment?" he asks.

"It's already been deposited. Well, what was left after I paid your debts." I watch his face twist in confusion at first,

but then he seems to just accept it.

“Thanks. I’ll be in touch.” He slaps the folder on his open palm and leaves through my door, slamming it on his way out.

Opening his folder again, I look at the name I saw before, Skylar Graham. I pick up my phone and reach out to my go-to guy for information. It rings twice, and he answers. “Hello.”

“Hey. I need you to get me some information on Skylar Graham. I know her name and where her mother lives. But I’d like to know her location as soon as possible.” The phone rests against my cheek as I trace my fingers over the letters in her name. I have people that work for me, doing odd things here and there.

“Give me a few, and I’ll see what I can find,” he replies.

“I’ll wait for it,” I say into the phone, not wanting to wait. I need it now, not in twenty minutes when he gets around to calling me back.

After a long awkward pause, he comes back. “Hey. She works at a diner called Gracie’s. She seems to always be there, so I bet you could find her there now.”

“Thanks. Submit an invoice for the time it takes you to dig up everything you can find on her and then email it all to me as soon as you can.”

“Will do.” The line goes dead. I hang up the phone and close the folder. Gracie’s Diner. I type the address into the search engine on my desktop. A greasy spoon diner on the rougher side of town fills the image section of the screen. Perfect.

# Chapter One

## Skylar

Lavender. The color and the scent are meant to be calming, relaxing even, but peeking through the lavender pieces of my hair at the heavy wooden door in front of me has me feeling anything but calm. Echoes of the conversation I just had with the hospital administrator waft around me like tweety birds in a cartoon. Insurance canceled. One month. Ten thousand dollars. The last words sit so close to my face, I can almost smell them; they smell like desperation and pity. Linda, the hospital administrator, held so much pity in her eyes she could have filled a pity bucket with just looks alone, and her placating words made everything worse. I push the long strands that escape the silk scrunchie out of my face and turn toward the sidewalk leading away from the hospital. Away from my mother.

The lock to my apartment door sticks for the thousandth time this month, and I swear under my breath. My creepy building superintendent, Wes, has been trying to fix this lock for months, but the only time he comes by the shoebox apartment I live in happens to be the middle of the day or late at night when he knows no one else is in the vicinity. I give the key another wiggle, and the bolt finally clicks free. I sigh as the door opens, and I enter my space. The apartment is tiny, but it's mine. The walls are covered in 90s punk band posters, dream-catchers, and a seriously badass Fender lamp I found at a garage sale last year. After dropping my messenger bag at the door, I throw myself on my threadbare sofa and groan into the fabric. I don't have ten thousand dollars. I have no way, outside of selling a kidney, to get ten thousand dollars. Mental note: google black market kidney sale, and I have no one to even ask to borrow the money.

I let out a second groan into the air and sit up to see the black and white "The Who" clock on the other side of the room. Fuck. I'm going to be late to work. Mental breakdowns

are not afforded by the poor, only the rich get the ability to break down. I grab the costume I bought second hand from the back of the door to the bathroom and head into my room to get ready for another shitty shift at the shitty diner I work at. Halloween is the worst too, drunk college kids from all over end up at Gracie's for a late night snack after partying all evening.

## Chapter Two

The diner is busy, and the tables are never ending, but what else would you expect tonight of all nights. Serving drunks has its advantages though, one table left me a fifty dollar tip on a thirty dollar tab. Not sure if they meant to, but when the man dressed as a zombie told me to keep the change who was I to argue.

As the night moves on, we hit a slow patch, just enough time to clean the place up before the witching hour is upon us, and the rush of the drunks from the bars come pouring in.

As I roll silverware in napkins, I spot a man coming through the door. I watch as he takes a seat at the far end away from everyone. If there was a picture in the dictionary for sadness, he would be there. Even under all that sadness, there still stands a man more handsome than anyone I've ever seen. His loose tee-shirt and fitted jeans suit him well, making him fit in, even though the watch he wears showcases that he lives nowhere near here. No one with a Rolex would live in this part of town, let alone come to this diner.

I stand up and put my black fedora on to complete my sexy gangster costume. I thought about keeping my tips in the garter belt around my right thigh, but losing money would not be in my best interest right now. Too many bills and not enough time to make money.

I step up to his table with my hands behind my back. "Hey. What can I get you started with?"

He keeps his eyes glued to the menu. "Coffee black with sugar." His tone is dry laced with a hint of loneliness.

"Be right back, hun." I tap his table and turn to walk away.

I pick up a white coffee cup and an empty carafe to fill with coffee. I see the last piece of cherry pie sitting there so I scoop it up and take it with me.

Walking back to his table, I see he's set the menu back down. I put the coffee and pie on his table with a smile. "Pie makes everyone feel better."

He looks up at me with a raised eyebrow. "How do you know I need to feel better?"

I shrug my shoulders at the sad man who sits in front of me. "I'm pretty good at reading people, and you, sir, have a storm cloud hanging over your head." I smile at him and tap on the table again.

I start to walk away, but he clears his throat. "Thanks, I like pie over birthday cake anyway."

Why would he say something so random? I look back at him. "What's that supposed to mean?" I ask softly, watching his face.

He scoops up a piece of the pie with his fork, and I see a string of tattoos up his right arm. "I just can't stand birthday cake."

I crook my head at him, "Is today your birthday?" I ask. My face must read disbelief because he averts his eyes from me back to the table.

He nods, setting his fork back down after eating a bite of the pie and pours himself a cup of coffee. No wonder he's so sad.

How could anyone be alone on their birthday? I hear the bell of the diner door ding, letting in the next rush of people. "Happy Birthday," I say, touching his shoulder, my go-to to greet the new people. At my touch, he lifts his head, giving me a full grin. His smile feels like a lead weight against my lower stomach. I remove my hand before giving him a smile of my own.

"Thank you," he says. His hand fidgets in his shirt pocket, and then I watch as he slips a bill under my garter. I feel the warmth of his skin caressing me. I watch his face as his eyes follow the curve of my body up to my name tag. "Have a good night, Skylar."



He returns to his pie and coffee as I walk away. His sultry voice was calming and alluring. Tempting me, but I shake him off. Even if he is the sexiest man to ever walk their fine ass into this diner. I have too much on my plate to complicate things.

Reaching down, I pull the tip out of my garter and see he gave me a hundred dollars. I turn to say something to him real quick, but he's gone, leaving more money on the table. *Goodbye, my sad sexy man. I shall dream of you.*

I clear my throat and tuck the hundred in my bra to avoid losing it. These bills won't pay themselves, and this hundred dollars will go a long way.

I grab his money, which is more than enough to cover his half drank coffee and pie, when I notice he wrote on a napkin.

*It was a pleasure to see such a pretty smile on my birthday. - C*

I wonder what the C stands for? Obviously his name but, first name or last name? There's no number or anything so he shall remain a mystery to me, one day maybe I'll be lucky enough to see him again.

"Miss? Can we sit here?" a guy dressed as Michael Jackson, red bling jacket and one white glove, asks.

I just simply smile and nod, allowing them to seat themselves as I collect my thoughts to finish my shift.

## Chapter Three

November first always feels like such a let down, I don't have a reason why. Maybe it's because, as a kid, you wait the whole month of October for Halloween night, and when you wake up the next morning, it feels like a wasted month. Maybe it's because November starts the holiday season, and for the first time in my life, I don't have a soul to spend the holidays with. My father now lives in Seattle with his shiny new wife, who doesn't have Alzheimer's. My mother lives in an assisted living center with bars on the windows and pillows guarding any sharp edges. Loneliness is a heavy burden, just because you carry it well doesn't make it any less heavy.

Rays of sunlight peak through the dirty, broken blinds of my shoebox size apartment. I stare at them for a moment, relishing the burn against my retinas. My eyes water from the glare off of the stained glass, and for a single moment, I allow my eyes to fill with moisture, reminding myself that these aren't tears but rather my body's natural reaction to the pain of staring at the sun. I get out of the small bed and make my way to the bathroom before starting the coffee pot. I'm supposed to be at the facility at noon to have lunch with my mother. My mother, who sometimes remembers who I am and sometimes believes I'm her sister who died years before I was born.

Alice Graham, before Alzheimer's took her spirit, was the type of mother every child wishes for. She made costumes for plays throughout elementary, cookies for every occasion, and a themed birthday cake for every single one of my trips around the sun. Watching someone who was so vibrant become a shadow has to be the biggest slap in the face the universe can hand you. I've heard cancer is an easier diagnosis because there are only two outcomes—you live or you die. Alzheimer's is like taking pages from your story and lighting them on fire, you remember what happened before and you remember what happened after, but the middle is muddy and unclear, almost like it belongs to someone else.

The reminder that I also owe the facility she lives in more money than I have is a punch to the gut. I don't have the credit to take out a loan, that would become a vicious cycle anyway. I stare at myself in the mirror, my light purple hair lays flat against my collarbones, there isn't a concealer on the market that can cover up the bags under my eyes, so I don't bother. I braid my hair and let the twists fall like a snake across my back. Leggings, a hoodie, and my old tennis shoes complete the hot mess look. I grab my phone off the charger, checking it for messages, and outside of two text messages letting me know I'm the winner of an iPhone 14, there are no messages of meaning. I drop the phone in my messenger bag and throw the strap over my shoulder. The bus taking me to Hearthstone doesn't leave for another ten minutes, but I've always been an early bird for things that matter.

Locking the door behind me, I take the steps leading down to the street two at a time, jumping off the last one. As I round the corner to the sidewalk, I stop short when I see a familiar black BMW whipping into the parking lot. Blaine, my only friend from before my mom got her diagnosis, hops out of the driver seat with a smile and two venti cups with a green mermaid label. I sigh at the thought of the white chocolate mocha. Espresso is a luxury I can't afford right now, and I could squeal. I'm so excited.

"Where ya headed, Sky?" he asks as he approaches. I appreciate his visits even though they've become fewer and farther between as of late.

"To see my mom," I say, hugging his torso when he's close enough.

Blaine, who used to be a pimply, lanky kid, with braces and too much hair gel, has grown into a good looking man. His dark brown hair is messy in a just rolled out of bed way, he's wearing jeans and a white v-neck and an expensive looking jacket. He holds the cup out to me, and I almost curtsy; I'm so thankful.

"You have no idea how much I needed this," I say, tipping the cup up in a cheers motion.

“I do, actually,” he says, the rim of his cup tapping mine gently. “Please tell me you aren’t taking the bus up there.”

“Nope, I was planning on using my chevro-legs, you know these shoes don’t have enough miles on them,” I quip sarcastically.

“Let me drive you. I haven’t seen Alice in ages, I’d love to see her,” he replies. His smile is genuine, and I would love nothing more than to not sit on the bus for ninety minutes, the smell of piss always sticks to my clothes.

“Are you sure? You didn’t have any other plans today? I’d hate to intrude on you.”

“No intrusion,” Blaine says, walking back to his car. He opens the passenger door and gestures for me to get in. I say a silent thank you to whoever’s listening upstairs and amble towards the car.

Thirty minutes outside of Boston, Blaine and I have caught up on everything we’ve missed in the last two weeks since we spoke. I told him about the mysterious Mr. C and my creepy superintendent. He told me about the new case he took on at his firm and how grueling the hours have been. The only thing we haven’t talked about is my need for ten thousand dollars, and it’s hanging over the car like a stinky cloud a la pig pen style.

“How’s your mom?” he asks as we get closer to Hearthstone.

“I don’t know,” I reply honestly. “Some days, she’s amazing and the same person she always has been, and then the next day, she calls me Julie and tells me about the man she slept with in high school. It’s fucking hard.”

“I’m sorry,” Blaine says, clasping his hand over mine, and I know he means it. There’s no pity like there normally is when I tell people my mom is sick, just empathy.

“She’ll be happy to see you.” I say, emotion clogging my throat. *If she remembers you*, I think but don’t say out loud.



## Chapter Four

The cement stairs leading into Hearthstone always fill me with self doubt. The imposing building stands tall against the tree lined background, a constant reminder that this place is world-class healthcare. You don't get to build an Alzheimer's monastery for cheap. It's the best place to help take care of my mother, but the money is no joke and working at the diner isn't cutting it. Where is JG Wentworth when I need it? I don't have an annuity, but damn, I do need cash now. A smile pulls at my lips as I think about the stupid song that plays constantly on the shitty diner TV. When we reach the top step of the building, I let out an exasperated breath, thanks Dad, for serving this hefty slice of shit pie with a 'what the fuck am I going to do now' topper.

"Name," the rude woman at the counter says as I enter the front doors. The doors haven't even closed behind us yet, and the woman is already barking at me from the check in station. Her gray hair is pinned back in a chignon that probably took years to perfect. She reminds me of the old lady on *Monster's Inc*. The one asking about the paperwork.

"Skylar. I'm here to see Alice Graham," I reply as I pull my license out of my back pocket and hand it to her. She inspects the ID with such scrutiny I have to wonder if she shouldn't be a patient too. She saw me here last week, we had this same shitty interaction. She clears her throat as her eyes trail from the card to me and then back to the card.

She sets the ID down on the counter as she types my information into her computer. Satisfied I'm not a serial killer, she then hands me back my license and slides a small white badge with a large red "V" on it, alerting everyone that I am a visitor and not a patient. I take the badge and clip it in my hoodie. Blaine steps forward and flashes the old woman a killer grin. She smiles back politely and repeats the ID process with Blaine. Once we're both donning our "V" cards, pun intended, she pushes the button on the inside wall of the booth,

the buzzing sound alerting us that the coast is clear for us to pass through the doors.

Blaine and I walk the long white halls, each of us looking into rooms, inspecting the patients like zoo animals. My heart pulls in my chest at the rooms we pass without a single visitor signature on the clip boards outside their rooms. After a few more rooms and some interesting eavesdropped conversations, I spot Doctor Fraiser standing in the middle of the sitting room. He's deep in conversation with someone, but when he spots me, his face lights up. He makes quick work of crossing the room, when he reaches us he shakes Blaine's hand and places a hand on my shoulder lightly.

"Sky." He lets out a sigh. In his mid-fifties, he still gets around like he's in his twenties. Last time I was here, he said his patients keep him young. "Alice will be so happy to see you today. She's as lucid as I've ever seen her."

"Sky!" I hear my mother's voice from across the room with the same enthusiasm she used to have when I was little, coming home from school.

"Hey, Momma!" I smile and pull her into a hug, welcoming the warm embrace that I rarely get to feel anymore.

"Blaine. Is that you?" Mom reaches a hand out to Blaine, pulling him into our hug. "My babies are all grown up. I feel like I've missed so much. How is everything? Where is your father? What are you guys doing? And who the hell is paying for this place?" Alice spits off so many questions, and I don't want to answer most of them.

How do you tell your mother that her husband ran off and remarried, or that she may have to move facilities because I can't afford this anymore.

"I'm good, Momma. Let's go have lunch." I loop my arm in hers and walk with her to the little cafeteria they have. Blaine follows behind us, and she pats my hand as we walk.

"I'm so happy to see you." I help her sit down in her chair. "Tell me all about your life. What have I missed?"

“So you know where you are, and why you’re here?” I ask as I take a seat next to her. Blaine’s been here with me a few times so he heads off to get our food.

“Yes, baby. Enough about me. Tell me everything before I forget again. Have you and Blaine made things official yet? When am I getting grand babies?”

“Mom. Blaine and I aren’t together. No babies anytime soon. I have plenty of time,” I reply, slightly embarrassed.

“I don’t have plenty of time. You and Blaine have been friends for so long. I just thought.” She looks down at the table.

“Sorry, Momma. We’re just friends,” I reply.

Blaine sets down our trays, and mom starts digging in. I move around the potatoes on my plate, for the price these people are charging, you’d think they’d have better food. Dried up meat, unflavored potatoes, and mushy green beans with a hard roll is hardly something fitting for the price here.

“So good.” Mom hums as she eats.

“I’m glad you think so.” I look up at the people who walk in and see a face that I recognize from yesterday. The sad man from the diner. The mysterious C from the note.

“Sky.” Mom pulls my attention, and I look over at her tray, and she’s built herself a food house with her meat and bread. “Remember when we used to do this.” She laughs and claps her hands together.

