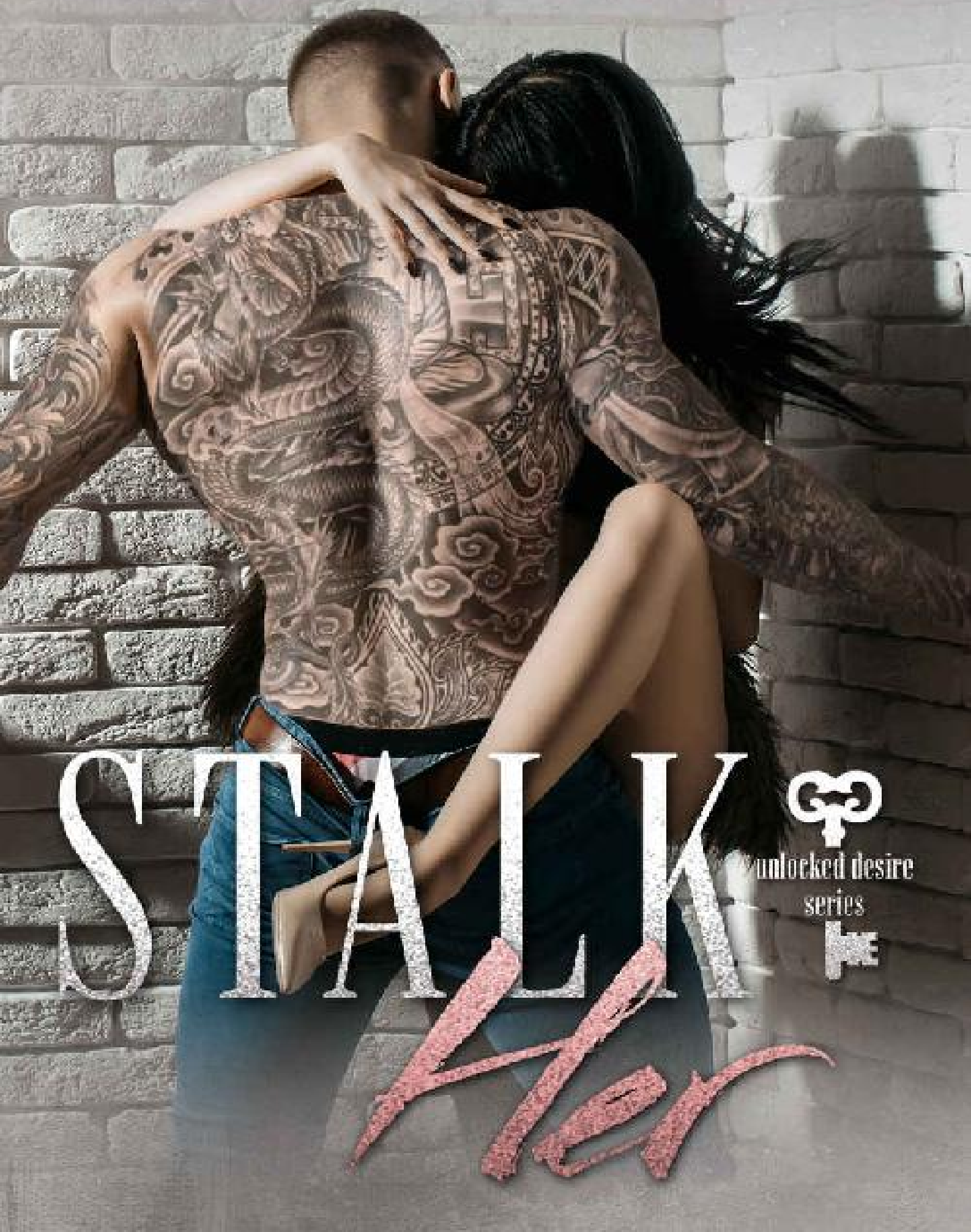


MILA CRAWFORD



STALKY

Ken



unlocked desire
series




Stalk Her

MILA CRAWFORD

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Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Excerpt from Ruthless](#)

Introduction

She should never have walked into my club.

*What she thought was an innocent night out attracted the
attention of a monster.*

Now there is nowhere to run.

There is nowhere to hide.

She now belongs to me.

Mine.

Chapter One

V ANCE

The music vibrates through the floors, allowing the rag dolls to gyrate and grope one another, completely intoxicated.

On a typical night, women come here to show off their bodies, to feel better about their empty lives. While the men come here to forget how pathetic their existence is by finding a willing hole to stuff for a few hours.

We found here the true nature of the sickness known as humanity. Maybe that is why I never left.

When I started working for Vincent Ricci, I was a punk kid who just needed a few dollars so that my mother wouldn't lose our house. Turned out violence and murder is something I am good at—a little too good. Not only could I do what men who'd been on the job for decades couldn't, but I also liked it. So I'd stayed, never left, eventually becoming one of the most powerful men in the organization and the owner of this carnal human pit.

Over the years, I'd made a habit of walking the floor of the clubs I ran, usually standing at my perch above the fray, viewing the stain on the world known as humanity.

I fucking hate people, even the ones I like. I usually find them distasteful. Their minds full of the mundane, their desires

juvenile. The disdain probably gave me the ability to do what I need to do without blinking an eye.

I am about to head back to my office when she appears, something different, someone beautiful in a world of filth. A slight-looking girl with long, silky black hair, a raven moving gracefully amongst the trash.

The typical women, pathetic creatures, surround her, flaunting themselves for even a glance from the piece-of-shit men nearby, but not her. She stands there, trying to disappear, and it makes me want to view her more.

My eyes feast on her before two fake blondes drag her to the dance floor. She doesn't look like she wants to take part. Her long black hair flows as she shakes her head, trying, but the blonde carcasses pull at her anyway.

Her hair flows from side to side as she shakes her head, waving her friends off, trying to say no, but the blondes just pull at her, tugging, basically dragging her until all three move to the center of the dance floor. The black raven stands there, a beautiful bird whose wings got clipped. The two blonde vultures dance around her, trying to show how attractive they are to any prying eyes around them. They don't realize that beside *her*, they are nothing but flecks of dirt discarded on the ground.

The raven looks so uncomfortable standing there; she sways her body to the music, but the rhythm is ultimately off. A random man, nothing special, approaches her. I am familiar with the type; they look for girls who appear unsure of themselves so they can prey on them, but he doesn't realize the raven has my attention, and now she is mine. Nobody messes with what is mine.

My eyes contact with a few of my boys, prominent, well-trained men who make sure everything in the club runs smoothly. It takes care of the unwarranted riff-raff who stumble in the place. Usually, we don't make a big deal about the men hitting on women, but the idea of anyone touching the raven doesn't sit well with me. The violence I keep leashed

has now roared to the surface. I am not the type of man you want to be around when I feel unhinged.

I push my way through the crowd, gagging on the scent of cologne used to mask the stench of sweat underneath. I stand a few feet away from the raven, my gaze roaming her body and zeroing in on her trembling hands as she tries to push the man away. I don't like that he'd frightened her. The rage that always lurks under the surface of my skin takes over. The monster, ready and waiting to take out anyone who dares make the raven unhappy.

"I suggest you step away from the lady." My voice is calm, level. They taught me at a young age to control my feelings, to hide my wants, to cage my desires. There is no reason for this little shit to think he has anything on me. Just another commonplace interaction between a bouncer and an aggressive fucking drunk.

The man snakes his arm around Raven's waist. I glance up, see how uncomfortable she is. I don't say a word. I just push the two blondes who ignored my raven out of the way. I pick the raven up and move her behind me before grabbing the man's wrist. I push his hand back until I hear a snap.

"What the fuck, man?" the man screams in agony, his good hand going to his limp one. His face contorted with pain.

I smile at the man, almost as if nothing had happened, and state calmly, "She didn't want you to touch her."

"She wasn't saying no," he shouts.

"That's a lie. I told him to go away. He wouldn't." Raven's voice comes crashing through the loud music. It is beautiful, even with the hint of anger laced in it. She sounds angelic, perfect. I didn't even know a sound like that was possible.

"I'm gonna call the police. You can't just break my wrist."

"Go ahead. Please make sure you mention my name. Vance Matthew sends his regards. If I leave you alive by morning."

Upon hearing my name, the man's eyes round, his head drops, and his eyes only look at the lights shining on the marble floor. So my instinct was right. He is scum. People who react like

that to my name are those who know exactly who I am, what kind of work I really do. They are the ones who fear the monster most because it was previously unleashed on them, knowing what I am capable of. Fearing my name means you have something to fear.

My guys come up from behind, pulling his arms back and making him humble. I smile as Rock tosses me the man's wallet. "Kevin Muller, 505 West Conrad Street." The man's eyes widened as I read his name and address. "Kevin, I suggest you never forget two things that happened this evening. Make sure you brand them into your mind so you never forget. First, if a woman says no, listen. Second, if you ever fuck with me or this young lady, I will hunt you down as if you're a rabid dog and put you down." I toss the wallet to Kevin. It hits his chest and bounces onto the floor. "Pick it up."