“Of course. It was our favorite thing to do with our food. I also remember Grandma telling me to stop playing with my food when I did it at her house. I was so sad so you hurried up and made a little house out of your food too.” Her face lights up at the memory. Such a precious thing having memories, here with you one moment and then forgotten in the blink of an eye. Especially in my mom’s case.

“Blaine,” Mom gasps, looking at his tray. “You did it!” She claps again. I look over to see he’s made a food house too.



I join in on the fun, using my hard bread and dry meat to build my house, using the potatoes as a glue and the green beans for the roof.

“Beautiful, baby!” Mom says when I complete my little house. “I still want grand babies before I don’t remember anything.” Blaine chokes on his drink, causing mom to laugh. “Is there something funny about that?”

“No, ma’am. Just wasn’t expecting it.” Blaine uses his napkin and wipes his mouth. His eyes ping to me in a ‘help me out here’ way, and I smirk.

“Is there a reason why you haven’t swept Sky off her feet?” My mom raises an eyebrow, and I palm my forehead in an effort to hide my embarrassment. Blaine clears his throat as heat creeps up his cheeks.

“We’re just friends, ma’am. Always will be,” he replies quickly, a hint of a smile on his lips.

“Friends,” she scoffs, a sound of disapproval.

My eyes scan the area to see if I can find that familiar face again. Mr. C, whoever you are, I will find you and get the full name one day.

“Miss Graham. May I speak with you?” Dr. Fraiser steps up to the table.

“Yeah sure.” I stand up and place a kiss on my mom’s forehead. “Be right back.” I nod to Blaine, who starts talking to Mom. Hopefully he can squash the babies conversation, and the us being a couple situation. We tried dating once, and it was awkward since we knew literally everything about each other, including the fact that Blaine enjoys the company of all types of humans. He discovered a little later in life that he likes both men and women, so he decided to not put a label on it. He says when he finds never ending love he won’t care who it’s with. As long as it’s forever.

Forever is a long time to promise yourself to a single person. I couldn’t imagine committing myself to one person for the rest of my life.

“Miss Graham.” Dr. Fraiser starts, pulling me from my thoughts of marriage and babies.

“I’ve told you several times to call me Sky. Miss Graham just feels too formal.” I shiver because I know where this conversation is about to head.

“Sky. We need to talk about your mother.” He sighs as he opens the file he has with him. “We are doing everything we promised, and her condition is permanent as you know. Which requires around the clock care.” He pauses and looks me in the eyes. “With that being said, we need to get her account up to date. You are several payments behind.” Panic rises up my spine, and I want to scream, I don’t have the money.

“I know. I’m trying.” I exhale loudly, my eyes locking onto his. “Short of robbing a bank, I don’t have many options. I actually have a payment with me if you want me to run down and pay it,” I say, fishing my wallet out of my bag. I palm the three hundred dollar bills that were originally intended for my food this week, but my mother sacrificed so much for me, I can eat top ramen this week for her.

“Miss Graham,” he says, touching my arm lightly, his eyes hold warmth but there’s pity there too. Pity for me, pity for my mom, pity for the entire situation. “Unless that payment is ten thousand dollars, we can’t take it. We need you to catch up or we will have to relocate her to the ward at the hospital,” he states, and a nuclear explosion would have less of an effect at this point.

“Ten thousand dollars, all at once?” My eyes widen, and I feel my stomach drop. I can’t come up with that. “When does it need to be paid?” I whisper; I don’t really want to know the day, but not knowing isn’t going to help me at this point.

“By the end of the month. If it’s not paid then on the first of the month, we will move her.” Dr. Fraiser closes his folder.

“Okay. I understand.” I nod at him, feeling sick. I’d hate to have to move her, but I can’t keep piling up debt when

I'm so far behind already.

“It'll be an adjustment for her. But it'll take the burden off you. The government will cover the hospital fees.” I nod again. I'm kind of just frozen here, unsure of what to say or do.

I look back at my mom as she laughs with her friend that just joined her at the table. Not only does she have to deal with losing herself to this disease, but now, she will lose the only home she's known for a while, and messing up her living arrangement could derail her further.

The only way to keep her in her life is to pay the money. It's officially time to ask for help. I couldn't live with myself if I moved her to the hospital.

I'll have to put my big girl pants on and ask Blaine for a loan. He's the only one in the world I can think of that would have that kind of money. Or at the very least most of it. I let out a deep sigh. “Thank you, Dr. Fraiser. I'll see what I can do.”

Self doubt, there you are. My never ending friend, always here to remind me that I'm not good enough to take care of my mother after everything she did for me. One day, I'll get ahead of this.

## Chapter Five

Soft rain pelts the windshield as we take the exit leading to the freeway. Blaine and I have spoken a total of five words since leaving the hospital. I'm too lost in my thoughts to hold an articulate conversation, and Blaine's too nice of a guy to call me out on my mental vacation.

"Do you have ten thousand dollars I can borrow?" I blurt, better to bite the bullet now than to wait until he's dropping me off and feels bombarded.

"Uh, yeah," Blaine says, ever the gentleman. "Do you mind if I ask what you need it for?"

"If I told you, I'd have to kill you," I say in a serious voice. "But, I need to keep my mom where she's at, and the facility isn't cheap. They need ten g's by the end of the month, and I'm broke as hell. I'd pay you back." I cringe at my words.

"You don't have to say anymore." He rests his hand on my upper thigh, giving it a light reassuring squeeze. "I've got you, Sky."

I let out a soft breath of relief, knowing that Blaine loves me enough to help me out. Even though I will a thousand percent pay him back, every damn penny and then some. I could never take a hand out. I work for what I have. "Thanks." The words leave my lips, but it feels weird and awkward as I say it.

The diner is busy for a weeknight as I fill orders and dance through the people to make sure everyone has everything they need. Each table is more demanding than the next. I'm not sure why people think that waitresses are their personal slave, but I'm not.

"Miss. Ketchup!" the guy from table four shouts. I was literally just at his table giving him steak sauce. I grab a

ketchup bottle and walk it over to him. He takes the bottle without a word, no thank you, nothing. Asshole.

I hear the bell over the door ding again, I really want to rip it off the wall. I turn slightly from my perch against the Formica countertop to tell them they can sit wherever, and I would be with them in just a moment. The wind rushing in from the open door brings a chill through the diner, and my first instinct is to tell them to come in or go out. I lift my eyes from the cracked plastic of the menus I was wiping down to see him. The mystery man from Halloween. The man who left nothing more than a fat tip and an initial on a napkin.

“Miss.” I hear one of the tables say, his voice grating further against my tattered nerves. I ignore his request as I lock eyes with the stranger who’s been at the forefront of my mind for days. He takes a seat in the far booth, placing both hands on the table. I run my palms across my food caked apron, hoping I look more put together than I feel. My feet carry me across the diner, like a magnet drawn to a piece of metal.

When I reach the table, I stop and look at him. He looks almost the same. “Mr. Mysterious C. Welcome back.” I sit a menu down on his table with a silent thud. The plastic board sits in front of him, but he doesn’t look at it, instead he appraises me. His eyes move slowly from mine, down my body, and then back up again. The blatant perusal shouldn’t make my cheeks heat, but it does.

“Skylar,” he says as his eyes hold mine again. He says my name with a tone that sends a shiver through my body.

I snap out of my weird eye locked trance, reminding myself I have no time for bullshit today. “Do I get more than a note with a letter C at the end of it this time?” I bite back.

“Miss!” The other table shouts, his voice now reaching nuclear levels.

I snap my head around to them. “One second.” I put up a finger and turn back to C.

“I’ll have a burger and fries,” he says coldly. I’m normally so good at reading people, except this man sitting before me is nothing like the one I met on Halloween. He’s detached and ignoring me. He doesn’t even bother to look up at me when he orders. I stand there for a second too long. “Today,” he says with too much snark for my taste right now. Even the air around me feels chilly.

“Well, then fuck you very much,” I murmur under my breath. “I’ll have it out shortly.” I walk away, writing his order on a ticket. I put it up in the window carousel and make my way to the impatient table. “What can I do for you?” I ask. Why does it bother me so much that this man is here? And why am I bothered by his cold shoulder? He was nice to me the last time he was here, but maybe it was a one-off. My thoughts spiral, and the look on my face must tell the man in front of me that I’m not paying attention. He clears his throat loudly, bringing my back to the present.

“I just wanted some ketchup,” he says exasperatedly. Looking at me like I’m beneath him, he gives me a fake smile as he grips his fork tightly.

“Sorry. I’ll be right back with it.” I’ve never understood people and their need to be rude to the server that brings them their food. Like I get it, you’re here to eat, but fuck, for all they know, my life imploded right before they got here. My mother used to tell me that someone who is nice to you but treats wait staff like shit isn’t a nice person, so kindness is something I am to always put out into the world.

I grab the ketchup bottle from under the counter and take it to them. As soon as I set it on the table and ask if they need anything else, the cook dings the bell alerting me that Mr. C’s food is ready. I sigh audibly and walk to the small window with the heat lamps. Carlos, the cook, eyes me from the other side, his eyes questioning whether or not I’m okay. I nod slowly while my insides turn. I’m not okay, but there’s no use alerting Carlos to my inner turmoil. Grabbing a tray from the stack sitting on the counter, I prep his plate, reminding myself of that movie where the waiters do fucked up things to people’s food when they treat them like shit. The thought of

spitting in C's food brings a tiny smile to my lips; I never would, but the thought makes me laugh.

As soon as the plate hits the table, I realize I forgot to get him a fucking drink. I roll my eyes at myself as I set his food down. "What can I get you to drink?" I ask, my hand on my hip as I wait for his response. At the sound of my voice, his eyes snap up to me. His eyes are cold as he appraises me, no shred of the man I laughed with the other night behind his orbs.

"Oh, I thought I'd have to just sit here and die of thirst before you spoke to me again." His face turns smug as he provides me with a coy smile. One of those cocky smiles that you just want to smack into next week.

"Oh, I didn't think snakes needed water," I say under my breath, barely audible. "Do you want a drink or not?" I ask loudly. I don't understand why he's so different today. Even his clothes are different. His well fitted three piece suit, fancy watch, and a bland tie are a stark difference from the man I met. Maybe this is who he is, and Halloween was a facade.

"Water," he says, picking up a fry. He keeps eye contact with me as he pushes the shoestring potato between his straight white teeth, the motion sends a shiver through my body. One usually reserved for the place between my legs. I nod and start to slowly back away from my spot at the table. If I stayed there any longer, I'm pretty sure I would have started rubbing myself against him like a cat in heat. Jesus, get it together, Skylar.

As I stand at the water spigot, I think about how I need to keep my mom in the one place she's comfortable. She's spent the better part of ten years there, and when the money ran out, I started working extra shifts. By extra shifts, I mean at least one a day with only a single day off during this week. I'm exhausted, but my mother would have done the same for me.

The water overflows and spills down my arm, pulling me out of my head. I curse softly under my breath, setting the glass down and reaching for a rag to clean up the water. The

water pools on the counter and is actively dripping into the holes of the non-slip mats that cover the floor. Fucking perfect.

Once I clean everything back up, I set the dish rag in the bleach bucket and grab the water glass from the counter. I head to his table, his head perks up at the glass thuds lightly against the table. “Thank you, Skylar.” The way he says my name sounds different than before. His voice is more commanding, more assertive. Why does my head hear the asshole in his tone, but my vagina, she hears the welcome in his voice. Like he could call me every dirty name in the book, and I would still be willing to walk away with bruised knees and a handprint around my neck. Jesus Christ, snap out of it, Skylar. My god, I need to get laid.

“You’re welcome, C.” I didn’t mean for the C to sound so harsh and breathy, but it did, and there’s nothing I can do about it now. “If you need anything else just let me know.” I tap my fingernail on his table and walk away.

Scurrying to the back, I get behind a closed door, lean against the wall and stand there, waiting for my heart to find a normal pace again. My breathing is shallow and forced like I just ran a marathon. I have never been one to let men affect me, but this man is making my body betray me in ways I’ve never felt before. I peek out of the tiny window at the top of the shuttered door for one more look at the man who’s been haunting my dreams as of late.



## Chapter Six

No matter how hard I try, I can't seem to get C out of my head. He haunts my every waking moment and then pleases me in my dreams. I woke up in a cold sweat this morning with my hand inside my underwear. I've literally met this man twice, and both of those times were drastically different. He was warm and inviting the first night, and he made me feel like a summer afternoon with promises of stolen kisses and hand holding. The second time I saw him, he looked at me like Vecna in *Stranger Things*, cold and unamused with promises of a hand print across my ass and mascara streaks down my face after he was done with me. I'm not against either one of those, but the differences in this man are giving me whiplash. I'm still here for it though, basically standing before him with a bowl like *Oliver Twist*, 'sir, can I have some more please?' I throw my arm over my face as I smooch my head further into my pillow.

When I step out of the shower, the reminder of the ten thousand dollars hangs above me like a dark cloud. With today being my only day off, I planned to stop off at Blaine's before heading to the hospital to see my mom. I hate the idea of taking money from Blaine, and the fact that I will still have to pay him back and pay the hospital at the same time doesn't ease any of my worries. Yes, the ten grand will help me right now, but it feels like I'm throwing myself into a vicious cycle of constantly being behind on payments. Blaine said I didn't need to worry about paying him back right away, but owing a friend money is like putting a space bar between your friendship. I dial Blaine's number again and wait for an answer, but it doesn't come. The telltale sign of his voicemail rings through the speaker, and I groan outwardly. I'll just stop by there on my way to the hospital, I tell myself as I push my bright yellow Converse onto my feet.

Flipping through my keys, I fish out Blaine's and unlock his door, his phone has gone to voicemail three times,

and I'm not above breaking into his place. His house is quiet when I crack open the door, and all the lights are off. No way this jerk's still asleep. I take the stairs two at a time up to his room to find his bed made and no Blaine.

Standing in the middle of his empty room, I let out a laugh as I realize this mother fucker probably got lucky last night and stayed at their house. I walk back down the stairs and check the second living room to make sure he didn't fall asleep watching TV again but come up empty. Oh well, I'll just go see mom and pay them later, I still have some time. I let myself out of his apartment, making sure to lock the door behind me.

Although, time is running out quickly. I couldn't imagine my mom being made to live elsewhere. When I leave Blaine's house, I walk the two blocks to the bus stop and head upstate to see my mom. When you're the only family someone has it's important to spend time with them, even if they don't remember you all the time. I watch the trees zip past the bus and get lost in my thoughts. C being at the forefront of all my daydreams is starting to piss me off, but his face keeps popping up no matter how hard I try to stop it.

The bus comes to a stop outside of the hospital, and I take the stairs to the front door. When I arrive at the nurse check in, I stop and give them my name to check in to see my mom. A nurse catches me in the hall as I'm securing the bright yellow visitor wristband. "Your mom hasn't been herself this morning," she warns, her face stern as she inspects me for my reaction.

"How bad?" I cringe, adjusting my bag over my shoulder.

"She threw her breakfast at us this morning, telling us that we kidnapped her, and her father would come after us." I let out a small giggle, my lips pulling up slightly at her antics. My grandfather's been gone since I was two. I've heard once or twice or maybe a thousand times that with this disease, if you can't laugh a little, you'll only cry a lot. The dark haired nurse rears back like she can't believe I'm laughing at

something so serious. Her eyes narrow at me, and I sigh loudly.

“Okay. Thanks for the heads up.” I nod and continue heading down the hall towards my mom’s room.

I knock on her door twice, then let myself in. “Hey, Mom,” I announce.

“You’re tricks won’t work on me, Satan, I know who you really are.” My mother stands in the corner of her room with her lamp in her hands and her gown on backwards. She tied the straps so it looks like a robe with fringe.

“Who am I?” I ask her, cocking my head to the side as I look at her. Setting my bag down softly on the chair next to me, I stand in front of her, waiting for the answer .

“You kidnapped me for ransom!” she yells, her voice carrying throughout the room. Her eyes narrow at me as her lips purse in defiance. “Only my father won’t pay, he’d rather rip your heads off your shoulders than pay someone for me.” The way she’s standing there makes me want to laugh, her knobby knees, tattered nightgown, wild hair, and gripping that damn lamp out in front of her like a weapon.