Kevin hesitates, so I walk up closer to him, looking him directly in the eyes. "*Pick it up.*"

He stumbles as he bends over. My knee connects right to his face. "You missed your wallet."

Kevin grabs the wallet, and my boys hold him up. His eyes are wild with fear. The trail of blood is now falling down his face, crimson drops hitting the white marble floor. Around us, patrons are staring. I don't care. All sense of reason has somehow vanished from my brain. I want him to pay, thinking he could breathe the same air as the raven, let alone touch her. "Kevin. You're gonna go home and never step foot near her or this club again. If I ever see you again, I will cut you from navel to nose like a goddamn fish. Got it?"

Kevin shakes his head, his body trembling.

"Kevin, I need to hear you say it, so there's no confusion. Do-you-got-it?"

"Yes," he whimpers. He stumbles as my boys release him before getting up and practically running out of my sight.

I turn to the crowd, smiling as I adjust my suit. "Drinks on the house," I say loudly and watch as the crowd cheers, forgetting

what they witnessed moments ago. “Just let them know today is the Vance special.”

I turn to the raven and nod before walking away, moving back to the balcony. I continue to survey her beauty.

It looks like Kevin and I aren't the only ones whose attention she'd caught throughout the night. Men approach her, but when she waves them off, they leave without a hassle. One guy glances up. I glare, enough of a deterrent for him to mind his own business. Raven turns to where the man looked, before she falters and trips, landing on her hands. I sprint down the stairs, moving to her, desperate to reach her as if my life depends on it.

Chapter Two

C LARISSA

“You alright?” the crazy guy from earlier asks.

I feel like a sane person would fear him, but I don't. I'd been around enough predators in my life to know that even though this guy was crazy, he wouldn't hurt me. The way he'd come down like a ton of bricks on that perv from earlier told me as much.

“Yes, I think I twisted my ankle or something.”

His arms sweep under me, lifting me as if I weigh nothing more than a feather or a cotton ball. He cradles me in his arms, rushing us away from a crowd down a small, dank-looking corridor. This would probably be the part where I got chopped up into tiny pieces and left for the vultures in a horror movie.

We reach a black steel door. He places me gently on the ground, still holding me up with one arm while he punches in a code, causing the door to open.

“Whoa, this is a pretty lush-lookin' office,” I say, taking in the brick walls, dark mahogany table, rich brown leather furniture.

He shrugs, placing me on the large leather sofa. “I like to be comfortable here. It's where I spend most of my time.”

“I should scream, shouldn't I?”

“Only if you want me to hurt you.”

Fear races through me. “You'd hurt me?”

He smiles. “Probably not.”

“Probably?”

“I can’t say I never would. If you asked me to, I’d say yes.” He takes off my shoes, catching me off guard by how gentle his hands are as he rolls my ankle, trying to examine the damage. A rather shocking display for the guy who told a dude he was capable of murder not too long ago.

“You’re a little fucked up, huh?”

He glances at me, his eyes a deep blue ocean in the middle of a storm. “You don’t even know half of it.”

I shiver from both his stare and his touch.

“Looks like it’s just twisted. Just keep off of it. It’ll be fine in a few days.”

“Cool, I’ll just be on my way.” I move to get up, but he is lightning quick, pinning me down, both his arms caged around me.

“I’ll take you home.”

“No offense, big guy, but you just beat the shit out of a guy in front of me for no reason then manhandled my ass to get me into this cigar lounge of an office. I’m not really gonna tell ya where I live.”

“I don’t need you to tell me anything. I can find out whatever I want with one phone call.”

“Who the hell are you?”

“Vance.”

“No, I mean, who are you? Like, what’s your deal? You seem to walk around the place like you own it.”

“I do own it.”

“No, not the club. Like...you appear as if you can buy and sell anyone or anything. Like real power.”

Vance shrugs; he lifts himself off the sofa, offering me his hand. “I promise I won’t hurt you. My word is my bond. I

won't break it." When I don't take his hand right away, he quickly adds, "I also don't take no for an answer."

"You said you wouldn't hurt me then said I can't say no to you."

"You can say no when it comes to sex, and I promise, no physical harm will come to you."

His words aren't really reassuring, but I believe him. Danger isn't a new concept for me. I was born in it. I place my hand on his massive one, and he pulls me to him. He smells good, like hot chocolate and violence.

He opens a door in the back of his office, and we are outside beside a black town car with its own personal driver. Vance opens the door for me, gesturing for me to go inside. Even the vehicle is swanky. The thing has a mini-fridge, and it's roomy as hell, more like a mini limo of sorts. Vance follows me inside, closing the door behind him. "Tell the driver your address."

When I've given the man the info, Vance frowns. "That's not a good neighborhood,"

"It's fine. I'm not dead yet."

"That's not a joking matter, Clarissa."

Goosebumps appear on my flesh, hearing him say my name. I am not sure if it's caused by fear or excitement.

"How'd you know my name?"

He smiles as he hands me my wallet.

"You stole my wallet?"

"Just in case you tried to tell me the wrong address."

"You're a bonafide stalker, you know that?"

Vance winks at me before his full lips form into a sinister smile. "Wasn't before today."

During the drive, Vance doesn't say a word. He sits there watching me. I squeeze my thighs together, not sure what is happening to me. His stare isn't a normal one. It's almost

orgasmic. If someone could make a girl come from a look, it is definitely this man. It's unnerving how the man stares at me like I'm a tiny morsel that he can't wait to devour.

"You really don't live in a pleasant neighborhood," Vance says, his eyes now off me. He focuses on the run-down sidewalks surrounded by buildings with broken cement stairs and missing bricks in the walls.

"I'm a big girl. I can take care of myself."

"Yes, but you don't need to. Not anymore."

His words catch me off guard. I don't really understand what he is saying. When we get to my apartment, I am flooded with relief. The sooner I am out of the car, the quicker I can get some fresh air. Sitting in there with him feels like I am lulled, as if drugged by the intoxication by the near proximity to his presence. "Okay, well, this is me. Thanks for the ride."

My hand is reaching for the door handle when he grabs my wrist, turning it in gently. "Wait." He pulls out a cream-colored card with fine black cursive print from the inside of his jacket, placing it in my hand. "If you ever need anything, call that number. It goes directly to me."

"Ummm, thanks," I said, making the words sound more like a question than a statement.

"I mean it, Clarissa. Use it."

The car door opens. The chauffeur offers his hand, but before I can take it, Vance's voice booms with a menacing tone, "Don't touch her." To me he growls, "I will come help you out."

I sit there wondering why this guy was so weird, until he shows up to my side of the car, taking my hand. We walk up my apartment steps; he quietly watches me turn the key and go inside, letting the door shut between us.

"I'll be seeing you, Clarrisa," he says through the door. "Sweet dreams."

I walk upstairs into my lonely apartment. I approach my window, staring at Vance as he leans against the car, his eyes taking me in. I should be scared. I should call the cops. But I

take off my top, letting him see me in my black lace bra through the safety of the glass between us. My hands roam up my body and latch on to my breasts. My hands knead as wetness pools at my center. All the while, I wonder what it will be like if he came into my apartment in the middle of the night and touched me while I slept.

Chapter Three

V ANCE

I feel like a junkie picking at the scab that drugs left behind. Only this addiction isn't imaginary. Thoughts of Clarissa are like the sweet release of opium in my veins.

I can't shake her from my mind. She is like a bolt of lightning forging her way into the darkness. I can't eat, drink, or sleep. I've turned into a real pussy fixated on just her.

I walk through the haze of delusion, thinking about her raven hair and sweet bubblegum scent. Nothing in my life seems to matter. My entire world is now a restless blur. Restless nights have led to a total obsession that has led to me parked outside her apartment, night after night.

The first night I went to her apartment, I sat there in the car and just stared at her window like a fucking pervert. That was just a hit of a joint. I've needed something stronger, something to bring me into oblivion. I've foolishly thought that if I saw her again, I would snap out of whatever trance she'd put me in, but the addiction just got worse.

I've abandoned every single responsibility in my life, and I've become consumed with knowing the most minuscule aspect of her life.

One time, I watch her as she packs her backpack and runs to the subway, her large bag falling loosely on one arm while she tries to not spill the hot coffee in her cup.

I follow her at the college campus. Usually she is alone, but once in a while she will casually be talking to a classmate. There is no one she has any kind of meaningful connection with. It pleases me to see that she avoids all the men who surround her. I'm not sure if it is shyness or just disinterest on her part, because for the guys', they want nothing more than to get into my girl's pants. I crack my knuckles as I watch the boys earnestly, seeing if any dare cross the line with my raven. I know how to stay calm. How to be focused, but with her, my control seems paper thin, here and gone in a flash.

My raven is smart. Her course load is all physics and calculus. I sit in the back of her classes and observe as she scribbles on a piece of paper, trying to keep up with the cocksucker professor.

On occasion, she raises her hand and asks him to repeat himself. The motherfucker rolls his eyes at her as if she is a burden making some sort of unreasonable request. The asshole was talking too fast for her to catch everything coming out of his mouth. I want to put a gun to his head to let him feel the discomfort he is causing her. I'll have to remember to make a visit so he knows who he is messing with.

After classes, she usually runs home and stays in all night.

I've been camping outside her place, watching from the back seat of my car. I get Enzo, my manager at the club, to make runs, bringing me food or anything else I may need. I don't even shower. I live in my car. I want to be close if she needs me or, God forbid, she is in danger.

One morning, she skips school and heads to another apartment across town. A tiny redhead opens the door. They hug before rushing inside, running in and out every few minutes, loading a small coupe. A man follows them out, slurring his words and barely able to stand straight while he yells at them. Calling them s and pieces of trash. I see red. My blood is on fire. I'm not someone you mess with. I'm about to get out of my car and bust the fucker's head in on the pavement, but Clarissa and the redhead get into the coupe and drive off. I follow them, making a mental note to pay the man a visit at some point.

The redhead drops my raven back at her place before hugging her and driving away.

I desperately want to be close to her to know what she is doing, what she eats, what her favorite drink is. Does she sleep in pajamas or completely naked like I do? When I can't take it anymore, I start looking for ways to get inside her space. There is no way I will let anyone else watch her. I don't trust anyone else with my raven.

The first opportunity I get, I break into her apartment.

It is midnight.

Her place is cramped, poorly lit, and a dive. She lives in a studio, barely enough space for anyone to move around in. One tiny room encompasses a barely usable kitchen and an area with a fold-out sofa that is currently formed into a bed. My sweet angel is lying there, folded on her side. She looks so much more fragile in sleep. Her perfect red lips slightly parted, her black hair fanning across the white pillows, a stark contrast. And a small room located to the side contains a stained toilet and a bathtub that desperately needs to be replaced.

Staring at the place, I know that there is no way I'll allow her to keep living like this. A fuckin' animal deserves better than this pile of shit. I open her fridge and peer at the contents inside. Barely any real food... She has some coffee cream, peanut butter, and a loaf of bread. Her cupboards don't fare any better, with a box of crackers and some ramen noodles. No wonder she is so thin. She barely eats. I will fix that, even if I have to tie her to a chair and force a steak down her throat.

I remember what it was like, worrying about how we were going to keep the lights on or worrying about money being left over for food. The worried look on my mother's fearful gaze is etched in my memory. She'd managed to keep my sister away from all the worries. Still, I was the man of the house after my father died. The responsibility fell on me, so I did what I needed to do to keep them safe, even if it meant my safety became inconsequential.

I glance at my raven sleeping soundly. She has no clue that an animal is walking free in her space, an animal who has become fixated on her, who will do anything to possess her. At that moment, I vow that there is no way I will let her go hungry ever again.

I slowly open the tap, and a violent creaking sound blares in the room. My gaze shoots to Clarissa, who is still sleeping as if there isn't a predator in her room. The fucking taps don't even work correctly. There is nothing in her small space that is suitable. Absolutely nothing.

My eyes focus on a small dresser beside a rolling rack that she seems to be using as a makeshift closet. I pull the top drawer open and notice an array of panties. Nothing too extravagant, mostly basic cotton in black, white, and nude. I take one of the black ones and place it on my face while inhaling. It regretfully doesn't contain her scent, but it had been on her skin.

She rustles in her sleep. The blanket has shifted with her movements, and her tit is exposed. She doesn't have on a bra, and one perfect pink nipple is exposed to my ravenous eyes. My dick gets rock hard instantly. I adjust myself and realize that the only thing that could end my torment is release.

I approach her bed and unzip my pants, holding my dick in my hand like a pervert. I know what I'm doing is wrong, but the need is too great. I lick my hand before placing it on my length. I pump my cock in my hand, slow at first, picturing her tongue licking me from root to tip like I am a lollipop in her favorite flavor. Clarissa sighs and moves her face, now directly in line with my dick. I pump harder, picturing her lying there, her mouth open wide while I plow the back of her throat. The image of her sucking me off is so strong that I come right there in her black cotton panties. My fingertip brushes the head of my cock as I collect some of my come and touch it on her slightly opened mouth. I know I should be careful. She could wake up screaming and ruin all my plans, but the need to mark her, leave her with my scent, overpowers me, making me lose all reason. I don't even care because the little raven was mine from the moment she stepped into my club.

Chapter Four

CLARISSA

All week I've felt off, as if I should watch my back. Between school and helping my best friend Emily move her stuff out of her abusive ex-boyfriend's apartment, life has taken a toll on me.

These are the moments that I wished I had someone to lean on. A mom to go home to, and a dad to tell me it will all get better. The only person I have in life who knows me is Emily, and now she is hundreds of miles away in Utah, trying to put distance between herself and Roy.

My back makes me want to scream as I get myself out of bed, remembering Roy's rage. He wasn't supposed to be home when we were clearing out, but just like any good abuser, they never keep to their promises and ache to have one more go at their victim. If having a sore back and being in pain means that my best friend is finally free of that lunatic, so be it.

I walk over to get a cup of coffee started, when my buzzer goes off. I have no clue who's come to see me at the ass crack of dawn. I glance down at my barely there tank top and panties and shuffle into a pair of jeans and a green sweater lying by the bed.

I open the door to my apartment just as a delivery guy shows up with bags of groceries. I don't remember the last time I've actually seen so much food. "I'm sorry, but I think you have the wrong address."

“Clarissa Roberts?” the man asked, looking at a delivery form.

“Yes, that’s me.”

“Then I’ve got the right person.”

I move to give him a tip, but he waves it off. “No need. It’s all already been taken care of.”

As I bring the bag in, I can’t think of who’d have sent me such a generous gift. Other than Emily, I have no one else who would even think of me, let alone fill my fridge with groceries.

I unpack the groceries, full of meat, vegetables, fruit, and chocolate. There is everything I ever dreamed of. When my hand hits the bottom of the bag, I find a white envelope.

I slowly open it, pulling out a pretty white card.

Clarissa, I wasn’t sure what you liked, so I got a little of everything. If you need anything else, use the card I gave you.

I glide my fingertips along the card. Vance is hard and, from what I’d seen, scary as hell. I’m really not sure what he wants from me, but I definitely am prepared to find out. Hopefully, it won’t be the biggest mistake of my life.

Chapter Five

VANCE

“You ever leaving your car?” Enzo asks over the speakerphone.

“I will once I collect what’s mine.”

“She isn’t going anywhere. There is shit that needs your attention at the club.”

I let out a sigh. “I’m sure you’re more than capable of taking care of it.”

Enzo is a scary motherfucker, No one messes with him and expects to live. We’d come up together. I trust him more than my childhood best friend. Tristan doesn’t really know what I am, but Enzo knows the face of my monster because he is one too.

“You’re fuckin’ obsessed, man. Nothin’ will happen to her if you leave for a few hours.”

“I’m not riskin’ it. Take care of whatever needs to be taken care of.”

I look up to Clarissa’s apartment and see her leaving wearing high heels and an all-too-short black dress that looks like feathers are coming out of it. I smile, thinking how she actually looks like a raven. A fucking hot one.

I watch as she gets into a car in the back seat. Good, it isn’t a date. I don’t have to kill the poor fucking driver. It is probably

an Uber or Lift.

I start the car and follow her. I'm not sure where she is heading at ten at night, but there is no way I'm leaving her alone. Plenty of men prey on women. I know exactly who they are. My world is full of them. Anyone touches a hair on my raven's head, and they will have me to deal with, and I'm not the type of man you want knocking at your door.

The car she is in starts driving on familiar streets, places I see daily rushing by as I follow her.

Is she going to another club, someplace where I don't know the layout and can't protect her as easily?

Fuck.

I really don't want to kill someone tonight, but seeing how she looks, it might be inevitable if men see her.

I inhale a sigh of relief as she gets out of her car and steps into the club. My club. There is no running away. She is stepping into my castle, and here I am, motherfucking king. Soon she will find out what I will do to make her my queen. My fucking raven. My little bird. *Mine*.

I rush into the club from the back room. She is safe in the club. Enzo had passed around her picture, so all the guys know she is off-limits. I hate that they'd even looked at her picture, but it had to be done. It won't serve anyone if I just go off half-cocked and start killing the entire crew.

"Nice to see you," Enzo says as I pass him in the dark corridor.

"If you wanna talk, meet me at the perch."

The perch is the highest point of the club. It's where I sit, my throne, as I watch the spectacle below. It is also the best place to protect her. In that position, I can trace her gliding on the dance floor and see precisely who talks to her or tries anything else.

I stand there, tracking her every movement with my gaze. She looks so beautiful that it physically hurts to stare at her. She smiles at the bartender, Josie, when she takes her drink and sits

down. I didn't think it was possible to be fucking jealous of a damn chair.

"You look like shit," Enzo says, coming to stand beside me. "You can't go on much longer, or you're gonna snap."

"Too fuckin' late. I snapped the moment I saw her."

"You're no good to her or anyone if you're fucked up and off your game."