“Mom,” I say softly, “your dad isn’t coming to get you this time. Let me help you.” I hold my hands out in front of me as I approach her carefully. She pulls the lamp towards her chest like a child with a teddy bear. Her eyes widen at me as I take another step forward.

“Why do you keep calling me Mom?” She guffaws, her wheels turning at lightning speed. She takes a step back, her back now braced against the windowsill.

“I’m your daughter,” I say slowly, “my name is Sky. Grandpa died a long time ago. No one is holding you for ransom. You just have to stay here for a while.” I bite my lip as emotions course through me. I’d love to tell her that she doesn’t have to be here forever, that one day she can go home, but that would be giving both of us false hope, unfortunately only one of us will remember that hope tomorrow. I watch as her body language changes, she’s searching every inch of her

waiting memories for me. She doesn't remember me today, which shouldn't hurt as much as it does, but tomorrow she might, and that's all the hope I can muster. I wait and...wait for her to come back to me. She knows she knows who I am, but it's like opening a filing cabinet, and all the papers are misfiled. Finally a low sob leaves her as the pieces of the puzzle click into place.

"Sky," she cries, panic lacing her tone when she sees she's holding the lamp like a weapon. "Oh gosh." She sets the lamp down on the side table and runs over to hug me. "I'm so sorry." Her warmth encases me like a cocoon, and I revel in the feeling.

As I continue to hug her, I realize why she looks like such a mess. She hasn't showered. "Let's get you ready for the day," I say into her messy locks. I grab her hand and lead her into the bathroom. The small space reminds me that this is our new normal. I help her get the water running and then step out of the tub to help her in. She takes my hand gingerly and then tells me to shoo.

While Mom showers, I step out of the room and find my way to the reception desk where I make payments. The stark white counter sits between me and the woman sitting behind the desk. Her face is trained on the screen in front of her; I clear my throat and when she still doesn't notice me standing in front of her I announce myself. "Morning." At the sound of my voice, her head turns away from the screen, and her blue eyes meet mine. Her hair is perfectly curled, clothes pristine, with a string of pearls around her neck. Polished is the only way to describe her. I twist my lips as she appraises me.

"Good Morning. What can I do for you?" she says sweetly. God, even her voice is perfect. Ugh. I'd roll my eyes if I didn't need a favor from her.

"I'm pretty far behind on payments," I start, pulling my bottom lip between my teeth. The dead skin there is an easy distraction from the embarrassment I'm feeling. "I uh-I've got the money coming, and I can have it paid by the end of next week."

“Case number?” she asks, her attention back on the computer in front of her. Her perfectly manicured nails rest on the home row of the keyboard, waiting for my answer.

“6830569.” I’ve memorized the number at this point. She types the number in quickly and inspects the account with an expression I presume to be disdainful.

“Ah, yes.” Her face twists as she looks up at me. She doesn’t exactly judge me silently. Her face says more than her words. “You have until the end of the month to catch up or we move her.” Her tone is matter of fact, this woman is better suited working for the DMV than a care facility. The lack of compassion in her tone pisses me off.

“Yes, I am aware,” I snap. “I just told you I have the money and that I would be here to pay it *IN FULL* by the end of next week.” I bite back what I really want to say to her judgemental ass. I swallow the words before they escape from my lips.

“I will make a note.” She smiles, the fakeness bleeding through her overly whitened teeth. She scoffs and clicks away again. I don’t have the patience or the self control to deal with her right now so I turn on my heels and start to walk away, back to my mom’s room. Anger courses through me as I stomp away from the desk. The level of prejudice this woman just threw at me for no reason causes my anger to reach nuclear levels. Fuck it, I say to myself, I’m going to ask her who made her sit on a stick. I turn back around and start towards the desk, but before I can take a single step, my face collides with a hard chest.

“Shit. Sorry,” I grumble, using my hands to push my face away. A small stack of files falls to the ground, and the papers that used to occupy the files pool at my feet. Jesus, what a day to be clumsy. I quickly bend down and collect the papers that hit the ground. Careful to put them back in mostly their respective places. “Freaking idiot,” I mumble to myself as I add more papers to the file.

Thick, muscular thighs clad in dark blue suit pants are the first thing I see when I lift my head from the floor, and I

follow them up and up until a familiar face stops my train of thought. His eyes inspect me before he kneels down to help me gather the last of the papers. I reach for the last one near his foot, and his fingertips brush against my wrist. RED ALERT: he's touching me. I inhale quickly through my nose from the contact, and a slow smirk pulls at his lips. He stands and offers me his palm to assist, but my brain is currently misfiring so instead of taking his palm like a normal human, I hand him the stack of files and push myself off the ground.

"Skylar," his deep voice grumbles my name, careful not to pull attention to us. "What're you-"

"Sir!" the woman behind me shouts, stopping his sentence. "I am so sorry she got in your way." Her eyes cut to me, and she glares like I punched her cat. "I'll have her escorted out immediately."

I hand him back the last of his papers and turn to the stuffy woman who is now standing behind the desk with her phone in her hand, calling security no doubt.

"I'm here to see my mother. You can't kick me out for accidentally bumping into him." I guffaw.

"On the contrary," she says, covering the mouthpiece of the handset with her palm. "You see, that stunt has disturbed the patients, and I can have you escorted out for that," she snips. The woman's voice is almost comical, like she was proud to insult me in front of this man.

He stands up straighter and clears his throat. "Name?" he commands; she assumes he's talking to me, and her mouth pulls into a Cheshire Cat grin. She looks to me, and I don't answer. He sighs loudly and asks again, his eyes narrowing at her. Like a chain on an old light switch the second times the charm, light bulb! She realizes he's speaking to her, and now it's my turn to smile.

"Sara. Sir," she says proudly as she swipes her hands down her blouse. She smiles at him sweetly and narrows her eyes at me.

“You’re fired,” he says nonchalantly while placing the papers back into the correct files. My eyes widen. *Fuck, shit.* Karma’s a motherfucker.

“You can’t fire me!” Sara barks out, stomping her foot like a three year old. Her eyes track from him to me as anger mars her normally poised features.

“Who am I, Sara?” he asks, not even looking at her. His tone affirms he’s already bored with this conversation. I sidestep away from them as they talk. I shouldn’t be here for this, it’s not my business. Yet I can’t look away.

“Mr. Conner Maxwell, the CEO,” she states, realization dawning on her quickly.

I nearly choke on saliva. If my throat wasn’t dry as a bone, I would have spit. Jesus fuck, the CEO? I cringe inwardly.

“And, therefore what?” Conner says. Well at least I have a name now.

“My boss,” she sighs. “You can fire me,” Sara says, lowering her eyes to the ground. Probably to hide her tears.

“Pack your shit and get out. Now.” Conner spits as he turns to me. “I’m sorry I stood too close when you turned around. Please don’t sue for Sara’s behavior.” He reaches a hand out to shake mine. I place my palm in his, and at the contact of his skin meeting mine, a jolt of electricity runs through me. I lower my head to hide the blush I can feel warming my cheeks.

“Even if I wanted to sue you for this,” I say, lifting my head to meet his eyes; he towers over, and that fact alone should make me feel small, but instead, it makes me feel protected, for reasons I can’t explain. “My-my mother is more important, and I need to keep her here. So I will not be any trouble,” I stammer as I take in his gorgeous features.

“Except, you don’t pay for it,” Sara quips from behind her desk. Her voice is a harsh reminder of where we are right now.

“I told you I’d catch up next week,” I snap, turning to face her as I feel the heat on my cheeks from embarrassment.

“Ten thousand dollars by next week. Right.” Sara rolls her eyes like I’m full of shit. I open my mouth to deliver my rebuttal, but Connor’s voice booms through the hallway before I can get a word out.

“Enough, Sara. Get out. Your belongings and last paycheck will be mailed to the address we have on file.” Conner pulls his phone from his inside pocket and dials someone. “Come escort the collection woman Sara out of the building. She’s been terminated.”

I hear a voice on the other side right before Conner hangs up. His eyes find mine again, and we stand for a moment awkwardly as security arrives to escort Sara out. “Well. Uh- it was nice to meet you properly,” I say, my voice cracking, coming out throatier than I anticipated. He smiles at me, and my insides turn to mush.

“The pleasure really was all mine, Sky.” He winks, and I’m a soup sandwich. I giggle, yes giggle and stand there for a moment before realizing I’m not even sure what to say at this point. So I turn away from him and head back to my mother’s room to get away quickly. Before I enter the room, I turn around subtly to find his eyes still trained on me. He gives me a slight wave as he starts down the hallway.



## Chapter Seven

Most evenings are spent working as a waitress, but every Tuesday night, I speak to the public. Anonymously of course, I don't want the people I know, knowing that I have an entire podcast about Serial Killers. Not that I know that many people who would care, but I love the freedom anonymity gives me.

I set up my closet to ensure the quietness, avoiding background noises as I get ready for my podcast. Snacks, drinks, and of course my research on the serial killer I have picked for tonight.

From what I've learned, most people record their podcasts and then upload them after edits and what not, but YOLO. I do that shit on the fly, bumps and bruises, word salad, a few fuck ups ever which way.

I click on the red button to my mic and get everything lined up. I'm the douche that breathes in your ear at first, I try not to but, shit happens.

"Hello my dark lovelies, and welcome to another episode of The Murder Hypothesis. Tonight we will be talking about history's most terrifying female serial killer, Aileen Wuornos. *Ohhh*. Aileen wasn't dealt a fair hand to begin with, and let's face it, if you lived her life, you would've probably done the same thing. Or not.

"Let's start where it all began. Aileen was the product of her upbringing, trading sexual favors at her elementary school for cigarettes and other treats as early as eleven. But how does an eleven year old know how to trade sexual favors? Well, when your father is a convicted sex offender who left before you were born, your mother abandons you leaving you with your grandparents who didn't give a shit about you beating and raping you over several years. You too may find yourself in her predicament.

"At the mere age of fifteen, Aileen had to drop out of school to give birth to her grandfather's baby at a home for

unwed mothers, giving her son up for adoption.” I shiver at the thought of baring a child conceived by rape from a grandparent. They’re supposed to protect you and love you.

“She tried to escape her lifestyle, especially after her grandparents died. She found herself in Florida married to a much older man who had money and was retiring. This didn’t last long as Aileen would soon find herself getting into trouble with the law for beating people, including her new husband. She ran back to Michigan and filed for an annulment after just nine weeks of marriage due to her husband filing a restraining order.” I tend to get a little excited when I talk about serial killers so I have to mentally remind myself to calm down and go slower.

“When she went home to Michigan, she learned of her brother’s death, who she also had sexual relations with, had died of esophageal cancer. This allowed her to collect his ten thousand dollar life insurance policy, which she used to pay off her fine from a DUI and then bought herself a fancy car, only to wreck it while driving under the influence. Fucking dumbass.” Oh shit. Probably shouldn’t have said that part out loud.

I clear my throat and continue on with the story. “Aileen would soon run out of money and head back to Florida where she was arrested and did some time for armed robbery for thirty five bucks and some smokes. The only way she could make any money was to sell herself, and the only trade she knew was well... sex. She was arrested again, only this time one of her customers told the police that she pulled a gun on him and demanded money.”

I take a quick break to take a drink of water and then go back to it. “In ‘87, she found herself a woman and moved in with her. Tyria Moore would become her lover and partner in crime.

“Around this time, she began murdering people, her story changed when she told people about what happened, I guess depending on her mood. Sometimes she would say that they raped or attempted to rape her, other times she would say that she was trying to rob them and things went sideways.

“Her first victim just so happened to be a convicted rapist. In November of ‘89, Richard Mallory was running an electronics store in Clearwater. Aileen shot him several times and then proceeded to dump him in the woods and then ditched his car.

“Her next victim was a 43 year old named David Spears, she killed him by shooting him six times and then stripped him down to his birthday suit. Five days after Spears’ body was found, the cops found Charles Carskaddon who had been shot nine times and tossed off the side of a road like yesterday’s lunch.

“Summer of 1990, Peter Siems disappeared on a drive from Florida to Arkansas. Witnesses later came forward saying that they had seen Wuornos and Moore driving his vehicle. The police were able to pull Aileen’s fingerprints from the car once it was found as well as Siems’ personal items that showed up at pawn shops.

“Wuornos and Moore killed three more men before Aileen was picked up for having a warrant, of course the warrant was from a bar fight. Aileen had been alone at the time of the arrest, and Moore fled home to Pennsylvania where the cops picked her up the day after Aileen Wuornos was booked.

“Moore flipped on Wuornos faster than flipping a pancake. She wanted nothing to do with Aileen at this point. The police set Moore up in a hotel where she could talk to Aileen, hoping to get a confession out of her. She spent four days having Aileen go over details so they could get their stories straight, which ended up being the nail in the coffin for Aileen.

“When Moore got full immunity for cooperating, Aileen seemed to welcome the idea that all of it would be pinned on her and not her lover. They stayed in contact, awaiting the trial to start.

“Behind bars, Aileen seemed to go off the deep end, thinking people were out to get her, spitting in her food or providing, well, other kinds of ingredients that come from the

body.” I make a gagging sound on the podcast. “Well that’s just nasty.”

“When it came time for the trial, Aileen became unhinged, spouting off to the court and whoever would listen, that she was being treated poorly and that everyone was out to get her. She would even go on hunger strikes to avoid eating contaminated food.” I shiver at the thought again.

“Aileen got so bad that she petitioned the court to fire her lawyer and let her represent herself. When the court agreed to this, Aileen was utterly unprepared to defend herself and handle the paperwork of seven murder trials that she was charged with.

“She spent the majority of 1992 defending herself against the murder trials, and eventually, she was sentenced to death. During the trial, Aileen was diagnosed as a psychopath with borderline personality disorder, even though this didn’t play much of a part in her trials.

“In 2001, she petitioned the court, asking for them to speed up the process as she informed them that making her wait was inhumane and an abusive type of living condition, not to mention the sonic weapon being used against her.” I let out a little laugh but quickly pull it back in. “When she was petitioning the courts, the court appointed lawyer tried to say she was out of her mind. Aileen provided paperwork stating she was of right mind and submitted a document for the record stating, and I quote: “I am so sick of hearing this ‘she’s crazy’ stuff. I’ve been evaluated so many times. I’m competent, sane, and I’m trying to tell the truth. I’m one who seriously hates human life and would kill again.”

“During her last interview, she was quoted saying: *I’d just like to say I’m sailing with the Rock, and I’ll be back like ‘Independence Day’ with Jesus, June 6, like the movie, big mother ship and all. I’ll be back.*

“And on June 6, 2002, she was put to death at 9:47 pm.”

I take a deep breath and ready my closure so I can be done for the night. Even though I loved every second of this, I

need some down time.

“Not a lot of people really care about serial killers and their reasons behind doing it. But there is almost always some sort of underlying issue that can be traced back to the ‘why this person, why that time, why kill at all’. And that’s what I’m here for, I want to know why. Aileen Wuornos had a shitty life that forced her hand one too many times, she lost her freaking marbles and did the best she could for a while. One day, she said fuck it and went ham. Now, I am not saying that this is okay. But I understand the why now, so without further adieu, I bid you a good night. Catch you next week on The Murder Hypothesis, where we talk about Donald Harvey, also known as ‘The Angel of Death’.”

I let out a deep exhale as I click off the mic and end my podcast. Putting everything away, I step out of my closet and head to my bed, where I can binge watch some TV to fall asleep to.

## Chapter Eight

My fingers hover over the keys of the dilapidated laptop on my kitchen counter. My body screams at me that I shouldn't be doing this, that if he wanted me to know he would tell me himself. My heart beats wildly in my chest as I type the name into the search bar: *Maxwell, Conner*

The spinning wheel of death sits in the middle of the screen, twirling slowly. I consider closing the lid of the laptop, taking this as a sign from the universe that I really shouldn't be doing this. I lift my hand to the screen just as the screen fills with images of the man who's been running circles in my head.

News articles about his family, pages and pages of what happened to his family. The tragedy that fell on the Maxwell name. I scroll through, noting death after death.

The fact that he's now the CEO of a huge company with other business to boot, baffles me. I'm not sure how they're keeping it together. They've been through so much, and now here I am in their lives, unsure of what to do next.