I scrub my face, trying to get my fucking brain under control. I let everything go. My only interest is Raven. Nothing else seems to matter to me. I can burn it all down and will be fine as long as she is with me.

"What ya gonna do, Vance? Follow her like a puppy for the rest of your life?"

"Fuck off."

Enzo laughs, hitting me on the back with his open hand. "I love you, man, but you're seriously certifiable. I've never seen you this deranged before, and a lot of pussy gets slung your way."

"I don't want the other pussy."

"Can't you just fuck one of the dark-haired girls and pretend it's her? Maybe a good nut will get you back on the straight and narrow."

I grit my teeth, my hands going ghostly white from holding on to the railing so tight. "Don't want anyone else. Only want her, only her."

Enzo keeps talking, but I ignore him because, at that moment, a creepy guy with slicked-back hair and a generic suit is talking to my raven. She politely smiles, but her body shifts away, silently telling the fucker that she isn't interested. The cocksucker doesn't get the message. He doesn't back away and go on to the next conquest. He shifts his body closer, crowding her space.

I sprint down the stairs. "Rock, Tony, come with me."

The two bouncers don't even blink. Like good soldiers, they follow, no questions asked.

I walk up to Raven. "Sir," I say through gritted teeth, "please come with us."

"What the fuck for?" the prick asks.

"We'd like to have a conversation with you. Sir, we can do this the easy way or the hard way. I prefer the latter, but I'm not opposed to the former."

The asshole's eyes widen and shift from left to right, as if checking for an out, but there isn't one. This is my palace, and he'd pissed off the king. My boys grab him by the arms and start dragging him away as he continues to yell.

"Hey," Raven says, "I was hoping I would bump into you. Is that guy gonna be alright?"

I grab a lock of her hair and feel the silky softness on my finger, just a taste of her softness, her beauty. "Don't worry about him, Little Bird. Why were you lookin' for me?"

She peers at me as her perfectly straight teeth graze her bottom teeth, making my dick hard as a rock. "I got your delivery. It was really kind. Thank you."

"It was nothing," I say, meaning it. I will do anything for the girl; ordering some food is literally the lowest thing I can do on a list of items. I want to make her my queen, to lay the world—my world—at her feet. "I would love to stay with you all night, Little Bird, but right now, I need to go deal with business." I point to the balcony. "That's Enzo. He'll watch you. Once it's time, he'll bring you to me."

I offer her a smile before turning to Josie. "Anything she needs is on the house."

"You got it, boss."

I offer Raven a smile before heading to the back.

The club used to be an old warehouse, with all the trappings. At one point, it housed a butchery, and when we remodeled, I insisted we keep some of the old features when we updated the place. The cold storage unit was one thing we kept.

I remove the boning blade from the inside of my suit jacket before I peel it off and hand it to Rock. “Who’s watching him?”

Rock’s eyes go wide as he watches me twirl the knife in my hand. Most people like guns in my line of work, but not me. Guns are easy. They don’t need any talent. There is no need for finesse when pulling a trigger. But a blade is beautiful. It takes conviction, drive and, most of all, skill. “Tony and Salvator. Boss, he is just drunk.”

I glare at Rock as I glide the knife’s blade along the inside of my palm.

Tony raises his hands, showing that he gets the message as I open the door and see the little fucker sitting in a metal chair. The pussy is literally shaking. That is the thing about these aggressive punks who came to the club. They are cowards pretending to be alphas.

I roll up my sleeves, exposing all my tattoos, and watch as the guy’s eyes practically bulge out of his head. He swallows his fear, trying to replace it with indignation on his weasel face as I approach, holding a blade in my hand. We both know who is in charge here, who the tied-up animal in the cage is, but the fucker still tries to pretend he has some power.

“You can’t just keep me here. This is illegal. I’ll sue you for everything you’ve got.”

Tony tosses a wallet to me, and I pull out his driver’s license. “Michael Williams.” I flip through and see a picture of the pussy with two little boys and a woman who looks tired of his shit as she plasters on a fake smile for the camera. “Cute family.” I glide the knife gently on the picture, barely scraping it. “I wonder if they’d like a brief visit from me.”

“Don’t you fuckin go near them, you psycho.”

I laugh. I know I’d never touch his family. I don’t hurt women and kids. That was what assholes like this fuck would do, but I let him think I would gut every single person he loved and have no remorse about it. There is no harm in fucking with his head. I walk up to him and place the tip of the knife along his

throat. "I don't think you're in a position to tell me what to do and who to do it to. You should have thought about your little wife and kids before you touched something that didn't belong to you."

"What the fuck you talkin' about, man? I took nothing."

I laugh, sitting on the chair opposite him as I pull a solid wood table between us. "Take? No. You could take nothing from me. I said touch. You touched something that is mine." I tap on the table. "Put your right hand here. Spread your fingers apart."

"What the fuck for?"

"We're gonna play a little game. You like games, right, Michael? You seem to play them on the ladies. They say no, and you chase a little game of cat and mouse. The thing is, Michael, you didn't touch just any pussy this time. You touched my lioness, and there needs to be a price for that."

When Michael doesn't move, I nod at Tony, who points the gun at the coward's temple. I lean forward in my chair, twirling the sharp blade on the small table. "Bullet or my game, Michael. The choice is yours."

Reluctantly, he places his shaking hand on the table.

"Good choice. Your life really isn't worth refusing me. Now spread your fingers apart."

Michael spreads his fingers apart, his eyes glistening. Was the fucker gonna cry?

I balance the tip of the knife along his hand. "I love this game." I move the blade between his fingers while I stare right into his eyes. "You ever played it before? It's got many names: the knife game, pin finger, nerve, bishop, knife fingers and, my favorite, five-finger fillet."

Michael shakes his head. I laugh, and then I hear it, the steady stream of liquid. Michael has pissed through his pants. "Michael, I would think a grown man like you would've been toilet trained by now. I wanted to draw this out, but I'm not sure you can handle it."

"You're a fuckin' psycho."

“Yes, Michael, you’ve already covered that.” I smile at him as I move the blade faster between his fingers. I sing and watch as genuine fear grips him. He knows he is staring at a monster and has nowhere to go and no one to help him. “Engine, engine number nine, going down the Chicago line. If the train goes off the track, do you want your money back?”

“Fuck,” Michael screams as he pulls his hand back. Blood now spills violently where his index finger connected at the knuckle a moment ago.

“Michael,” I say as I examine his severed finger, “we are now even.”

“Even? You fuckin’ cut my finger off.”

I bend down, my eyes now level with his, and shove the finger in his face. His eyes look frozen, mesmerized by the limb. “And you touched my woman. This finger here touched what belongs to me, so I took it, making us even.”

“You’re fuckin’ certifiable. I’m gonna go to the cops.”

I scrape the knife along his face, one trickle of blood slides along his cheek. “You’ll be doing no such thing. The finger is nothing compared to what I could do to you, your ignorant little wife, and those boys of yours. I was trying to be merciful, but if you want me to unleash the full force of the monster I am, I will happily oblige. Just try me.”

Chapter Six

C LARISSA

Maybe I made a mistake. I sit there in the lush-looking office—Vance’s office. A *man’s* office. I keep looking at the leather furniture and mahogany desk as I adjust my dress. I should have worn something else. All I’d wanted to do was thank him for some fucking groceries. I could have come here in jeans and a sweater. I didn’t need to get dolled up. I hate my stupid vagina. It was her idea to look pretty for Vance. I pace the room, wondering if I’m the dumbest girl on the face of the planet. I am attracted to a control freak. What if he is some sort of murderer? Even as I have the thought I push it aside. The man seems unhinged, but he also seems protective and kind, at least to me. I just need him to understand that I’m not going to just do what he wants just because he wants it.

I bang on the door for fifteen minutes, to no avail.

“How long am I supposed to stay here?” I demand, my fist hurting from constantly pounding on the steel door.

After Vance left me to deal with whatever, his goons came up and told me to come with them, right after some guy wanted to dance with me. I am starting to think that Vance has a thing about dancing.

Every time someone wants to dance with me, it seems to make him go off the deep end.

“You can’t just keep me here against my will. It’s fuckin’ illegal.”

“Hello, Clarissa.” I jump as a deep voice from behind startles me. I turn to see Vance, no longer in his suit jacket, his black shirt unbuttoned at the top, showing his dark chest hair. The sleeves of his shirt rolled up to his elbows, exposing intricate tattoos all in black, no color.

I storm towards him. His face lightens up, and he flashes me a smile. I slap him hard, leaving an angry red welt. I go to do it again, but he grabs my hand, his smile still plastered on his face, but this time it doesn’t look light. Now it seems dangerous, venomous, and as much as I want to be scared, I find myself being drawn to it.

“You don’t want to mess with me, sweetheart. I’m not one of the little college boys you’re used to.”

“Who the hell do you think you are?”

He shrugs, bringing my hand to his lips and placing a gentle kiss at my pulse point, making my entire body shiver. His eyes get a glint of mischief as his lips turn up, forming an arrogant smile. “Yours.”

“You’re fuckin’ crazy,” I shout, trying to take my arm back, but his hold is too strong. If Vance wants to, he could overpower me with no problem. “You trying to freak me out because I’m not scared of you,” I lie.

Vance takes a step toward me, my wrist still engulfed in his large hand. His other hand brushes my hair back, his touch flooding my body with heat, want, and need. “You should fear me, Little Bird.” He abruptly drops my hand and gestures to the brown leather chair. “Take a seat.”

“Fuck no. I’m leaving,” I say, backing up to the door.

Vance doesn’t say a word. He rips off his black leather belt with one swoop. Panic takes control, and I can barely swallow the bile that is rising in my throat. The genuine fear that he is going to rape me crawls into my mind and holds me tight. He steps closer with the belt in his hand. My back is now to the door, and his frame is all that I see in front of me. I flinch.

He tilts his head. “Did you just flinch, Little Bird?”

I don’t respond. I just want whatever he is going to do to me to end.

Vance bends his head, his breath warm against my skin when he whispers, “Tell me, Clarissa, who do I have to kill?”

Somehow I found my voice. “Yourself?”

Vance chuckles as he steps back and molds the belt into handcuffs. He slides it over my wrists and tightens the loops, the leather making my hands useless. “This should keep you put for the time being.” He lifts me by my waist and moves me towards his desk before he opens the door. He whispers to the men outside. I don’t know what they are saying. From my peripheral vision, I see that the door Vance came through in the back of the room is ajar. This is the moment, my only moment. I run.

The hallway is creepy. It looks like something you’d see in a horror movie—gray, dark, and devoid of humans. This is defiantly where I’m gonna get murdered then chopped up and thrown in a dumpster.

“Clarissa, stop,” I hear Vance’s deep voice yell. A part of me wants to stop. Some stupid sex-starved dumb part that thinks a massive orgasm is worth being killed.

It’s hard running with your hands tied together. Who knew that you need your hands to run better. I sure didn’t, as I faceplant right on the ground. I try to get up. I raise my head and come face-to-face with his black leather, expensive-ass Italian shoes.

“You alright?” he asks, trying to help me up.

I shift my body away, refusing his touch. “Go to hell.”

“You’re gonna prove to be difficult, aren’t you?” Vance asks, gently lifting me off the ground. The way he handles me doesn’t correlate with what he is doing. The man is holding me against my will, for God knows what, my hands tied up, and I feel really caged.

“How the fuck am I supposed to make things difficult when you’ve tied up my hands and kept me locked up in a room?”

Am I supposed to smile and say *Thank you, sir. More please.?*”

Vance rubs the back of his neck and laughs. Something seriously messed the guy in the head. “I suppose that’s what I thought would happen, yeah.”

“You’re fuckin’ certifiable. You ever get checked out for your brand of crazy?”

He tells me where to walk by nudging my back. “I’ve been told I’m nuts before, but it’s usually by people I don’t care for.”

I don’t know why, but hearing those words fall out of his mouth wounds me a little. They seem so fucking depressing. I glance down and notice the bloodstains on his hand. “What the fuck happened to you?”

He follows my eyes and shrugs. He pulls out a white handkerchief and wipes his hands. I am transfixed by the red now sullyng the pristine of the white. “Let’s just say I don’t like it when people mess with what belongs to me. I especially don’t like it when they touch what’s mine.”

“No one taught you how to share as a kid, huh?”

I must have said the wrong thing because his hands are on me, and he whirls me around, pinning me with the heat burning in his eyes. “I don’t share. Ever. Got that?”

“Yeah, man, chill. I won’t ever take a chip when you’re not lookin’.”

“You can take whatever you want. Others can’t.”

Chapter 7

V ANCE

“Okay, since I can do whatever I want, why don't you let me go on my merry way, and we can pretend nothing happened.”

She is fucking infuriating. She has every part of me, including my dick, confused. The girl is here trying to do everything to run away from me, and my cock is hard as steel for her. “No.”

“Whatcha gonna do? Kidnap me?”

I pin her against the wall, making sure she can feel all of me. I look straight into her eyes, letting her feel the heat in mine. “You're far from a kid.”

“Did you turn up the heat to make me feel uncomfortable?”

“Do you ever shut up?”

“Not really. Especially when I'm nervous. Why? Does it bother you?”

“Not really. I'm sure I can stuff your mouth full to keep it under control.”

“Oh my God, you're gonna rape me, aren't you?” she screeches as she tries to pull away from me, but she isn't a match for my strength.

Rape... She thinks I am capable of rape. Sure, I can do some fucked-up shit, but never rape. “Little Bird, I don't rape

women. When we have sex, you're gonna beg for my cock in every single one of your holes and thank me for it."

I take her to the alley, where the town car is waiting for us. Enzo and Tony are on standby, both giving me a look of disappointment. "I don't need your shit," I warn them.

Enzo hands me the blindfold. I hold it up to Clarissa.

"You're crazy if you think I'm wearing that!"

I pin her to the car, letting her get a taste of my hard cock against her belly. "We can do this the easy way or the hard way. How would you like it to be? Soft or rough? I'm personally partial to rough, so I'm hoping you go that route."

I watch as her breathing becomes shallow. She can protest all she wants, but a significant part of her likes this game of cat and mouse with me. Unlike the other guys, with me she wants to be caught. I bend down, my breath on her skin. "Why don't you be a good girl and do as you're told?"

I place the blindfold over her eyes. This time, she doesn't protest. I gently place her in the car's back seat, climb in after her, and then Tony gets into the driver's seat and takes off.

"Where are we going?"

"Somewhere we can be alone."

"You could have asked me on a date."

"Consider this a date."

"Fuck you," she barks.

"I'm trying to be patient, Little Bird, but you constantly testing me isn't helping. I'm not the most gentlemanly. Don't test me again."

"You literally tied my hands with your belt and took away my sight. I'm pretty vulnerable here. How can I be sure you won't harm me?"

"You have my word that no harm will come to you. You're completely safe with me."

"Can I get something to drink?"

I open the car's fridge and pour two glasses of champagne.
"You like champagne?"

"Who doesn't?"

I bring one flute to her lips. "Open."

"You can't possibly expect me to let a man I barely know pour unknown liquid in my mouth. How can I be sure you haven't drugged me?"

"Open your mouth, Clarissa, or I will pry it open for you."

She sits there, mouth clamped shut. My control slips, and my anger rises, taking hold of me. I take a swig of the liquid, holding it in my mouth. If she wants to be difficult, so be it. I hold her head in one hand while I pinch her nose, restricting her airway. I am grateful that I can't see her eyes, so I can't see the knowledge in them. I'm a monster. When she can't hold her breath any longer and opens her mouth, I lean down and spill the liquid from my mouth into hers. She swallows most of it, but a tiny drop glides from the corner of her mouth. I bend down and trace it with my tongue and hear Clarissa sigh.

"You turned on, Little Bird?"

"No."

I glide my finger along her collarbone and stop just above her cleavage. "Is that why your breathing is so heavy? Why is your mouth slightly parted, as if waiting for my cock?"

"It's fear, you asshole, not lust."

Using my knee I nudge her legs apart. . I feel the heat from her pussy, knowing that if I touched her, she would drench my hand. Leaning down, I nip at her earlobe, enough to get her attention but not enough for it to hurt, and whisper, "Is that why your nipples are hard as rocks and your pussy is soaking wet?"

Chapter 8

C LARISSA

Anger is boiling in me and it's about to erupt. I don't know who Vance thinks he is. The asshole abducted me, tied me up, spat in my mouth, and had the nerve to point out how wet I was. The thing is, he isn't lying about it, and that's what really pisses me off. I am turned on—really turned on. I'm like Niagara Falls, gushing at everything this man does and says.

What the actual fuck is wrong with me?

Vance hasn't spoken since he rudely pointed out how my body was a treacherous slut, ditching every ounce of pride for some dick. His dick. I'm not sure if I like the silence or hate it. On the one hand, it's nice not to feel like I'm going to burn up either by his words or his touch, but it's driving me crazy that he isn't paying me attention.

"We are here, sir," that prick Tony says when the car stops. I'm not sure if Tony really is a prick; he could be a very nice guy, but since he helped Vance do this to me, I will call him a prick.

I hear shuffling and a car door open as a cool breeze pricks at my skin before it slams shut.

"Fucker, you gonna just keep me in the car," I demand before another door opens and a firm hand tugs at the belt cuffs.

"Easy... I don't want you falling again," Vance says.

I slowly get out of the car, heeding his words. His firm hands move torturously slowly along my arm, making me shiver. I hear the fucker chuckle. He knows exactly how I'm reacting because his eyes seemed to watch me like a hawk. Once he reaches my head, his fingers curl into my hair, tugging gently. "I'm going to take the blindfold off."

I nod as his fingers remove the obstruction from my eyes, making his dark blue eyes the first thing I see.

The heat of his stare is so intense that I feel like he could light me on fire. I'm not sure what to do with the emotions this man evokes in me. The sensations of fear, want, and need tumble within me until they have made some sort of toxic concoction.