I almost feel like I don't belong in the Maxwell life, I can barely afford to keep my lights on, let alone keep my mother at Hearthstone, not to mention the fact that Sara totally outed me as someone who couldn't afford that place, right in front of him. Then again, he knows I work at a fucking diner.

I close the laptop, after taking in the full tragic story of the Maxwell family, and just stand there wondering everything that's happened lately. I read the names in the article, my heart clenches as I put my hand to my mouth to cover my gasp, realizing that I've been blind this whole time. And now, I see everything.

Blaine is supposed to come over for pizza and a movie tonight. His bitch ass better bring me the money tonight since I go back up tomorrow to take care of the debt owed.

Two hard knocks and a rapid knock signals that Blaine is here with pizza. I pull the door open to see him smiling from ear to ear. “Money, pizza, and a movie in mind. Where do you want me?” He waggles his eyebrows at me, and while I know he’s joking, the questions send a zap through me. That’s a dangerous question with as worked up as I feel. Conner has been playing the lead role in my sex dreams this week, and I feel like my entire body is a live wire right now. I’ve yet to cross that line with Blaine. But I could use some tension release. As soon as he leaves, I remind myself, I can take care of it. Am I talking to my libido right now? Jesus Christ. Hold it together, Sky.

“The couch,” I say, moving out of the way of the door so he can walk in. I watch as he drops the pizza on the small table and drops down to the threadbare couch. Why we do this in my shoebox of an apartment and not his penthouse, I’ll never know. He looks good in his white v neck and dark jeans. My mind wanders to what’s below the shirt, below the jeans. What he’d look like hovering over the top of me. Arms braced on either side of my face, pupils blown with need...hold up, wait a fucking minute.

“What movie?” I croak, shutting the door behind me, shaking out the thoughts of Blaine’s naked body doing wicked things to mine. I need to get laid soon, especially if I’m having thoughts like this about my best friend. A shiver dances across my body as I feel disgusted just thinking about it. I swallow hard, reminding myself that crossing that line is a terrible idea.

“That new Ryan Reynolds movie,” Blaine says, he’s clueless to the pouncing he just took in my head. He flips the pizza box open on the table and grabs a single slice, the grease coats his fingers, and I watch with rapture as he sucks the orange liquid from his fingertip. “It’s on Netflix,” he says around a mouth full of pizza. I nod, trying to stop myself from dribbling and grab the remote to the small TV from the center of the table.

Dropping down on the couch next to Blaine, I sigh loudly as I grab a piece of pizza and lean back. “Sounds good to me.”

As I'm searching for the nameless movie, Blaine digs in his pocket and pulls out a check. The top line is blank, but he signed and filled out the ten thousand dollar part. "Here," he says, dropping the check into my palm "Pay the care facility and keep your mom where she's comfortable." He nods, and I stare at the check in my hand, a heavy weight feels like it's been lifted from my shoulders, and for the first time in days, it feels like I can breathe.

"You are literally the best friend ever," I exclaim as I tuck the check into my back pocket and lean back into the couch, eating my pizza. Blaine takes the remote from me and puts the movie on, not really taking time to look at which movie.

We sit and watch the whole movie without talking, commentating on everything that's happening is a pet peeve of mine. No talking when I'm watching something, it turns me into a moody bitch to have to pause or rewind something because you couldn't keep your mouth shut.

When the movie ends, I shake Blaine awake. His snores may have been worse than talking during the movie.

"You missed a good movie," I tell him as I stand up from the couch, taking the pizza trash with me.

"Shit. Sorry I didn't mean to fall asleep." Blaine stretches and stands up, checking his expensive watch.

"Got somewhere else to be?" I ask, crossing my arms over my chest.

He gives me his puppy dog face, wide eyes and a turned out bottom lip. "There's this blon-"

"Go. Get your dick wet and leave me here. Bye Blaine." He runs to me, placing a kiss on my forehead and then leaves me standing alone in my living room. I turn the switch off to the lamp in the living room, the glow from the microwave lights up the small kitchen as I make my way down the short hallway.

I shuffle my way to my room and open the night stand. "Guess it's just me and you tonight." I pull my trusty



toy out and set it on the right next to me.

Quickly, I slip out of my pants and underwear and climb into bed. I throw the black duvet over me as my fingers find my clit, sensitive and begging for relief. My breath catches as I circle around and around with a light touch. The ache pulling me in, I slip a finger down into my wet pussy, letting out a gasp as I feel my own inner walls clenching around my finger.

Lifting my tank top, my fingers find my aching nipples as I slowly roll the hardened buds between my fingertips. The heat builds up as my body tightens, and I feel the need to dive deeper. Needing something more, I reach for my silver toy from the nightstand, not needing any kind of lube, not with how wet I am. I twirl it in my juices and push it deep inside of me, crying out at the fullness while arching my back. The pleasure consumes me. I click the small button at the base of the toy, and the vibration rubs against my g-spot deliciously.

There's a knock on my door as I reach the peak of oblivion, ignoring them, I ride my toy, driving the silver cock in and out of my aching channel, fingering my clit with fervor, moaning out as my body quakes from the explosion of my orgasm.

The knocking continues, only now it's harder and more annoying. Pulling my toy free from me, I set it on the bed and wrap myself in a throw blanket, pulling my tank top down around my torso.

Stomping into the living with anger, I rip the door open, ready to give whoever is on the other side a piece of my mind. Conner stands there, hands in his jeans pockets and a smirk playing on his gorgeous full lips. My eyes go wide as I take him in, and my cheeks burn from embarrassment. I know for a fact he heard me, I wasn't exactly quiet. Thank god I didn't moan his name. That's a level of embarrassment I couldn't deal with tonight. "Well that was quick." he says smugly while looking down at my blanket wrapped body.

“That’s because someone kept knocking instead of letting me finish,” I snap. I press my thighs together as my pussy pulsates from the need for more. Tame it down, girl. Why is he here? Oh god, is my mom okay? I haven’t checked my phone since before Blaine came over, maybe they called. It does seem a little below his pay grade to be making house calls though.

“Is my mom okay?” I ask, my voice way too husky for the question I asked.

He cocks his head to the side and inspects me before nodding.

Conner doesn’t wait for an invitation to come in, he just pushes through and walks into my living room. “Can I help you?” I say with venom spewing. I don’t exactly need Mr. Conner, the CEO, in my living room, staring at me wrapped in a blanket when I’m naked from the waist down.

“Who else is here?” He turns to look through the apartment, his words deep and almost like a growl.

“Just you and me,” I mutter, pulling the blanket tighter against my body as I watch his face change. “How do you know where I live?” I ask as he looks around the sparse room.

“Your file at the facility,” he says. I take a few steps into the living room, and the damn blanket wraps around the leg of the couch, exposing my bare thigh. His eyes darken with lust as his head falls to the exposed area. He takes a step towards me and then another.

“Conner,” I warn as he approaches me.

“Cyrus,” he corrects with a growl, moving closer. “I’m Cyrus.” He adjusts his black tie. I give him a good look over, finding myself staring at a man who looks like Conner but is dressed nothing like him. Conner wore relaxed clothes whereas this man is wearing a full ass suit with a red pocket square. They dress miles apart.

“So Connor has a twin.” I nod to myself, pieces of this puzzle falling into place. “Still, I don’t know you well enough

for you to be in here. Please leave.” I start towards the door but instead find myself pinned to the door with him staring down at me.

He takes a deep breath in as he pushes his nose into the space between my ear and shoulder. “You smell divine.”

“Cyrus. Please leave,” I squeak as his hand moves down my body. His fingers feel like fire when he pushes the blanket to the side, touching my arm.

“If you want me to leave, I will.” His hand traces further down until he touches the skin on my thigh. “But answer me one thing, who were you thinking about when you were rubbing that sweet pussy?” He runs his nose along my neck again, and my mind misfires. “Was it me or maybe someone who looks like me? Hmm.” His hand skates between my legs, causing my breath to catch. “Since I’m here I could help, you could have the real thing, baby. I promise it’s better than anything you could have imagined,” he whispers the last part of the sentence, and goosebumps scatter across my overheated flesh. “Was it me?” he asks again, and I nod. “Do you want some help?” And like the wanton idiot I am, I nod again.

I gasp as his fingers skim across my hip bone before they slip between my legs and push into me. “I-I.” I moan as he twists his fingers inside of me.

“You’re gonna let me fuck you so hard that you’ll be walking bow legged for a week.” My body tightens around his fingers as he kisses my neck.

I shake my head at the thought, no man has ever left me sore after, so I had doubts. But I needed this, we’re both consenting adults. I’m single. Why not? A small voice in the back of my mind reminds me that I don’t know this man. That this is probably a terrible idea. That someone could end up doing a murder podcast about me, but... “Prove it,” I growl, dropping the blanket to wrap my arms around his neck.

Cyrus lets out a growl and lifts me with his free hand, and I wrap my legs around his waist. He keeps his other one buried inside of me. He walks down the hall, carrying me

towards my room. “Last door on the right,” I whimper as he continues finger fucking me like this is how he pays his bills. The man has magical fingers, and honestly, if I’m getting murdered tonight, this isn’t the worst way to go.

He kicks open my bedroom door, and I’m tossed softly on the bed as Cyrus wastes no time before kneeling between my legs. His warm mouth encases my clit as his fingers move inside me, his tongue laps at my throbbing nub, and when he curls his fingers inside me, all bets are off. Gripping the sheets tight, I scream out as an orgasm rips through me. My back arches, he is relentless, eating me out like I’m his last supper. My body shakes, trembles, shivers, and twitches. Completely and utterly convulsing under his expert touch.

He’s merciless as another orgasm pulls me apart. I grunt through my teeth, almost pleading with him to stop. I feel his weight shift as my eyes peel open. His thrusting fingers don’t let up as he towers over me leaning down. “Scream for me. Don’t hold back. I want to hear you come apart,” he growls against my neck, which doesn’t help with the back to back orgasms. His scent envelopes me, the smell pushing all of my senses to their breaking point.

I spiral again, only this time a flash of colors burst behind my now closed eyes. I pull in a deep breath and just let go. My entire body screams and tenses as he thrusts feverishly into me.

I let out a string of curse words mixed with his name and the almighty himself. He refuses to let up as I feel orgasm after orgasm taking hold of me.

Pushing up the bed as my body starts to come down, I feel like a wet noodle trying to crawl away from his fingers as he relentlessly continues, legs shaking so hard as my entire body pulses. “I’m not finished,” he growls, grabbing my ankle as he pulls me to the edge of the bed. The sudden empty feeling I get has me whimpering as he pulls away from me. I lay there, a shaken mess in awe of this man. He strips his suit jacket off and lays it over the chair next to my bed.

His fingers dance carefully down his shirt as he unbuttons it to reveal a huge chest tattoo. Intertwining vines that lead from his neck down to his shoulders and chest. A gasp escapes me as he pulls his shirt off completely, his well muscled body begging to be touched. My eyes follow his hands down to his belt buckle, I swallow hard in anticipation, yearning to see what awaits me below.

## Chapter Nine

The monster cock staring at me will never fucking fit inside me. I'm scared to death at the thought of it ripping me in half. I feel doubt pulling at me as I take in the sight of him. "Fear not, I'll fit." He smiles as he gives himself a slow tug.

This behemoth stares at me as Cyrus continues to stroke himself. This motherfucker is a show-er and a grow-er. Jesus fuck. My heart races. "No wonder you said I'd be walking bow legged for a week." I gulp.

I've seen all sizes of cocks, I'm not a prude. But, damn. This is the cock all other cocks want to be when they grow up. Cyrus and his massive cock approach me. Do I crawl away? Fuck. There's no way. I can't take that.

"Lay back," he commands. His words sing to me, lulling me into submission. I do as he says, watching with intriguing eyes as he rubs the head of his dick on my clit, instantly calming my panicked mind.

"Breathe," he says softly as I feel the tip of him pressing against my entrance. I breathe in as he pushes into me, stretching and as he starts to fill me completely. Inch by inch, I feel him opening me, pulling gasps from me as I feel the pressure inside. Slightly painful and a whole helluva lot of pleasure.

I yelp and jerk from the slight pinch I feel inside when he pushes just a smidge too far. I look down at where we meet. "That's right, baby. Look and see how much of me your greedy pussy takes." My breath is shallow as I watch him pull out of me slightly and push back in.

Every nerve in my body is on edge as he slowly moves in and out of me. My fingers find my nipples. I pinch and pull at them, sending my body into pleasure that flows up my spine. Each time he moves, I feel like I could explode. His slow methodical movements baiting me, tempting me, pushing me. My breath catches as he rolls his hips, tapping the spot in the back that drives every woman wild. It's like there's an itch,

and the only thing that can get the scratch is this man, buried deep inside of me.

I trace my fingers up his arms until they lace behind his neck. I thrust up into him, testing my boundaries, seeing what I can endure. “Fuck, baby. You are so goddamned tight.” Thrust. “I’m going to destroy this tight cunt.” Thrust. Thrust. Thrust.

The tension builds further, pushing me over the edge. “Oh.” Thrust. “My.” Thrust. “Gaaawd.” I cry out as I feel another orgasm, this man will be the death of me. My teeth sink into my bottom lip as I try to contain the scream.

“Let me hear you,” Cyrus growls. He fucks me harder, trying to make me scream out for him again. And I do.

I let it out. Mind numbing scream, mixing it with his name. “I. Can’t.” I can’t even breathe. All I feel is him.

“You can.” His thrust speeds up, and I feel like I’m falling from heaven. My body is on overload, and I’ve completely lost count of the orgasms. In a trance of bliss, pleasure, and pure exhaustion, I fall over the cliff once more. My body cries out, my voice hoarse from the screams as I feed his ego.

“That’s it.” His pace slows just a little as he pulls out of me. “One more, baby.” His head dips down as he sucks a nipple into his mouth, biting down, sending a sharp ping through my body, and just like he said, one more. This one, the strongest yet as my knees shake and toes curl. My body clenches tightly around his as he stills, *fuck*. I have no strength in me to fight him off. I let him cum inside as his body tightens, and his eyes flutter closed, spilling his soul deep inside of me.

When he stops moving completely, I let out a jagged breath as my body vibrates from orgasm overload. Now there’s being fucked, and then there’s this. This was a completely different kind of fuck, this man was all about my pleasure, almost like he took enjoyment in my pleasure and, well, fuck me if it wasn’t mind blowing.

Cyrus pulls himself from me, and when he's gone, I miss it. The fullness, like I'm empty without him.



# Chapter Ten

Confused.

I stand in my bathroom wondering who's staring back at me. I recognize the face, but the events that transpired with Cyrus make me feel like a different person. Not only have I drawn the attention of Cyrus, but now I must face the music of connecting with Conner. His twin.

Running my fingers through my hair, I try to shove away the shame that I feel. Even though I did nothing wrong, I still feel weird about facing Conner. How do you tell a guy you're interested in, hey I may or may not have had mind blowing sex with your brother who happens to look just like you, and my vagina feels like it went through a meat grinder, wanna have dinner? I roll my eyes at the thought.

My clothes cling to me as I run my palms down my shirt, smoothing out the slight wrinkles of the white button down. "Okay, Sky. Take the check in, and get the hell out." I tell myself, hoping it helps push the guilt down.

It doesn't help.

Why do I feel guilty?

I check the phone laying on the counter, seeing the time. "Shit." I grab the phone and dash out of the bathroom, collecting my keys and wallet as I head out. I have to get up to pay for my mom and then get back here for work.

The large door swings open as I push through. Cutting to the left, I find my way to the clerk again, thankful that I won't see Sara's judgmental face this time.

"Case number." I hear as I approach the desk. I look behind the computer and see a man sitting there. I rattle off the case number, and then his brown eyes look up at me. He's cute with his round glasses and freckled cheeks. "Are you here to make a payment?"

“Yes,” I respond with a smile, fishing the check out of my purse.

“Amount?” he asks, tapping away at his keyboard.

“Ten thousand.” I respond, flattening out the check’s center crease on the counter in front of him.

I watch his eyes as he watches me, *Please don’t be like Sara*. I think to myself. “Okay.” He holds his hand out. I place the check in his hand, and suddenly the heat rises around me. I feel hot, and I know my cheeks are flushed. “This is blank.” He hands me back the check.