I am not sure if I want to fuck him, kiss him, beat him, or run away from him. His eyes bore into mine, his lips turning up into a callous smile, as if he knows what I am thinking.

"All in good time, Little Bird," he whispers, sending goose bumps along my flesh and a jolt of electricity right to my clit. If the man can do this voodoo with words, I wonder what he can do with touch.

"Sir, I have your package here," Tony says, handing him a small package wrapped in what looks like a brown paper bag.

Vance takes it from him. "Thank you, Tony. Have a safe drive back to the city."

The city... Those words bring me back to reality. He's abducted me. I glance around and see miles of land with hundreds of trees, and in the middle of it is a small cabin and what looks like an oversized garage behind it. That's it. No other houses, no people. I am in the middle of fucking nowhere with a man I barely know. This is straight-up a scene from some horror movie, and I feel no fear. *Maybe I am certifiable.*

"Umm, Vance, how are we gonna get back without Tony?"

"We aren't," Vance says. His hand lingers on the belt still tied around my wrists. "At least not for the weekend." He undoes the belt, tossing it around my neck. His eyes focus on my wrists. Two angry welts now replace the black leather. Vance

frowns, massaging my wrists. “I’m sorry. I didn’t think I tied them that tight. Fuck.” He falls to his knees and places sweet kisses all along the insides of my wrists before turning them over and repeating the gesture on the other side. I can’t help thinking how incredibly tender the act is; a complete clusterfuck of emotions rage in me for this man. Most of them I am not even close to understanding, and I’m not sure I ever will.

I know what I am about to ask is stupid, but my voice cracks as I ask anyway. “I know I already asked this, but are you going to hurt me?”

Vance stares up at me, pain, anger, regret, and sadness flashing in his eyes before he masks them, locking it up in an impenetrable fortress so I can’t reach. “I don’t hurt innocent women. I definitely would never hurt you. I’d fuckin’ die before I let one hair on your head get damaged.”

“Is it a sex thing?”

“No,” he whispers. “I want you, but no, I didn’t bring you here to make you my sex slave, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“Then what am I doing here?”

“I just want you here.” He pauses for a moment, as if rethinking his words. “I *need* you here. From the moment I saw you, I was drawn to you; that’s never happened before. I don’t really know what to do about...” He trails off for a moment before he adds, “Feelings.”

“So you make it a habit of kidnapping women you’re attracted to?”

Vance shoots up off the ground, backing away from me. He doesn’t hide what he is thinking, his hands fists at his sides, his eyes burning molten lava. “What makes you think I’m attracted to you, Little Bird?”

His words feel like freezing cold water being dumped over my head. I am shocked at just how much they sting, but I refuse to let him see the pain they caused. “You broke a guy’s hand over a week ago, you did God knows what to that guy from tonight,

you sent me groceries, you kidnapped me. You either want to fuck me or kill me.”

Vance ignores my question; instead, he takes the brown paper bag package out of his pocket. This time I really focus on it and notice drops of blood trickling out of it. “What the fuck is that,” I ask, my voice shaking with each word I utter.

Vance’s thick fingers unwrap the paper, and two cuts of steak peek through. He whistles, and two large Dobermans run out on demand. Vance doesn’t take his eyes off me. He holds up one of the two steaks and one Doberman jumps viciously, making me panic, thinking he might actually take out Vance’s hand with the steak. When the dog has his meat and Vance’s limbs are still attached, I calm down slightly, only to witness it happening again with the other dog.

“You’re fuckin crazy.”

Vance laughs, a genuine laugh, a laugh that comes from a place of joy, patting the dogs on their heads. “They’re well trained.”

I can’t help thinking how different he looks at this moment. Sure, he still looks like he could take on ten men by himself and is hard as hell, but he also looks like a boy next door—kind, caring, dependable.

Vance places his hand on my back, guiding me to the cabin. I can’t move. My feet won’t let me. I’m frozen, unable to do anything but look at the two dogs, who are glaring at me.

“Stand down,” Vance yells. Both dogs whimper before running away. “They won’t hurt you. They know your place and theirs.”

I nod and lean into him as we walk to the cabin. Vance opens the door with a gold key and holds the door open for me. I walk in under his arm, my body brushing against his, and heat pools in my center. My body’s reaction to him is ultimately out of control.

The cabin looks like one of those cheesy spots for a man’s man that you’d see in a Hallmark Christmas movie. If I were

honest, it is not at all how I've pictured Vance's style. It is a complete log cabin, all wood, bear rugs, and warm colors.

"You were expecting a sterile white room," Vance jokes once again and cuts through my thoughts.

I whirl around and pin him with my eyes. "How do you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Read my thoughts."

Vance laughs. "I can't read your thoughts, Little Bird. I can read your sexy body and beautiful face." Vance walks towards me, gliding his knuckles along my cheek. "Everything you think and feel radiates out of you. In my line of work, being able to read people is the difference between life and death. Let's just say you should never play poker, sweetheart."

"There's food set up on the table. Is there anyone else here?"

Vance shakes his head. "No. I have someone who takes care of the place while I'm not here and arranges what I need before I arrive."

My eyes move back to the spread on the table. Every food someone could think of. Chicken, steak, lobster, potatoes, rice, vegetables.

"That's a lot of food for two people."

"Your fridge was empty, and I'm pretty sure peanut butter isn't your favorite thing to eat."

I tilt my head. "You were in my apartment?"

Vance doesn't answer. He rubs the back of his neck, and all I can focus on is the intricate tattoos that cover his forearm and the bland space that is still pink flesh on the inside of his arm. It's a very odd place to leave without a tattoo, as if he were saving it for something.

"You gonna answer me? You were in my apartment?"

"Yes," he says, his voice clear and direct. There is no shame or embarrassment, as if breaking into my apartment was almost his right. "Listen, I really need to take a shower. It has been a

long week, and now that you're here and safe, I'm going to shower. I'll be right back."

"You seem pretty sure that I won't try to run," I say, annoyed at how arrogant he is. The man broke into my space, touched my stuff without permission. I wait for the anger to hit me, but all I can concentrate on is the heat from his fingers on my lips and how desperately I crave his touch. "You said you wouldn't force yourself on me."

Vance's eyes betray him. They look sullen before he catches himself, and the same heated dark look returns. He closes the space between us, his body surrounding me like a noose and a blanket combined. The air seems thicker when he is so close to me, so thick I'm not sure if I can breathe. "Little bird, we both know that every single thing I have ever done to you, you have wanted."

My mind flashes back to that first night, when he had dropped me off, how I stood inside the window fantasizing about what he actually did. My hand instantly touches my lips, and he smiles. I'd figured I'd dreamed of him that night in my loft, but he had been there. I am not sure if I should run out of here screaming or if I should climb him like a monkey. The man pushes all my buttons. Unleashes all my feelings at once, and I am trapped between wanting to fight and submit.

"Little Bird, I have to take a shower," Vance says, snapping me out of the maze known as my emotions. He traces from my temple to my jaw with his fingertip. "Don't leave the cabin."

"Where am I gonna go exactly? It's not like there is another soul in sight for miles."

"Go eat," Vance orders, and I obey as I watch him disappear around the corner.

My mind feels like it's in a haze. I am in a cabin with a man who has been stalking me, a man who broke into my apartment, invaded my space, my privacy, and now it looks like my freedom.

I hear the shower and run.

Chapter 9

VANCE

Having Clarissa here feels right. I had brought no one to the cabin before. It is a place of refuge, peace. I don't want anyone here unless they mean something to me. My raven means the world.

I stare in the mirror and then gaze at the white handkerchief now stained crimson from the severed finger inside. I don't know when this all became my world, when my need for control and power trumped my humanity.

I shake off the self-loathing that I am feeling and get on with it. Walking into the master bedroom, I drop the towel and put on jeans then head to the kitchen, and to my shock, Clarissa is gone.

"Where is she?" I growl at the dogs. They cast their heads down, telling me they fucked up. I glance at the front door, and it's ajar. "Fuck."

I don't bother grabbing a shirt and leave my feet bare. I open the front door and run, the dogs following in pursuit. It's fucking not safe for her here at night. There's literally nowhere to go, and the only thing she might find is some wild animal that would tear her limb from limb.

I should never have left her alone. She hasn't come to terms with it. I should have stayed there or handcuffed her to the shower. I thought she was fine, but obviously, I was wrong.

Maybe I can't read the little bird as well as I thought. I smile, thinking when I find her, I will start taking my showers with her in them. Fuck, why would she do this? She knows I'd rather die than hurt her.

The dogs stop. I feel relieved because that must mean they have something. A branch breaks, and the sound of rustling leaves blasts through the silent night air. I glance down and see one of her nude high heels. She must be close, and if she was running with these, she's probably injured. I'll have to punish her for putting her safety at risk. What the fuck was she thinking? I thought she understood me. I'd fucking die before I let anything happen to her. Under no circumstances is she ever allowed to get hurt. If I have to tie her up to keep her safe, I will, because she is now mine, and I take good care of what belongs to me.

Timber and Tiger jump into the small valley and bark. I run down and join them, and there is my Little Bird, sitting on the cold, hard ground, nursing her arm. I can't really see her face in the darkness. My first reaction is to check her ankle; she slides back on the ground as I approach.

"Fuck you."

"It would be your pleasure, Little Bird, but first, I need to see what kind of damage you did to yourself."

She bites her bottom lip and gives me a nervous smile. I am not sure if she fears me or likes to play games. "So this may not have been the brightest thing I've ever done."

I walk over and take her ankle in my hands.

"Looks like this is a habit with us. Me hurting myself and you being there to fix it."

I don't say a word, lifting her. I get lost in her warm body cradled against me while her arms go around my neck and she leans into me, giving the illusion that she trusts me.

I open the door to the cabin and rush her to the bathroom. "Strip," I demand.

She sits there immobile before giving me a look of disgust while she wraps her arms around herself. "I will not."

“You think if I wanted to do anything to you, your arms would have a shot in hell of protecting you? You’re just lucky that you’re not over my knee right now for the stunt you pulled. Don’t make me repeat myself, Little Bird. Strip.”

Clarissa bites her lip, turning her face away from me. I know I sounded like an asshole, but I am pissed. She could’ve seriously hurt herself.

“Either you do it, or I do.”

“You said you wouldn’t rape me.”

“Oh, for God’s sake.” I walk up to her, my hands on the hem of her short black dress. I stare into her eyes and notice a shift. The fear that was there a moment ago is now gone. It’s been replaced with something else—curiosity, lust, desire. She licks her lips, and I tear the dress off her, exposing her black cotton panties and black lace bra.

“Do you want me to rip the rest off, or do you want to do it?”

Clarissa keeps her eyes on me as she removes her bra, letting it fall to the floor by her feet, and then shimmies out of her panties, leaving her bare entirely to my hungry stare. I am hard as a rock from just looking at her body. My dick could fucking cut through steel at this moment.

“Happy?” she asks.

I close the gap between us. “Not yet, but the night is young.”

My hands are on her in an instant, though not in the primal way that I want them to be. I examine her body, checking every inch for any marks of damage she might have caused herself when she ran away from me. I turn her around, and my blood runs cold. My hand twitches, and my fingers shake as they brush against her bare back.

“Who did this?” I ask, my voice cold. I am no longer a man but a monster. My throat is dry, and the only thing I can focus on is how I will kill the man who left welts all along her back.

“It’s nothing,” she says, trying to move away from me, but I am not having any of that. I grab her and pull her to me, holding her captive in my arms.

“That’s not nothing, Little Bird. I’m gonna ask you one more time. Who the fuck did that to you?”

Chapter 10

C LARISSA

Vance's grip on my arms is firm, but it doesn't hurt. It is the way a parent might hold a child who is being belligerent, gentle but he wants me to know he isn't messing around.

I sigh, casting my eyes down. There is something about the intensity of Vance's stare that makes me want to run both to and from him. The man is an enigma with a well-fortified web, and I am standing right in the middle of it.

"Look at me, Clarissa," he demands before his fingers lift my chin. I am lost in the deep blue of his irises. The man is really a work of art. His face is perfect in every single way, matching the sizable muscular frame of his sculpted body.

"What are you gonna do to him?" I stutter, my words failing me.

"Kill him."

Vance says those words as if I'd asked a stupid question. I can see that to him, that is the only solution, but the real shocker in all this is that if Vance kills Roy, I wouldn't care because, after everything that man did, he deserves it. There is only one reason I have an objection to Vance killing him. "I don't want you to get into trouble."

Vance rubs my bottom lip as he smirks. "Little Bird, I'm not a man who gets into trouble. I'm the man who makes it. You

don't need to worry about me, but whoever dared touch you does."

"His name is Roy Rogers. He's a deadbeat piece of shit my best friend Emily got tangled up in. She seems to always get tangled with assholes, starting with her father. But hopefully, it ends with Roy. When we went to their apartment to pack her up, he came in and started going crazy. He punched her, and when I went to get him off her, he went crazy, pushing me, and I hit the counter hard. It hurts like a bitch, but I think it's just some heavy bruising, no actual damage."

Vance nods, walking over to the bathroom counter and tapping into his phone. I notice it, a finger wrapped up in white, streaked with red... Blood.

I scream and fall to the ground as Vance drops his phone and rushes to me. His hands are frantic as they move along my body, his eyes consumed with worry and fear. "Clarissa," he yells, shaking me.

"I-Is that a finger?"

Vance shrugs. "Yes. It's the fucker's from the club. The one who was harassing you."

"He fuckin' offered to buy me a drink, Vance! He barely touched me."

"He touched you with that finger. So I took it."

"You fuckin' cut off his finger 'cause it touched my elbow?"

"Pretty much."

"You're certifiable."

"I don't like people touching my property. I told you that. I don't share well."

I pull away from him, my back hits the wall, and I realize there's nowhere left to go.

"I might be certifiable, but I'm your nut job," Vance says with a wink.

"I'm here as your prisoner, Vance. You call me your property. I really don't think I've got any power here."

Vance backs away from me, his eyes searching mine. What he is looking for, I am not really sure. This man does things to me I don't even understand. They say that fear can heighten sexual desire, and maybe that is true, because at this moment, I have flashes of him pushing me up against the wall and fucking me until I can't think straight.

He pulls open a drawer, and I see the metallic gleam of a blade. He turns to me and smiles. "This is probably poetic in some fucked-up way."

My heart stops. Is he going to kill me? As if he senses my fear, he turns to me and offers a sad smile. "This isn't for you, little bird." He stabs the blade into the part of his skin on his left arm that is bare of any tattoos. "This is for us."

I watch in horror and fascination as Vance carves letters along his arm. I step closer, a sick fascination with this man taking root and growing wildly inside me. Glancing down, I can now clearly see what he has done. There, staring back at me, is eight letters... CLARISSA.

He turns his face to me, a look of pure desperation and need shadowing his eyes. He's letting his guard down, standing before me naked, exposing the deepest parts of his soul, letting me see both the man and the monster. I have never had another person look at me the way he does, as if I am his world.

Vance makes me feel as if I actually matter, even if his methods are a little unconventional. Usually a girl gets flowers and chocolate, not a man mutilating his arm with her name.

With my name.

Vance lifts his arm, trails of blood dropping onto the white marble floor. "There." He places the bloody knife on the counter, turning to look at me. "This is pretty permanent, don't you think? When I say you belong to me, it's not one-sided. I'm yours, only yours, and no one else's."

I just nod, not sure of what else to do and say.

Vance doesn't push me to speak. He leaves me in my thoughts as he turns on the tap of the bathtub, searching for the right temperature. "You want bubbles?"

“You actually have bubbles?”

“Probably not, but I can get someone to deliver some for the next time.”

I like the way he says next time, as if I’m going to be a fixture.

“I was intending on planning this better, but then that guy at the club fucked my plans up, so I have nothing for you, but I will fix that. The only thing I could get here on time was the food.”

I smile, thinking how much of a contradiction this man is.

“You’re a little squishy, aren’t you?”

“No, Little Bird. There isn’t much about me that’s soft. The only person who sees that is you, only you.”

Vance offers his hand, and I take it before stepping into the tub. The carving on his arm doesn’t even phase him. He wraps it in a towel before he starts, taking a washcloth and working on my skin, careful around my back to not cause me any discomfort. “Does it hurt?”

I sigh, leaning into his touch. “No, it feels wonderful.”

Vance pours shampoo into his hand and gives me an apologetic smile. “It’s probably not what you’re used to.” His hands glide in my hair as he makes suds while massaging my scalp.

I feel my heart constrict at his gentle touch as a tear slips down my cheek.

Vance stops what he is doing. Panic flashes in his eyes as he stares at me. “Did I hurt you? I’m sorry. I can stop.”

“No, no, it’s not that. You’re being so gentle and loving. It’s just that I’ve had no one take care of me in so long.”

“Not even when you were a child?”

“No. My parents died in a car crash when I was three. I’ve been in the system my whole life. No foster parent took the time to make sure I knew I was important. No one has, really...until you.”

“You *are* important,” Vance says before he continues to wash my hair. “I’m going to make sure you never forget it.”

I smile at his sweet words and revel in his tender touch.

Vance removes the showerhead attached to the tub, checking the water pressure before he sprays it on my head, washing away the soap and all the pain I had been harboring.

“Your hair is so beautiful,” he says, his hands gentle in my hair. “It was the first thing I noticed about you. This dark black hair... You looked like a raven.”

I chuckle. “Is that why you call me Little Bird?”

“Yes, my little bird, my raven.”

I turn to face him, and his eyes are much softer than I had seen before. “That’s kinda poetic.”

He smiles and places a soft kiss on the top of my head. “You’re poetry.”

Once he has gotten the soap off, he bends down and lifts me out of the tub, once again cradling me against him. I’m taken aback at how easily he does it and how much I like it. If this is what it means to be owned by Vance, then I will gladly be his.

Water trails from my hair as I peer into his eyes.

He looks down and smiles. “You look good in my arms, baby.”

I nod and smile back, knowing that I fully agree.