“I didn’t know who to make it out to.” He hands me a card and taps on the name of the facility. “Ah.” I grab a pen and fill in the blank line then hand it back to him. “There.”

He’s quick to work, clicking away, he pauses for a second, and I hear the printer start up. “Okay.” He pulls a paper out from the printer. “Sign here.” He points to the line at the bottom of a receipt. I scribble my signature and the date.

“Perfect.” He collects another paper and hands it to me. “All paid up through the end of next year.”

The end of next year? That amount should have just caught me up. “What do you mean through the end of next year?” I crane my neck over the counter to look at his computer.

“There was a large payment made last week too. You must really want to get ahead of the payments.” He smiles and hands me the receipt showing that I’m absolutely paid up for the next thirteen months. But how?

“I didn’t pay that. There must be a mistake. Maybe someone else’s payment was applied wrong?” I panic, thinking about someone’s poor family member who will be in the same situation I am.

“Shows here that the payment was made anonymously last week to this account. Sorry, I thought you knew.” He points to the screen and smiles again before he clears his throat. “Look. I’m assuming you had no idea, so just take the

gift and let it be.” His eyes cut to mine, begging me to just let it be.

“It was a mistake. Please find out who paid it and return their money. I don’t need a hand out.” I say, trying to not sound ungrateful, but my pride is taking a hit right now. I’m not a charity case.

“That won’t be necessary.” I hear from behind me. When I turn to see who it is, Conner is standing there in a dark gray suit with a crisp white button down and black tie. Why does he look like corporate porn? And why am I imagining him doing all the dirty things his brother did to me last night. “I applied the payment due to how you were treated the last time you were here.” Today, a pair of glasses sit on his face, framing his eyes. The expensive square frames add to his allure.

I start to open my mouth to tell him that I was uncomfortable with taking his money when he puts a finger up to hush me. I snap my mouth closed as he opens his. “Skylar, I wonder if you’ll accompany me to my office.”

“Conner. I-“ I clear my throat.

“My name is Cassian. Cash for short.” He smiles wide and nods for me to follow him. Just how many of these handsome men have the same face?

“So, are you all related?” I ask, following Cash down the hall.

“Who?” He adjusts his glasses and leads me to the right, down a hall I’ve never been down.

“You, Conner, and Cyrus.”

“You could say that. Either way, I won’t be taking the money back that we put in your account.” He adjusts his glasses so they fit better on his nose, smiling down at me.

I feel like I’m living in a world of perpetual confusion right now. First Conner shows up at my work on his birthday looking like a lost puppy. Then I see him here, and next thing I know, Cyrus is knocking on my door, and we’re having a rough and tumble in bed. Now Cassian is here, telling me they

paid for my mother's stay here. How does one take this kind of treatment by not one but three brothers? Do they want something? I barely know them yet here I am, walking down a hallway I've never seen before next to one of them.

"I just want my mom to have the best care, and this facility provides that. I don't need a hand out." I turn my head to look up at him, and he stops walking.

"Skylar, this was not a hand out. It is compensation for being treated so poorly by our employee, we felt it was right to compensate you. So please, I'll hear no more about it." His face is stern giving me 'don't question' me vibes. So I let out a sigh and concede, this time. I take a step forward, my need for self sufficiency outweighing self preservation at this point. We stand in the empty hallway, my face turned up to his from the height difference.

"Okay-" I say, holding his stormy eyes hostage with mine, "but no more. I pay my own way," I tell him, poking a finger into his chest. His large palm grabs my hand from his chest as he lets out a small laugh and begins walking again. I have no choice but to follow him further down the stark white hallway. I can see two doors, one at the end of the hall and another to the left.

Cassian opens the door straight ahead and reveals a large office with absolutely no windows. There's a set of fancy modern looking lights hanging from the ceiling, but you can't mimic natural sunlight. The clinical feel is still palpable.

He moves straight for the large wooden desk and sits down, "So..." he starts, leaning back in the office chair like a Bond villain. He steepled his fingers, both elbows placed on the arm rests. "Cyrus? How was that?" he asks without batting an eye, a smirk playing on his gorgeous full lips.

I choke.

Quickly covering it up as I clear my throat trying to be sly. "Do you tell each other everything?" I ask, slightly mortified.

“I just know things.” He shrugs. “Cyrus is very—” He stops, searching for the right word, *egotistical? Insane? A clitoral DJ who only plays 90’s hip hop?* I answer in my head. “Well, let’s just say he takes what he wants. Since you brought up his name, I highly doubt he found you for anything other than that. He likes to fuck,” he states nonchalantly. The man doesn’t like to fuck, he was born to fuck. But I don’t know how I feel about having this kind of conversation in the facility where my mom lives.

“Just so we’re clear, he’s lucky he got to you first.” He smiles smugly at me, and I watch as he places his glasses on the desk and loosens his tie. He studies my body as I try to not notice his. Whoever birthed the sexiest group of men I’ve ever met needs to be awarded a gold fucking medal. He slips his jacket off revealing the tight white shirt, snugly fit to his arms and chest.

I’m not sure what the hell is going on exactly. But I feel both turned on and appalled at the same time. Who do these guys think they are?

“Look, Cassian,” I start, but he pops the top button of his shirt, and my brain misfires as a tiny sliver of a chest tattoo peaks above the white shirt. He notices me gawking and smirks, asshole. I recover from my momentary drool session and clear my throat. “I’m not sure what game you and your brothers are playing, but I won’t be in the middle of it.” I turn on my heel from the center of the room and head for the door.

As my hand grasps the silver door knob, I feel the warmth of a hand against the back of my neck. I’m turned quickly and shoved against the door with his face an inch from mine. “We aren’t playing any games.”

“Then what do you want?” I ask with a shaky breath. Exasperation apparent in my tone.

“We want you,” he states, his voice a low grumble, husky and full of lust. His breath caresses my cheek.

“Why?” I finally ask, the word falling from my lips of their own accord.

His hand wanders down my side slowly, I feel like I'm being lit on fire from his touch. The heat between us is more than I can handle right now, especially with what he's saying. They want me. They who? Him and his brothers?

"You see us. You were kind to Conner when he was feeling down about his birthday. You were able to sedate Cyrus' hunger. We'd like to see if you can hold your own with Colt or keep up with me."

"There's four of you?" I swallow the lump I feel in my throat.

"There are five of us actually. But Cruz," he stops and licks his full lips, "doesn't play well with others." Five. He said five of them. Holy fucking, cock. Yep, that's a cock pressing against my hip.

"Then it is a game," I spit, pushing off of the door. "You all want to attempt to woo me, and we'll just see what happens." Ugh Pass. "Count me out, Cassian. I don't want to play." I push my hips against him to try to make room for me to move away. "I've gotta go, Cassian."

"Then let the games begin, little pet." His voice is low, it's like he's making me a promise. A promise of seeing me again. He lets go of me, letting me leave the office. I walk with a speed that would be running if I didn't fear getting stopped on my way out. I'm flustered from the conversation and slightly annoyed at the fact that I'm turned on.

I approach the lobby when I hear a voice come over the loudspeaker, announcing for help in my mother's room. I run, fuck the rules. My feet carry me as fast as they can to her room.

"Let go of me, you fucking piece of shit. You can't hold me here against my will." My mother's voice is louder than anyone else around. A few nurses have her cornered, and she's holding her lamp again.

"Mom!" I shout to get her attention. My heart breaks watching her fade away, the woman who spent every ounce of herself giving me everything I needed.

“Sky, tell these clowns that I’m not staying here. Your father will be pissed if I’m not home to make him dinner.”

I push through two nurses. She’s shaking like a leaf. “Momma, Dad left. Remember,” I say it as softly as I can, usually when I have to tell her that Dad left, it wrecks her all over again.

“If you can’t calm her down, we will sedate her,” the burly nurse man says, holding a syringe.

“You don’t need that,” I say, pushing his hand to the side. “Now leave, so I can calm her down.”

“Where’s your father?” My mom’s sad eyes look at me, pleading with me, hoping I lied to her.

“He left a while ago. Remember, he moved to Seattle.” I reach for the lamp in her hand and take it. She doesn’t fight me. “Come on. Let’s sit down.”

“Okay. Where am I?”

“You live here now, Mom. They take care of you.”

She sits down and rubs her forehead with her hands. “I’m sorry, Sky, sometimes I forget things.”

It breaks my fucking heart to see her have to relive this over and over, her reaction differs depending on her moods. Thankfully this one is smooth compared to when I first moved her here.

“I know, Momma. I know.” I rub her back as she begins to sob, falling over onto my shoulder. “I’m sorry,” I whisper softly. “So sorry.” I’m not a mean person, but I wish this had happened to someone else, sometimes it doesn’t feel real. When she’s having a clear day and we’re out in the garden, I can almost see it, the life we could have had. The mother who would have been the best of grandma’s. Hell, I could’ve been married with kids by now. But life had other plans for me.

I’m single because it’s my job to take care of her. So even if I feel guilty for sleeping with Cyrus, while being curious about Conner, it’s not really something to be ashamed

of. I'm not committed to any of them. So why not have fun, why not enjoy my life when and where I can. Maybe, just maybe I can get moments where the world fades away as I fall deep into oblivion in the arms of one of these handsome as fuck men.

As my mom falls asleep, I lay her back on her bed and cover her up. I've decided that if these guys want to use me in whatever game they have planned, then I'll join in on the fun. Only we'll play on my terms.



# Chapter Eleven

I spent my night doing another podcast, talking about The Angel of Death, revealing everything I could find about him and asking why he did it.

My doorbell rings as I crawl into bed. I swear to God, if Blaine is here to tell me about another hookup, I may just dick punch him. I'm so fucking tired.

I rip the door open ready to shout at whoever stands there. I see another Conner look-alike. Except this one is dressed in all black, with silver rings decorating his fingers. "Sky," he says so casually, like he's known me his whole life and I'm just the missing puzzle piece fitting us together.

"Yes." I fight the urge to slam the door in his face. "Look, I don't know which one you are, but I'm tired, and it's been a long ass week. Can we do this another time?"

"I'm Colt." The way he says his name sends a shiver down my spine. "I'm here for you, Sky. If you need to sleep. Then-" He walks through my door and lifts me off the ground. I hear the door shut as he carries me down the hall to my room. I'm not sure how he knows where my bed is, but I'm too damn tired to fight him off or even care. I let out a yawn as he lays me down on the bed. He pulls my blanket up over my shoulders and tucks the strand of hair behind my ear. "Sleep." He presses a kiss to my forehead. My body listens, and I fade to black. No sexy dreams, no touchy touchy, nothing. Just the peaceful dark behind my eyelids, whisking me away to sleep.

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I do everything in my power to fight the urge to slap the man sleeping in my bed. The faint memory of him coming in last night lingers, but I don't remember inviting him to sleep here.

The only problem is that I don't actually want to hit him. I want to climb him like a tall tree and ride his trunk all the way down. I press my thighs together to appease my need, but it doesn't help.

"Colt." I shake him awake. His eyes snap open, and he grabs me around the throat. I gasp for breath as I claw at his hand.

"Sky." He releases me quickly. "Shit, Sky. I'm sorry." I cough as he stands up, moving towards me like I'm a wounded animal. My heart races as I step away. "I won't hurt you." His eyes are soft, different than last night.

"You literally just had your hand around my throat." I back up further to the wall by my bathroom door.

"I'm sorry." He grabs his shoes and jacket and runs out, leaving me standing there with my heart beating so fast I feel like it's beating through my ribcage. I breathe slowly to try and slow down my heart.

Shower.

I need a shower.

But I also need coffee. Maybe a shot of something stronger.

What are these guys doing? What's their plan? How did I get mixed up in the middle of them?

After my shower, I put my work clothes on and start the walk to work. I need the hustle and bustle Wednesday gives me. We have a special tonight that brings everyone in. The sign on the window invites them all in; *Buy One Meal, Get One Meal Free*. Never fails to keep us busy all day.

The bell dings as I walk in. "Morning, Sky," Cook says. I call him Cook per his request. Says he wants to keep his work life and personal life separate, and the best way to do that is to tell no one his name. Which, I can see the appeal to that.

“Morning, Cook.” I say with a smile. My morning may have shaken me, but today is a good money making day so I will bring my A game.

“Love the new hair,” He says to me as I walk by where he sits at the counter. I decided before the podcast that I was over the lavender hair. I felt confused and split in the decision on whether I was going to invite in the craziness that was the Maxwell brothers. So I opted for a split hair color—a soft blue on the left and a perfect green on the right.

“Thanks.” I wink at him as I bounce by to get ready for the lunch rush. Once the silverware is rolled and everything is ready, I unlock the front door to let in the first wave.

“Sit wherever you like. and we’ll be right with you.” On Wednesdays, we leave the menus on the table and let customers sit wherever they want. It makes things easier as they file in.

Two waitresses are here. Myself and Candy. I don’t think it’s her real name, but that’s what she has on her name tag so that’s what we call her.

“Good Morning,” I say to my first table. “Drinks?”

“We’ll have water, two burgers with fries, no onion,” the gentleman to my right says. I turn to look at the woman sitting to my right. She nods and puts her menu back on the table.

“Coming right up.” I stop at the next table.

“Morning. I’m Sky. What can I get you?”

“Sweet tea,” he says. “Lemonade.” She smiles.

“I’ll be back with those and get your order in a moment.” I turn on my heels and head to the cook’s window, putting in the order for the burgers. I grab four glasses, get two glasses of water, tea and lemonade. I take them to the tables. “What can I get you to eat today?” I ask as I place the lemonade in front of her.

“Can we get four grilled chicken salads, four burgers and fries and six waters to go at the end?”

I write it all out on the ticket. “We’re taking some food down the street to a family that we saw sleeping in their car.” Her eyes are riddled with sadness yet she seems happy.

“Where are they?” I ask.

“Two blocks down,” he says, pointing to the east.

“Go get them and bring them in here. You can all eat on the house today. I’ll set up the corner table for you all,” I say, tucking my notebook in my apron. “I’ll move your stuff over.”

She claps her hands. “You’re too kind.”

She runs off to the door. They look like they couldn’t be older than twenty-one, and here they are buying food for an entire family sleeping in a car. I grab their drinks and move them to the corner booth.

Turning to the cook’s window, I hand him my ticket. With ‘OFH’ - ‘others feeding homeless’ on the bottom. When we have someone who offers to pay for homeless people’s meals, we have a rule that the entire ticket is free. Most people don’t offer to feed the homeless so it’s rare to see, but when it happens, we like to reward them.

“Got it!” he shouts back as I walk away. I see the couple walk in with a family that looks worn down. There are two parents who look exhausted and four kids, ranging from mid-teens to one that looks six or seven.

My heart breaks, I’ve been homeless exactly once in my life. It was when I first moved Mom into the facility, and I had to sell the house to get her in there. I managed to get a place two weeks later, but living in my car was a nightmare.

“Hello.” I smile as I carry six waters on a tray to the table. I give them all water, and the kids down it like they haven’t had a drink in a while.

They have a slight smell to them. “Thank you,” the father says to the man who brought them in.

“Thank her. She’s giving us the food.” He points at me.

He reads my name tag. “Sky, you are a blessing from above.”

“I don’t know about all that, but I’ll be more than happy to help you guys out if you need. Is there anything other than food and drinks you need?”

The mom looks up at me. “Only if you have a shower back there.”

“I do,” I reply. Her face lights up.

“How long before the food is ready?” she asks.

“Twenty minutes, give or take. You and the girls need a quick shower before you eat?” I ask as I step away from the table. I nod for her to follow me.

“I’ll go grab your bag,” the father says.

I lead the mom and her four girls to the back where we have an entire gym-like bathroom. Three showers, a large area to dress and wash up.

“Oh, this is perfect, thank you,” she says, stepping into each shower stall to turn them on.

“Do you mind me asking what happened?” I watch as one of the girls hurries into a stall, pulling the curtain shut. Another one follows suit. And then a third one. The youngest one stands with her mom across from me.

“We lost our jobs when the world went belly up from shutting down. And we finally lost the house last week.”

“We need a new dishwasher and another waitress. There’s also an apartment upstairs that I’m sure I could talk the owner into renting it to you. He may have you do some work on it for the rent as well, it’s not exactly in the best shape.”

“You really are a blessing from above.”

“I’m Skylar. But call me Sky.” I hold my hand out to her. Her palm meets mine, and the shocked look on her face

has me wondering if I still have bathroom water on my hands.

“Tosha. This is Kenly. And her sisters, Taytum, Ronnie, and Willow. My husband is Cameron. We couldn’t take this much kindness from one person. You do realize your name means shelter though, right?”

“Shoot, you guys start working here, and it’ll help me. I’m really just being selfish so I don’t have to do so much work.” I wink at her.

There’s a knock on the door, I open it to see Cameron standing there with a dirty bag. “I’ll let you guys talk it over.” I sidestep, letting Cameron in as I leave them alone.

I return to the front and keep doing the rounds. Orders going up in the window, and food metaphorically flying out. Candy and I run circles around the diner as everyone comes in, sits, eats, and leaves. It seems like it’s never ending until three o’clock hits. We usually slow down from three to five.

The couple that came in with the homeless family left after they were done, but I invited the family to stay and eat up. They had their showers. Met with David, the owner, and they agreed upon them working and living here. I don’t know all the details, but I’ll be glad for the help, and they’ll be happy with a roof over their head and money coming in. I love the feeling you get when you help someone out, not because you have to or need to, but because you want to.

# Chapter Twelve

Eye rolling.

I'm eye rolling like a fucking teenager at a parent because this motherfucker really thinks that it's okay to just show up at my door after what his brother did.

"You can't be here." I start to shut the door, but his hand stops it. He thinks I won't close it on his tattooed hand, but I absolutely will, fingers be damned.

"I need to explain." He pushes the door open with his palm wrapped around the frame.

"I don't have time for your games, Mr. Maxwell." I sigh loudly, I'm pretty sure I'm staring at Conner. He's in relaxed clothes, the others seem to have their own style. Not to mention Cassian wears glasses.

"Please, Sky. I just want to talk. If you want to stand here, we can. It would most definitely be more comfortable inside though." Fuck me in the eye socket. No wait. Don't do that. Gross. Why did I even think that?

"Fine. You get five minutes. When I ask you to leave, you're gone. Got it?" I cross my arms over my chest in my best intimidating pose. I know I'm not intimidating at all, but it makes me feel better. Even if it's just for a small minute while he walks into the room.

"Yes, Ma'am," he replies with a wide smile. I move out of the way, shutting the door behind him as he comes in. Doing everything in my power to keep my distance from him isn't as easy as I thought it would be. Now that he's in my living room, I feel myself waiting for his touch. He takes my hand before I can stop him and leads me to the couch.

The feeling of his skin on mine is too much. What is it about these men that light me on fire? Every time I'm near a Maxwell, I feel like I'm falling away from reality, being sucked into his world. They consume my thoughts when they aren't here, and then I want nothing more than to touch them

when they are near. Even when Colt scared the fuck out of me, a part of me still wanted him to touch me. A part of me didn't want him to leave, wanting him to come back. I roll my eyes again at myself, please be more pathetic, Skylar, maybe you could fall at his feet and tell him you've been lusting after him since Halloween. Yeah, that'll go over well.

"Sky. I-I'm sorry about how this is all turning out. I keep trying to keep them all in line, but I can't seem to keep them from doing what they want." His tone is sincere, speaking to me from a hallway of truth, too bad there is something there scaring him, in the shadows. I need to see what's in the shadows, what he's hiding.

"Conner, they're grown ass men." I enunciate the men portion of the sentence, "They'll do whatever they want. You don't have to apologize for them. They can do that for themselves." I keep my hand in his as his thumb runs across the skin of my knuckles.

"Why are you so kind? I saw what you did for that family in the diner. I see what you do for your mom. You take care of everyone else, but who takes care of you, Sky?" I ignore the question because honestly, I take care of myself. Always have, always will.

"There's enough ugly in the world, Conner, why add to it. If I can make someone smile after having a shitty day then why not at least try." I offer him a soft smile.

"Even strangers," he adds, knocking my shoulder with his.

"Those are the ones who need it the most. Why offer kindness to only the people you know. That wouldn't be fair to pick and choose who you're nice too. If you're kind to everyone then no one gets left out." Not to mention karma is a motherfucker, and I don't need that bus honking at me anytime soon, especially with the life I've already got.

I watch his face twist in confusion as I talk, like he doesn't understand. "If I had ignored you and not brought you a piece of pie when we first met, you would have never even



noticed me. I would've just been another waitress. Instead I offered you kindness and here we are."

"I noticed you long before the pie, Sky." Now it's my turn to be confused.

"How?" I feel my eyebrows furrow, and a look of confusion streaks across my face.

He raises an eyebrow like he's waiting for me to catch on. "Oh, yeah-" duh. "my mom."

"I've seen how you treat your mother, how you treat other people there. Even the ones you don't know. You offer kindness everywhere you go, and I had to know you."

"So you came to the diner, on your birthday." Another question fills my head though. "Why were you so sad?"

"My birthday has never been something to celebrate." He rolls his bottom lip between his teeth, and if I didn't know any better, I'd swear that I can almost see a tear swell in his eye.

"A birthday is meant to be a happy day. A day where your family celebrates having you. Where people cherish your existence." I squeeze his hand in mine, and he returns the gesture.

"Only I wasn't something to cherish, babe. I was a burden on the family. I could never live up to who my father wanted me to be." He sighs loudly, and I can hear the disappointment he feels in the exhale.

"What about your brothers? Why didn't they help?" I ask, holding my breath for the answer. I pray he doesn't say something terrible about any of them, but at the same time, it feels like he might.

He squints his eyes at the word brothers and looks at the wall behind me rather than directly into my eyes, like he's searching for the right thing to say. "They helped more than you could ever imagine. We are closer than you know. When you find a way to help yourself, you do. We do that. We help ourselves. Everything we do is for me. I'm the sole heir to the companies. My brothers and I, well it's a complicated story,

and we'll get there one day. But for now, I just need you to know that we aren't here to play games as you called it. We want to see if you can handle us. We share everything. We don't want different women for each of us. We just want one that can handle all of us." He lets out a long exhale and looks over at me, his eyes pleading with me to understand what he's saying. "You don't have to choose, sweetheart."

I stare at him blankly. I'm not sure what to say to this, or if I should say anything at all. So I just keep awkwardly staring at him, fighting the ache between my legs.

"Five." I nod. Cassian said there were five of them.

"Four," he corrects, his face suddenly serious. "Only four of us. You don't need to worry about Cruz. He won't be a problem," he says quickly.

I start to ask about Cruz, but there's a knock on my door. "Who else is coming?" I roll my eyes.

"None of the others," Conner says matter-of-factly with a small snicker.

I leave the couch and move to open the door. Blaine stands there looking more disheveled than I've ever seen him. "Babe. I gotta talk to you." Blaine has a quick look of panic on his face when he looks behind me. "What's he doing here?" His eyes widen to saucers.

"This is Conner. He owns the facility Mom's in and well, long story."

"I know who he is, I asked." He narrows his eyes, looking over my shoulder at Conner.

"What?" I ask him.

"I- He-. Never fucking mind." Blaine walks into my apartment. Blaine may look like a million dollars, but he has the mouth of a sailor.

"What did you need?" I ask him.

"Can we speak in private?" he asks, nodding in the direction of my bedroom.

“I’ll step out and make a couple calls.” Conner pulls his phone out of his pocket and leaves.

“A Maxwell.” Blaine taps me on my shoulder. “Good on you.”

“What do you need, cockblocker?” I laugh.

“I wanted to tell you that I am leaving for a couple weeks for business, and I’ll be back later.”

“That couldn’t wait?”

“Not only could it not wait, but I needed my bestie hugs before I left.”

“When are you leaving?” I ask softly.

“Now,” he says, stepping up to me. He opens his arms wide, and I fall into his chest. The one person in my life that has always been there. After my father left, he helped me get Mom moved. My mom tries, but it’s hard when you don’t even remember having a daughter sometimes. So Blaine is all I have that keeps my feet firmly planted in this world.

“Love you. Be safe.” This isn’t anything out of the normal for him. He travels a lot, but it always sucks when he leaves.

“Love you too. And be careful who you invite between your legs.” Blaine places a kiss on the top of my head.

I punch him in the shoulder with a laugh. “Yeah, because you have a lot of room to talk in that department. I only sleep with men, I couldn’t imagine the body count if I double dipped like you.”

“Ouch, you wound me.” He laughs, faking a pain in his chest. “Bye, Sky.”

“Bye, B. See you on the flip side.” I throw up a peace sign as I watch him leave.

The door doesn’t fully close as I watch Conner walk in right after Blaine leaves. “You okay?” he asks as I wipe

away the single tear that always finds its way down my cheek when Blaine leaves.

“Yeah, just saying our goodbyes as he leaves for work for a while.” Conner stalks towards me, and at first, I feel the need to shy away, but when he wraps his arms around me, I feel safe. His arms encase me, holding me against him. The beat of his heart thuds against my cheek, and I know at that exact moment what it is I need.

## Chapter Thirteen

My hand glides down his shirt as he holds me tightly, the soft material is thin. I lift the hem of his shirt and flick open the button of his jeans. “Sky,” he whispers. I continue softly pushing his zipper down.

His skin is hot to the touch as I trace my fingers along the waistband of his pants. Carefully I push my fingers down into his boxers, finding my way to his, *Holy Mother of God*. His cock is huge too. These Maxwell men are well endowed.

Circling my fingers around the base of his cock, I feel the tension of it hardening and pushing against his jeans. There isn't enough room in here for both my hand and his dick.

I drop to my knees, pull his jeans down with me, baring his hips and everything below. Licking my lips, I apply a small tender kiss to his hip and work my way down as my hand wraps around him. This time, I won't worry about him fitting, if his brother could fit, then I'm ready for him. My body begs for it as my pussy clenches and pulses.

“I need to be inside you,” Conner says, lifting me off my knees before I can taste him. He kicks his shoes and clothes off. “Strip,” he commands. I don't hesitate. I pull my shirt off and push my shorts down quickly. He spins me around and walks me to the couch.

My body is forced to bend over the arm of the couch. “I want to hear your pleasure, my sweet.” Conner pushes my legs open, and I prepare for the intrusion, only it doesn't happen. Instead, I feel his tongue pressing against my clit as he licks me from clit to ass. His hand forces my ass apart. I whimper as his tongue leaves my skin.

Fingers begin to push inside of me as I keep my legs wide, holding my balance on the couch. My body begs for more as he tenderly moves his fingers inside of me. “Conner,” I breathe. “Fuck me.”

“I don't want to hurt you,” he says softly.

“You won’t,” I cry as he pumps his fingers into me quickly, hitting me in just the right way.

He changes positions, and I feel his thighs touching mine. I take in a deep breath, ready for the deliciousness that I’m about to feel.

The tip of his cock lines up with my pussy as I feel him slowly pushing into me. The pressure is intoxicating as he slides into me, stretching me completely, almost to the point of it hurting, but in a good way. I’m not entirely sure or not, but the Maxwell’s may have ruined all other cock for me at this point.

When I feel him push as far into as he can, he pauses. “My sweet. You feel so fucking good.” He slowly pulls out of me and pushes back in.

My body tightens from the pleasure as I clear my mind of everything other than the feeling of him inside of me. I want every ounce of my body to be racked with this pleasure, to devour it like the greedy woman I am.

His hands grip my hips tightly, surely to leave more bruising like his brother did. I scream as he thrusts into me harder and harder each time, hitting the bundle of nerves buried deep inside of me.

If I could live my life fucking like this, I would never leave the bed. My breasts bounce as he fucks me in ravenous manner, like he hadn’t been inside a woman in years.

The eagerness to crawl inside of me to give me everything he has. I want nothing more than to feed his hunger. My body begins to tremble when I feel pressure against my ass. “You are so tight,” he growls as I feel a finger slip into my ass as he continues fucking me. The build up inside my body is on the verge of exploding over the top. “Purr for me.” His voice is a low grumble that sends me over the edge. I grip the couch tightly as I scream out his name, feeling my body convulse. He pushes me further down the rabbit hole as he fucks me, teasing my ass, filling me in every way he can. My body cries out as he continues the pleasure that rockets through me.

Another orgasm rips through me before the first one even has a chance to calm down. My white knuckles plead for me to let go. So I do. I let go, giving myself over to him completely.

Conner knows just what he's doing, feeding my needs. Hold and squeeze where he needs to, pushing deeper inside of me. My mind goes blank as the fireworks explode behind my closed eyes. "That's right. Give yourself to me." The loud sound of him slapping my ass is heard before I feel the sting.

He pulls out of me, turning me around to face him. He's quick to lift me and slide my body down until he's inside me again. This time, I get to see him. My arms wrap around his neck to hold myself upright. He feels so much bigger like this, oh, god. We move slowly as he shuffles us down the hall.

When we fall to my bed, I push my lips to his, feeling his body quiver. He tastes like minty gum, which makes me wonder where the gum went.

Conner wastes no time though, pushing up off the bed, he grabs the back sides of my knees and pushes my legs open wider. "I love how your pussy grabs my cock when I pull out of you, like it doesn't want to let go." He moves a hand, pushing my knees up. "Hold your legs and keep yourself wide for me." I do as he says and watch him carefully. His hand dances down my leg, slightly tickling me as he makes his way to my clit. Tiny circles, that's what his thumb does as his palm is placed over my mound as his fingers push down on my lower stomach. "I can feel myself moving inside of you." He moves his hand and watches carefully. Then he snaps his head to my nightstand. "Perfect." He reaches over and takes my phone off the top.

He messes around with the phone for a moment, and then the light comes on. "I want you to see how much your pussy loves my cock."

The thought of being recorded turns my body inside out with pleasure. He pushes deeper into me. "Look how much of me you take. Watch as your belly moves to the same rhythm as me."

“Conner.” I let out a growl of my own, feeling myself flying higher again as my eyes close to feel the orgasm.

“Call me Cassian.” My eyes flick open as he throws the phone to the side and falls over me. “That’s right, my sweet. I’m dick deep in you, and you thought I was Conner.”

“Get off me, Cassian.” I cry out as the orgasm rips me apart.

“Give me your pleasure.” He thrusts into me again and again. “Take my seed deep inside of you as you cry out.”

“No!” I cry out as I feel dirty enjoying this. I sit up and bite down on his shoulder, hoping to draw blood.

“That’s okay. I’ll take your pain too.” He pins me to the mattress and fucks me harder. I cry out as my body begs for more. He holds me down as he continues his feverish thrusts. My nails dig into his back as I feel the never ending orgasm from being overly sensitive. I keep my cries and screams quiet. He wants to hear them so I won’t give them to him.

“I will leave you in a puddle of our mixed pleasure if you don’t scream out for me, my sweet. I won’t give you the after care your body will desperately need when I’m finished.” He pushes off me just enough to look down at me.

“Get off me, Cassian.”

“I want to hear you scream for me to stop. I want you to struggle. Fight me off, Sky. Show me that you can handle this.” His hand goes around my throat as he pushes me into the mattress.

I do what he says. I fight him. Pushing at him, kicking my legs. My heart races as I realize that this has gone from a consensual tumble with Conner, to Cassian forcing me.

“Fuck. You.” I cry between breaths.

My vision flashes red as he fills me again and again with his massive cock. Bucking my hips to move away, I realize something else. He needs the fight. This is turning him on. His eyes darken the more I fight.



“I will fuck you whether you want or not. Know this, my sweet little pet.” He licks my face. “You will never know it’s me until, I’m ready for you to know.”

“Stop!” I cry out as I feel him swell inside of me.

“Make me,” he growls, thrusting into me again. This time he stills though. “This pussy is ours.” His voice vibrates in my ear as he fills me with his cum. The biggest problem I have with this, is how much I truly enjoyed it. My body craved it without me knowing I needed it.

Cassian lets go of my throat and sits up, leaving himself fully planted inside of me. I push off the bed and slap him as hard as I can muster after all the energy that’s been spent.

I watch as Cassian’s face changes. “Your words may have been ‘stop’ and ‘get off’ but you enjoyed every fucking second of that. And now I know you can handle me.” He pulls himself out of me, leaving me feeling empty just like his brother did before him. “Pure perfection,” he says, pushing his cum back into my pussy.

What the hell am I going to do with these fucking Maxwell men? And why do I enjoy all of this?

## Chapter Fourteen

I am staying away from all Maxwell's at this point. I've been with two of the five. Well four, if I can believe that the fifth one doesn't get involved. Which means, I've fucked half of them.

"Sky." I hear his voice.

"Fuck me," I whisper to myself before I turn around. I'm literally at a *random* coffee shop that I just so happen to stop at on my way to the store.

"Hello," I say, turning around. This one is dressed in all black. "Colt?" My heart flutters, even if the last time I saw him his hand was around my throat, I still feel like I have butterflies dancing around in my belly.

"Yes." The line moves forward so I side step to keep my place in line.

"What is it with you Maxwell's? I keep running into you in the most random ass places." I scoot forward with the line.

"Well, why do you keep showing up to our places of business?"

"You own the damn coffee shop too?" I sigh as I step up to the counter. "Iced coffee, vanilla with cream," I tell them. He pulls out the smaller cup. "Nah, as big as you can make it please."

"Can do," he says. I swipe my card and move out of the line.

"Why are you guys so interested in me, Colt? I don't understand. I mean Cassian told me why, but it still doesn't make sense. I'm nobody. You guys have all this money, you could have anyone you want. Yet here you are talking to the girl in the waitress uniform who's struggling to make ends meet."

“We want someone to understand us. That’s all there is to it,” Colt leans into me and whispers. “If you can understand your mother, then you can understand us.”

He steps away and leaves me standing there.

“Iced vanilla coffee.” I snatch my coffee off the counter and run after Colt.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I pull on his arm and move him to look at me. “Colt!”

“Nothing, Princess. Just be careful out here by yourself. I have somewhere to be, but I’ll be there tonight to see you.” Colt places a kiss on the top of my head and walks away, again.

Well, now I’m only going to think about that. I move quickly to get across the street to the diner. “Morning, Tosha!” I say, opening the door to her already being here, setting up. Her and her family are doing much better now, and I couldn’t be happier for them.

“Morning, Sky,” Tosha says back, dumping salt into a shaker to fill it up.

“What are the kids up to on this beautiful Saturday?” I ask as I start rolling silverware.

“Cameron works tonight, so he’s out with them at the park today. The little ones wanted to play. And the older ones just wanted out of the apartment.”

Candy pushes the door open and lets out a sigh. “We aren’t gonna make shit with three waitresses today.”

“I’m here all day,” I say, holding up a fork.

“I’m only here for lunch,” Tosha says, putting the lid on the shaker.

“Fucking perfect.” Candy slams the ketchup box on the table.

“If you have a problem with it, take it up with David. I told him we needed help. We were running around like chickens with our heads cut off, Candy. If you don’t like it,

maybe being a waitress isn't for you." I let out a laugh. We make decent money for a diner, but that was because there were only two of us, and most of the time, we ran the floor solo.

"I just want to make rent." Candy rolls her eyes

"Same," Tosha and I say at the same time.

"You live upstairs, suck David's cock. and he'll let you live up there for free." I really try to be a nice person. I do. But when people say stupid shit like that it really pisses me off.

"Candy. Get your shit and get out. I'll tell David you weren't feeling well. But you will change your attitude before you come back in here. You only have one kid, she has four. Not to mention a husband who adores her dearly, and you can see every time they are together just how much she loves him. So check yourself before you come back in here spouting off shit you know nothing about." I stand up from the booth and walk towards her. "So get the fuck out before I have David fire you."

"See, if you suck his cock, he'll do whatever you want. Just ask Sky." I've held back for too long. Between my father leaving, my mother's illness, work, money, the fucking Maxwell's, I haven't had a chance to just be mad at someone. And I take my fury out on Candy. All because she said the wrong thing at the wrong time.

I reel back and punch her square in the nose. "I fucking told you to leave and shut up. I will make sure you aren't welcome back to this job, Candy." I turn to walk away, but I stop and look back at her as she holds a hand over her face. "Without touching David's fucking cock." I need to leave before I kill her out of anger; I've always prided myself on being kind, and this isn't how I like to represent myself.

I storm through the door to the back and run smack into David. "Well. That was interesting."

"Fuck. I'm sorry." I hang my head in shame at my behavior.

“No need to be, that was hot as fuck, and I was about to fire her anyway.” I roll my eyes at David.

“You’re gonna have to help Tosha with tables today,” I tell David as I pull my apron off. “I have somewhere I need to be.”

“Sky!” David calls after me as I run out of the diner. I find myself standing in the middle of the street, trying to catch my breath.

A drink.

I need a drink.

There’s a bar two blocks down. I run to it and pull the door open. I take the first seat at the bar and drop my head to the counter. “What’ll it be, Sky?” James the bartender asks. I’ve known him since I started working over at Gracie’s. He comes in sometimes after the bar closes and gets some food before heading home.

“Just hit me with something hard.”

“Light or Dark?”

“Dark.” I hear the clinking of glasses, and when I look up, there it is. I wrap my fingers around the glass and slam the whole drink back in one go. The burn feels good going down. “Another,” I say, putting the glass back down. I don’t ever lose my cool. I’m always well put together, especially in public. I don’t. *The poor can’t afford to break down*, I remind myself.

The bartender sits down another shot of whatever this is, and I slam it back too. When I sit the glass down this time, I hear, “Weren’t you just at work?” I look over to see one of the Maxwell’s standing there, he’s wearing black jeans and a nice button up, signature of Colt.

“Yes, Colt, I was just at work. Now I’m here, day drinking.”

“Any particular reason why?”

“Do people really need a reason to day drink?” He walks over to me, taking the moment to sit in the seat next to me.

“Water,” he says to the bartender.

“Not for me. Another shot.” I tap the counter.

Colt looks at me as I lift the glass to my lips and down my third one. “So, what’s bothering you, Princess?”

“Oh, well if you must know, sir.” I smile coyly. “I punched one of the waitresses at work.”

Colt’s eyes widened. “Did you get fired?”

“HA!” I lift the next drink to my lips. “Nope.” I pop the p loudly then down the shot. I hiss at the burn. “Instead he fired her. She wasn’t worth the trouble, but I let her get under my skin. And you know, there’s only so many things one person can take before snapping.” I lift the fifth drink to my lips.

“She’s done,” Colt says, dropping a hundred dollar bill on the counter.

“Yes, sir.” The bartender takes the bill and walks away.

“I was absolutely not done.” I poke him in the chest as I drink the last shot. There’s another bar down the street. I’ll just head over there since Colt shut me down here. On the plus side though, I didn’t have to pay for my drinks.

When I push up off the stool, I feel the buzz kick in. I stumble for a second, but Colt’s reflexes are fast as he steadies me. “Come on.” He tucks one arm around my waist as he puts my arm over his shoulder.

“I can walk ya know,” I say, trying to push off him.

“Sky, if I let you go right now, you’re gonna face plant on the ground. Then I’m gonna feel like garbage because you hurt yourself. So please for the love of my sanity, let me take you home.” He lifts me off the ground and carries me instead.

My head spins from the quick movement as we leave the bar. I let out a sigh at the fresh air and lean my head against his shoulder. I’m not as drunk as I wanted to be. But this buzz will do.

Keeping my eyes closed, I just lay in his arms, feeling the movement of Colt walking me home.

“Keys.” I reach into my apron that’s crumpled up in my hand and fish out my keys. He sets me down and takes the keys, unlocking the door. When I start to move, I’m swept off my feet again.

The biggest problem with drinking in my current situation is now I’m horny as hell. Colt lays me down in my bed and starts to stand up, but I lock my hands behind his head and hold on. “Don’t leave,” I whisper, looking up into his eyes.

“I’m just going to the kitchen to get you some water,” Colt says, trying to remove my hands.

I pull him down to me and press my lips to his. Only, he doesn’t kiss me back. I pull away. “I thought you wanted me,” I say softly and slightly embarrassed.

“Oh, I do, Princess. But not like this.”

“Like what? Tipsy and horny. Screw that.” This time I shift my weight and pull him to the bed, rotating us so I’m on top. “You’re done telling me anything. I’m going to take what I want.” I move my body so I’m straddling him. “I want this, Colt.”

Slipping my fingers between the buttons, just like the others, my skin alights when I touch his. With all the strength I can muster, I rip his shirt open, popping the buttons off. It makes a cool sound as the buttons litter the ground, which makes me giggle.

“Seriously?” Colt laughs.

I lean forward pressing my lips to his chest, kissing every inch of him as I follow the muscles down to his waist line. The tattoos call for me to trace them so I let a finger dance along the older gun tattooed near his hip as my other hand undoes his belt.

When the belt and pants are open, I move quickly pulling down his waistband to reveal another huge penis. One that I can’t wait to have inside of me.

I feel a deep shiver run through my body as I wrap my fingers around the base of it, slowly moving my hand upwards. In the matter of half a second, he is hard and ready to go.

The need to taste him overwhelms me as I lick my lips. Using both hands, I pump his hard cock a few times and slowly lower my head down to lick the tip of him. He moans when I make contact, tasting the saltiness of his skin.

Opening my mouth to let him in is going to be a challenge, yes I could probably get the tip in, but could I manage more than that? “Careful, Princess.” Colt groans as I slip my lips over him. I can barely fit him in my mouth, and I don’t have the patience to work him up like this. I release him from my mouth and crawl down his body.

I need him naked, completely and utterly naked so I can enjoy him fully.



# Chapter Fifteen

I stare at his naked body, Colt, one of the Maxwell Men that I have come to enjoy fucking. Not gonna lie, their big monster cocks draw me in, but if I'm honest with myself, I will find myself down the rabbit hole devouring each of them, or they will devour me. Whichever the case, I'm here for it.

"What's your plan, Princess?" Colt asks, tucking his hands behind his head.

"I'm gonna fuck you until you're screaming my name," I snarl, feeling the heat of our bodies touching. His thickness rubs against my clit, pulling a moan from my lips.

"Is that right?" he says, his lips tilting in a smirk as he lifts me up quickly. I let out a soft moan as I drench his cock with the lube I pulled from the drawer next to the bed, kissing my way up to his lips. I'm hoping lube and alcohol will be enough to relax me because I'm not in the mood for foreplay tonight.

"Yes," I growl, pushing him back down on his back. I work my hips until I have as much of him as I can inside me. I move slowly, relishing the burn his cock leaves dragging against my walls, my first orgasm already building. My body tightens as I jerk my hips, digging my fingers into his chest.

His breath tickles my neck as I lean down, moaning through my first orgasm. The fireworks explode behind my eyes, my body lighting up like the Fourth of July. Even his touch to my thighs is too much.

As I fall back to reality, I lift myself back up and ride him like it's the last time I'll ever have good sex. My body is begging to milk him for everything he is. I lean back, putting my hands on his thighs, continuing the movements with my hips.

His hands find my breasts, kneading at them, pinching my nipples as I let my head fall back. My body begins to tighten again as another orgasm pushes me to twitch, and "Oh.

My. Gawwwd,” I cry out as he grabs me hard, moving my hips for me.

Just before my orgasm slows down, Colt flips us over and pumps into me, sending me further into oblivion. Pushing my head back, I feel him diving deeper into me, and it still feels like he’s not deep enough.

I want to cry for more, but I can’t seem to form the words. “Fuck. Princess.” I feel Colt’s body tighten as he pulls back and slams into me. He growls as he stills inside of me, filling me with his cum. Our moans mix together in the air as our scent fills the room.

When he stops moving, I look up at him. His pink cheeks darken to a red, and I watch as a trail of sweat falls from his forehead. He slowly pulls out of me, but I’m not finished. I reach up, grabbing his hair, pushing his head down between my legs. “I’m not finished,” I snarl as I move my hips up to his mouth.

I watch as his eyes squint at what I’m doing, as I lift my legs putting them over his shoulders. “I want you to taste yourself.” His hands grip my ass as he dives in, his tongue pressing flat to my clit. I refuse to let go of him as his head bobs between my legs, my fingers lacing into his hair, gripping it tight as I ride his face, smearing his cum on his chin. I rock and buck as he flicks his tongue over my sensitive pussy. I hum at the pure ecstasy that I feel as he laps up his own cum from my pussy.

My body begins to convulse as he works mercilessly between my legs. I lock my legs around his head as he finishes me off, holding him in place for the only meal he’ll get before we fall asleep. When my body begins to come down, I loosen my grip from his hair and head and let my limbs fall like the wet noodles they are. My breath is quick, but my heart is beating faster.

“You are fucking perfect,” Colt whispers, kissing my inner thigh as I lay here feeling the hum over my skin. Colt gets up and moves to the bathroom doing something, probably washing his face. I giggle as I watch him come out of the

bathroom with a washcloth wiping his face. “Let’s clean you up, properly,” he says, using the washcloth between my legs.

I yawn, sucking in a deep breath as I feel both the buzz from the alcohol and the high of the orgasms. “Sleep, Princess,” Colt says, helping me move into my spot on the bed. He places a simple kiss on my cheek and covers me up, letting me fall into the darkness that consumes me.

When I wake up, the sun has gone down, and it’s dark. I shift in the bed, feeling a body next to me. Colt. He stayed.

I roll over, putting my hands on his chest as I curl up next to him, tucking myself into his arm. He stirs in his sleep almost like he didn’t know where he was, fighting in his sleep. I hush him softly as I rub his chest, soothing him in his nightmare. When he settles, I snuggle in closer and fall back asleep.

## Chapter Sixteen

It's been a week since I slept with Colt. I haven't seen any of the Maxwell's since Colt. I'm not sure if he said something that scared them off or if they've just been busy enough to not bother me. It's another Saturday, David hired another waitress to cover Candy's vacant spot, and I have the day off.

Whatever will I do with myself? I lounge back on my bed and turn the TV on. Bingeing on TV or movies all day definitely seems to be at the top of my choices today.

I could also go visit Mom, but then I run the risk of finding a Maxwell lurking in the shadows. Nah, I'll stay in and cuddle my blanket, order some fast food and be lazy. I deserve some me time.

The TV blares the theme music to my favorite show as it follows along the map of where all the characters are at. I haven't had time to catch up on it, so I'm late to the game considering the show ended already. I've had spoilers and people tell me not to watch it because of the last season. But here I am, watching the last season and loving every second of it. My doorbell rings echoing through the house.

With a sigh, I pause my show and move towards the door. I haven't ordered anything yet so I know it's not my food.

I rip the door open to reveal a man standing there looking like Conner, but the last time I thought that, Cassian tricked me.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Maxwell?"

"I'm Conner. I promise. I heard what Cash did. I'm here with this as an apology." He pulls a brightly colored bouquet from behind his back. "And these." He reveals a bag of taco goodness.

"Okay. You're forgiven." I move to let him in. "But only because of the tacos. I'm starving."

Conner goes into my kitchen, setting the flowers and tacos down. “Vase?”

“Under the sink.” I point as I eye the tacos.

“Go ahead,” he says with a soft smile. I rip the bag open, finding a mess of tacos spilling out. “All soft and fully loaded, without onions.”

I lift one to my nose and smell the heavenly scent. Ripping the wrapper off, I bite into it, moaning as the flavor bursts into my mouth.

“Good?” Conner laughs as he fills the vase with water.

I just nod with a mouth full.

He takes the flowers, trims the ends and arranges them in the vase. “They’re beautiful,” I say with a half empty mouth.

“But the tacos are better?” he asks. I just nod. Food is always better. “I’m sorry about Cash. I really am.” Conner places a kiss on my temple.

I swallow my bite and look up at him. “So your Maxwell’s are very serious about this? About me?” I ask quickly so I can take another bite of the taco.

“I knew I wanted you the second you walked into Hearthstone. You wandered in there like a lost lamb looking to find a safe place for your mother. You may not remember me, but I met you that day. You shook my hand and thanked me for creating a safe environment for people like your mother.”

I think back and try to recall that, but I can’t. The day I walked into Hearthstone for the first time was the day my father told me he wasn’t coming back.

“You were kind to everyone there, including the other patients. One little lady asked you if you’d read her a story like her mother used to, and you paused your tour and told them to come back in twenty minutes so you could read her a story. When they came back to collect you, you had put her to bed,

and they told me that she had been difficult all day.” I try not to choke on my taco as he tells me the story.

“Months later, I saw you walking with your mother in the gardens, and you literally stopped and smelled the roses. No one cares like you do.” Conner’s eyes are soft and almost tear filled. “I lost so much as a child, I didn’t know that kindness existed. I’ve searched my entire life to make that one connection, and there you were. Walking your mother in the garden. Two weeks later, I felt ashamed to be alone on my birthday and found my way to you just so I didn’t have to be alone. Even though you had no idea who I was, you were kind. You offered me pie, and you were sweet.”

“What about your brothers?” I ask, opening another taco.

“They each have their own reasons, and one day I’m sure they will tell you. But for me, you Sky.” He pauses and takes my hand, forcing me to set down the taco. “You are my reason for breathing. You haven’t known me long, and I get that. But, I want you to know that this isn’t a game to me.” I watch as a single tear falls down his cheek. “You are the only thing that matters.”

I’m not sure how I feel about his confession, I swallow the bite I had been holding in my mouth and start to say something. But what do I say? I’ve known him for a month. And I’ve been with his brothers more than him.

I close my eyes and imagine my life without them in it. First, I’d be so picky with what cock I let into my life after having the ones they have. Second, I like the idea of having each of them to myself. Maybe not all at once, because, ouch, but the differences in each of them makes me think that I could have everything at once. If I need sweet, I could call Conner. If I needed fun, I could call Cash. I could go on. But, am I ready to give that up after just one month? If I say the wrong thing here then I could lose them all, fuck. How do I get myself into the weirdest situations?

It’s because you’re too nice.

It is.

But, that's who I am.

"Okay, Conner. We will see where this goes. But first, I need more food." His eyes light up with excitement as he pulls a taco out of the ripped bag and starts eating.

*No matter where you are in life, things can always get worse.* That saying haunts me sometimes. I don't know why it popped into my head just now, but when life gives you lemons.

Conner eats two tacos whereas I ate like four. I was so hungry. I turn the kitchen sink on and start washing my hands when I feel a pair of hands snake around my waist. His lips touch my shoulder. I feel like I'm floating as I lay my head back on his chest and let him continue kissing up my neck. The soft tender kisses trail up to my ear.

A hand moves down my stomach, pushing its way under my pajama shorts. My breath catches when he slips between my pussy lips to find my sensitive bud. I moan softly, rolling my head over to his neck, letting my forehead rest against his pulse.

"Baby, you're soaked." His voice vibrates my chest as he pushes a finger into me. He's tender unlike the others, moving carefully, teasing me.

His fingers come out of me as I open my eyes and watch as he sucks his fingers into his mouth, humming at the taste. With his other hand, he takes mine and leads me to my room.

My bed is soft as he lays me down, gently hooking fingers into my waistband to slowly pull my shorts down. Gently and softly, those words describe Conner perfectly. He's a romantic, caressing my skin as he drags the shorts to my feet. Each inch taunts me with the promise of more. I watch him as he undresses and crawls up my body, licking, nipping, and kissing his way up my body. With steady hands, he pushes my shirt up and over my head. My heart flutters like it's my first time, then again. It is my first time with him, and as sweet as he's being, it's a different approach than I'm used to.

He uses his knees to spread my legs apart, settling in, his lip press to mine as I taste the spice from his tacos, dancing on my tongue. He carefully guides himself to line up with me, and as the tip presses against me, I moan into his mouth.

My hips lift as he pushes into me, filling me with love. I can see it in his face. This man loves me, and this is him giving himself over to me. Bestowing everything he has to offer in one movement.

My breath catches in my chest as I blink away a tear that just had to rear itself into this exact moment. He doesn't thrust or pump into me like the others did, no. He's making love to me, giving me the pleasure of slow and steady. Conner Maxwell, the man who was so alone on his birthday he came to a diner to reintroduce himself to the only woman who showed kindness to him.

A need swells in my stomach, one I've never felt before. His perfect rhythm pulls me along, kneading at me, "oh...ahhh..." I breathe out a long moan as I feel my body coil around him, building a long and much needed orgasm. One that twists your insides to match the outside, the incessant need to be closer to him.

When he backs out of me, I crave him more. When he pushes into me, I crave him deeper. I'm not sure I could let him go now, I thought about pushing them away, I fought with the thought. But this, this is what I needed. It's like they know what I need when I need it. Like we're all connected, sending a vibe of some kind, letting each other know what it is we need at that exact moment.

On the way down, I silently beg for another one. Conner reads my body, slipping a hand between us and pressing a finger to my clit as he works me over. My body answers his question, yes. I want more. I need more.

Conner offers me everything I need at this exact moment. He pushes into me slowly, feeding the hunger. We move together without fail. The sound of our moans, breath, and skin singing to anyone who will listen.



The tension in me builds again, only this time I feel his body tighten too. I clench around his cock in an attempt to pull him into oblivion with me. “Together,” he whispers. Which pushes me over the edge. I cry out as he pushes into me again, filling me with cum.

In that exact moment, I feel the love from him. It overwhelms me as he rolls off me laying next to me. His fingers trace my jaw. “Let’s take a shower, and then I’ll let you get back to whatever you were doing before I showed up.”

“I’d rather you didn’t leave,” I say softly. Conner smiles as he pulls me closer to him, like that was precisely what he needed to hear.

# Chapter Seventeen

Conner left me a note on the pillow yesterday:

*We may not see you much this week, we have a few things to take care of. Stay safe.*

*-Conner*

No matter what I do, I can't seem to stay away from the Maxwell's. Maybe some time away will be good. Especially since I caught myself feeling certain ways last night.

I wonder what Blaine's doing. I pull my phone from the nightstand and dial his number. It rings.

And rings.

And rings.

"This is Blaine. Leave a message."

That's weird, Blaine always answers for me. Even in the middle of sex, I called once, and the guy he was with was a screamer.

Beep.

"Hey, B. Call me back." I hang up and switch to a text.

***-Must be one hell of a fuck to be ignoring me. Call me back ASAP. Miss you.***

I drop my phone and turn my attention back to the note. Conner left, saying they'd all be busy. Blaine isn't answering. What the hell am I supposed to do with myself?

Then it dawns on me. I walked out at work. Shit. And it's Sunday. We'll have the after church crowd bellowing through the diner today. I jump out of bed, a little sore from

last night and make my way to the shower. I smell like Conner, his cologne mixed with sex.

Flicking on the water, I climb in, hissing at the cold. I should've waited, but I didn't. My shower warms up quickly as I start washing my body and then move to washing my hair. I don't really want to linger today. I turn the water off and step out, drying off with my fluffy black towel.

I don't feel like dolling myself up today. A dark cloud hangs over me, I'm not sure why, but I feel like somethings wrong. My fingers twitch as I bring them up to my face to apply a thin line of eye liner. I slip into my uniform and head to work for the day.

"Morning!" Tosha chirps from behind the counter when I walk in.

"Morning, Tosh. Sorry about last weekend." I smile.

"Don't be. I made tons of money, and David helped a lot." Her smile lights up her face.

"I mean about punching Candy in front of you." I sit in the booth where the silverware is and begin rolling them.

"Nah, she totally deserved so much more than a quick punch to the nose. I didn't want to risk getting fired by punching her myself." Tosha fills a ketchup bottle carefully so she doesn't spill it everywhere.

"How are the kids doing?" I ask, rolling just a knife into the napkin. I restart and grab a fork to go with it.

"Good. They like the school here. Taytum is the least happy about the school. But she's happy to be out of the car." Tosha's face turns from happy to sad.

"What else is wrong?" I ask, I can read people and her body language is screaming for help.

"I-well. We were fixing a window upstairs, and Kenly cut her foot pretty badly, and I'm just worried about the hospital bill." Tosha switches from ketchup bottles to salt shakers.

“Ah. Did she need stitches?” I ask, rolling the last set of silverware I have.

“Just some butterfly stitches, but they put her foot in a wrap thing that they said we need to keep it cleaned, and they gave her a tetanus shot just in case.” Tosha’s finger slips, and she knocks over a shaker.

I pop up and move to her, taking her hands in mine. “It’ll be okay. You have a job now. The hospital will take payments.” I let go of her hands when they stop shaking.

“With Christmas around the corner, we worry about money.” Tosha cleans up the spilled salt and tosses a dash of it behind her shoulder.

“The kids will be happy with just having a home again, beds, food, water. They’ll be fine, Tosha. Everyone hits a rough patch, they’ll understand.” I help her clean up the salt when the door dings behind us.

“Welcome. Please seat yourself,” I say to an older couple. They hold hands as he helps her walk to the table. I watch as he makes sure she’s seated and comfortable before he takes his own seat. I turn to Tosha. “I’ll let you take tables until you can’t handle it to help with money. Just let me know if you need help.” I nod for her to go to the table. She just smiles and moves quickly to the older couple.

I watch the diner as Tosha runs around taking care of business, Cameron comes out to clean her tables quickly so they can be seated again. The two of them are every couple’s dream, the way they communicate without words is adorable. The small gestures he offers, the cute faces she makes to see him smile. I want that. I want to be so in love that it consumes me.

How can I find that kind of love when I have four different men vying for my attention though. Especially since I keep letting them into my bed. This kind of love comes from being with one person for years. Building the life of your dreams together.

I roll my eyes at the thought of the Maxwell's. I could never have that with all of them. Even if they each offer something slightly different. Conner offers kindness, I could see that the first moment I saw him. Cyrus offers control, he will take away the control and just let me feel. Cassian offers games, he will make everything fun and exciting. Colt offers security, he makes me feel safe. If only I could smash them all into one person. Ugh. I let out a low groan as I jump off the bar stool.

I check my phone to see that Blaine still hasn't texted or called me back.

***-JFC, I love you, Blaine. Please call me the fuck back. I'm starting to worry.***

I shove my phone back into my pocket and head to the back to do some restocking. I've never gone this long without talking to Blaine. I'm not sure what's got him so tied up that he can't respond to me, but I hope he's okay.

After I restock everything, I wander back out to the diner floor and see that Tosha has everything well in hand. "Do you need me to stick around?" I ask her as she fills a cup with tea.

"Nah. I've got Cameron if you need to run."

"Thanks, Tosh." I head for the door and leave, making a run for my apartment. My heart races as I run, feeling the wind against my skin, blowing my hair back. My heart thumping echoes in my ears. Something is wrong, and I don't know what it is or where it's coming from.

I stop just short of the apartment door when my phone goes off. I pull it out of my pocket so fast I drop it to the ground. When I pick it up, Blaine's name flashes across the screen showing I have a new message.

***-I'm sorry***

"Where is the rest of the message, Blaine." I click the green phone under his name and wait for it to connect.

*"The subscriber you are trying to dial is not in service at this time."* The call is disconnected. I feel the worry bubble

up more. Where the hell is Blaine? He never ignores my calls, let alone turns off his phone

I run up to my shitty apartment and push through the door, making my way to my room, plugging my phone in and stripping out of my clothes.

I try to call Blaine again, putting the phone on speaker so I can brush my hair out. *“The subscriber you are trying to dial is not in service at this time.”* The call is disconnected.

“Fuck!” I dial his number again.

And again.

And again.

I cry out as I try once more, begging the universe to make Blaine answer his phone. If it was just dead then it would go to his voicemail, if it was on silent, it would go to his voicemail. But this, this is like it doesn't exist.

Once more.

*Please.*

*“The subscriber you are trying to dial is not in service at this time.”* The call is disconnected.

How is this happening? I lay down and stare at my phone, waiting for him to call. He always calls.

Always.

# Chapter Eighteen

*Knock.*

*Knock. Knock.*

The knocking pulls me from my sleep. I listen again.

*Knock. Knock.*

That's not Blaine's knock. I check my phone and still nothing since his mysterious "*I'm sorry*" text. I dial his phone number again, getting the same fucking message.

*Knock. Knock. Knock.*

These knocks are getting harder and more urgent sounding, like if I don't answer the world could end. I run to the door, pulling it open, hoping like hell it's Blaine, and he's just tired or panicked.

"Sky!"

A Maxwell falls into the wall, but not just any Maxwell. "Colt?"

He looks like Colt, dressed in his all black clothing. Except, when I touch him I pull my hand back, and I find my hand covered in a red substance.

"Colt!" I scream his name at him.

"Cruz," he says in a low grumble, correcting the name.

"Cruz?" The one that doesn't play well with others. "What are you doing here?"

"I read his journal. He says you're kind." He pushes off the door frame and walks into my apartment, leaving a bloody hand print behind. "I need a shower."

"I can see that. What happened?" I ask, closing the door. I watch as he trails blood through my living room. Now I may not live like the fucking Hilton's but Geebus. This is still my home.

“Cruz. Get to the bathroom before you stain something I can’t get clean.” I huff loudly.

“You really are kind. Aren’t you?” Cruz says as I show him the way to the bathroom.

“Yes. I like to see the good in people.” I help him strip out of his jacket, tossing it into the sink. Next his shirt, pants, and now he’s naked. I flick the water on and feel it as it warms up.

When the water is hot enough, I flip it to start the shower and help Cruz in. “There’s some soap here that Colt left under the sink.” I pull it out and hand it to him. “I’ll get your clothes washed and meet you in the kitchen with some food.”

“Thank you, Sky.” Cruz is soft spoken, but he seems like he’d just as easily slit my throat as he’d give me a hug. I pick his clothes up from the sink and carry them with me to the kitchen.

I fill up the sink with cold water, well all women know why cold water instead of warm. But I digress.

Using soap, I rub the clothing together to help wash away the blood. Even though the clothes are black you can still see the stains. I’m able to get it out of the shirt, but this jacket isn’t coming back from its TKO.

I throw it in the trash and move to the pants. Then I think about it. Why am I even bothering? These men can just buy new clothes. I chuck them all in the trash.

My phone rings, and I run like hell to get it, hoping it’s Blaine. I slide in my room, hitting my hip on the nightstand. “Fuck,” I screech, holding the assaulted area with my palm.

“Hello,” I say, answering the unknown number.

“Miss Graham? This is Detective Schultz.” His voice is firm, but I can hear something in it. His tone suggests that something is about to come crashing down, taking away everything I hold dear.



“This is Miss Graham.” I feel my heart beating against my ribcage.

“I regret to inform you that we found Blaine Wilkins dead in his hotel this morning.” I hear the words, but my body goes numb as the phone falls from my hand to the floor.

“Miss.” I can hear him. “Miss. We could only locate you as next of kin. Is there anyone else we should call?”

I pick up the phone as I fall to my knees. “No. W-we were all each other had.” The lump in my throat grows, and I can’t seem to swallow it.

“I’m sorry for your loss,” he says so matter-of-factly.

“Are you sure?” I ask, choking back the tears.

“Yes, he had his wallet on him. If you want to come identify the body, you can. I’ll send you a text with the location.” I nod, knowing damn well he can’t hear me nodding.

“O-okay. Thank you.” I just thank the man that gave me world shattering news.

“Well see you soon, Miss Graham. Goodbye.”

“Okay,” I repeat. He hangs up, and I sit there on my knees for a moment as I take it in. Blaine. Is. Dead.

I let out a blood curdling scream as it sinks in. My body crumbles over as I fall to the floor, letting my tears burn my face as I let out every emotion I could ever feel at once.

“SKY!” I hear Cruz scream for me. “Sky.” I look up seeing a naked man standing in my bedroom, dripping with water holding a knife with crazy eyes. He looks terrified. “What happened?” he asks as I move my head, covering my face with my hands.

I feel his hands scoop me up off the floor, pulling me close to him. My body hurts, I feel lost. Why did Blaine have to die? Why do I keep losing everyone?

“Whatever it is, I’m here for you.” Cruz lays me in my bed, and I pull my pillow against my chest and cry more. I

won't survive this. How could I? He was my life for so long, the anchor to my sanity. My world will never be on the correct axis again.

## **To Be Continued...**

For More, follow along for the guys POVs in **Duplicity**.

## **Author Notes:**

Co-Authors Em Torrey and Whitney Edes, brought you this wonderful story, when they were sitting there brainstorming for a different book idea and all of the sudden this book became a thing. Are we both busy with our solo careers, yes. Did we bring this story to life because we're badass like that, yes.

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