He wraps a giant white robe around me, and I smile.

“What’s funny?”

“I was just thinking that for a guy who seems to cut up things a lot, you sure own a lot of white.”

He shrugs, tying the robe tight. “It’s a thing from my childhood. My mother always liked white things—furniture, clothes, towels, linens. I know how stupid it is, ‘cause getting blood off white is a bitch.”

“Do you have a good relationship with your mom?”

“Yes, she’s the best. After my dad died, things were rough, but we got through, the three of us.”

“Three of you?”

He pulls back the covers, patting a spot. I shuffle over to sit where he wants me. “Yes, I’ve got a kid sister.”

“Must be nice.”

“It can be, but she is a pain in my ass and never listens to advice.”

I feel my eyes get heavy as I try to fight back sleep.

“Rest, Little Bird. We’ve got all the time in the world to talk about anything you want.”

Chapter 11

VANCE

My heart aches as I sit there watching Clarissa asleep in my bed. Worrying about how long it will take her to get used to being here, being with me. I feel a lightness that I haven't felt for a very long time. She belongs here with me. There is nothing I have ever been as sure about as that.

My phone buzzes. I walk into the bathroom and lift it off the counter. My arm stings as I do.

Enzo: We got him. Should be at the cabin in 30 minutes. You sure this can't wait? I can hold him for a few days.

ME: No. I want this done. Tonight.

I put the phone down and unwrap my arm. I smile as Clarissa's name stares back at me. Grabbing the first aid kit, I clean my arm, wrap it up with gauze, and head downstairs.

I throw a coat on and open the door just as Enzo pulls up to the house. He gets out, followed by Tony and who I could only guess is Roy.

"Where am I," Roy asks before he flashes me a dirty look. "You're all gonna be in a world of pain."

I step up to him and smile, and I see his eyes widen. That was an odd ability my smile had on people right before they met

my blades. They never really thought I would do anything until it was too late.

“Welcome, Roy. My name is Vance Matthew.”

At the mention of my name, he trashes against Tony, desperate to get free. “Listen, man, I don’t know what all this is about, but I swear to God I haven’t fucked with anything to do with Vincent Ricci. I know who you are, man.” He falls to his knees like a pathetic roach. “I swear on my mother, man.”

The pathetic fucker actually swore on his mom. That is the thing about men like Roy—weak bullies, unreliable little boys. The only thing they know how to do is use women in any way they can. I step closer, kick him directly in the face, and watch with satisfaction as the blood oozes from his nose.

“This has nothing to do with Ricci, Roy. You’re here ‘cause you fucked with what’s mine, and I don’t like anyone doing that.”

“Man, I didn’t, I swear. I know not to come near anything that you’ve got your hands in.”

I crouch down, fisting his hair in my hand, and yank back hard. I wanted the fucker to know that tonight was the last night he’d ever be breathing. “You put your hands on Clarissa.”

At the mention of her name, Roy’s eyes widen. “Clarissa? Emily’s friend? What the fuck does that bitch have to do with anything?”

The volcanic rage in me explodes. I pound Roy’s head onto the gravel with such force, I hear several cracks. I probably broke his nose and various other bones in his face with the power of the hit.

I drop him and stand. “Look at me, Roy.”

His eyes meet mine, and I see the fear in them. It’s a look I know well, the one a man gives when he knows his time’s up. “Please stop,” Roy begs.

“Are those the same words Emily used when you’d beat her?”

At the sound of Emily's name, Roy's eyes dart left and right, as if thinking she will pop up from out of nowhere.

"She's not here, Roy. I don't even know her."

"Then what am I doing here?"

I bend down once again, looking him directly in the eye. "You're here 'cause of Clarissa."

"Emily's cunt friend?" Roy asks before I pull his hair back and punch him directly in the face with all my force and knock him out.

"You're gonna make it extra painful, aren't you?" Enzo asks, shaking his head.

I shrug, wiping my hands on my coat. "He shouldn't have said her name if he wanted this quick and easy. Let's get him situated. I can't wait to see the fuckin' look of fear when he opens his rat bastard eyes."

"The cleaners will be here in about three hours," Enzo says as he hoists up Roy's limp body.

I bring down the ropes and start tying his hands and feet to raise him above us.

Enzo winced as he watched me tie Roy's hands. "You can't just fuckin' shoot people, huh?"

I discovered years ago that I really like using the strappado method for those who really deserve it. I have no issues with guns when taking care of business, but for rapists, pedos, and abusers, I like a little extra flare. I enjoy watching them tied up and completely helpless, totally vulnerable to my whim. "Some of them don't deserve a painless death."

Enzo shakes his head. "You should really see a therapist about your shit."

I smirk at Enzo as I tighten the rope around Roy's wrists. "You're not any better, brother."

Chapter 12

C LARISSA

I wake up, and the darkness engulfs me. I turn to the chair that Vance was sitting in and notice he isn't there any longer as I snuggle my face into his pillow and breathe him in. Smiling, I remove the covers and tug at the warmth of the robe. The chill of the hardwood floor hits my feet as I set them on the floor. I am jarred with the realization that I'm literally in the home of my captive. The fear that was coursing through my body a mere few hours ago has completely dissipated.

There is a piece of paper with a note written in black ink on top of sweatpants and a hoodie at the foot of the bed.

Little Bird,

Since you were a bad girl and made me rip off your dress, I thought you'd like something to wear. I'm going to enjoy peeling them off of you at some point. Maybe with my teeth.

Yours, Vance

I can't help but smile. For a guy who's out of control, he's also incredibly thoughtful. He was a rose with too many thorns, gorgeous and captivating, but if you made a wrong move, he would make you bleed and wouldn't think twice about it. I shivered, thinking about it.

As I roam through the darkness, searching for Vance, I see the dogs lying by the door, as if waiting for someone to get home.

For two vicious dogs, they are pretty docile.

“Hey, boys,” I whisper.

They both get up and move out of the way, as if telling me to venture outside. I open the door. The chilly night air nips at my skin, reminding me I don’t have a coat. It doesn’t phase me. I am not running this time.

There is a flicker of light coming from under the crack of the shed. Inside, “My Girl” by The Temptations is blaring full blast. Slowly, I open the door so as not to disturb him.

Vance is standing there, his bare chest exposed. The intricate tattoos on his back appear dangerous and alluring all at once. A man really doesn’t have the right to be so goddamn beautiful.

Vance’s voice creeps through the room like a caress on my flesh. “You can come closer, Little Bird.”

I step closer; Vance is panting, his body coated in the sheen of sweat, making my mouth water at the thought of licking it all off him. I place my hand on his shoulder. He sighs, hanging his head down.

Panic is all I feel. Vance doesn’t turn around to look at me. He doesn’t make a smart-ass comeback or try to get me wet from just the sound of his words and his voice.

My mouth is dry. I can barely swallow. I drop my hand, turning to leave, before I feel a firm hand wrapped around my wrists.

“Don’t go, Little Bird.” Vance’s voice is strained. The confident man somehow seems exposed, and I am getting a glimpse of his vulnerable side. A side I was sure he rarely, if ever, showed anyone.

“Are you alright?” I ask, not sure what else to say.

“Only when you’re near me.”

I glance down at his hand, which is holding my wrist, tight but not so tight it hurts; the kind of tight where it actually feels good. I’m not sure what it is about this man, but being with him is both terrifying and exhilarating. My whole life, I’ve

gone through wanting someone to want me, care for me, protect, and cherish me. In a few days, this man has done all of that.

I know that he's not a good person; one might even say that he's psychotic. Yet as I stand here in front of him, lost in the depths of his blue eyes, knowing that the only thing that could bring him to his knees is me, makes me want him no matter the consequences. The truth of the matter is, he has nothing to worry about, because he has trapped me in his web, and even if I wanted to, I could never get out.

"I'm not going anywhere, Vance."

As soon as the words are out of my mouth, I see it. Blood. At first, I think it might be from his self-inflicted mutilation of carving my name into his arm, but it is too much blood. This is the type of blood that you would see in a horror movie after someone had stabbed someone else brutally multiple times.

My eyes shift to his other hand and see the knife before a red drop falls on his face, followed by another.

Vance must notice the fear that flashes in my eyes, even though I try to control it, because he drops my hand and hangs his head. "This is who I am, Little Bird. It's all I really know how to do."

My eyes follow the drops above us, and that's where I see him, Roy, dead with multiple slashes deeply embedded by a sharp object: the knife wielded by Vance's hand.

Vance notices me looking at the knife and places it down on the steel table beside him with what looked like other torture devices. I'm not sure what they all were, but none of them looked too pleasant.

"What is going on?" I ask. As soon as I say the words, I know how dumb they sound. What is going on is that Vance carved up Roy like a prime roast. A typical reaction to this is running, screaming, praying some kind stranger picks you up on the side of the road before the psycho chops you up. Still, I discovered long ago that I wasn't that normal.

“He hurt you.” Vance shrugs, as if killing random people for hurting me is normal. “Also, he likes to beat on women. Someone should have put the dog down a while ago. Might have been still breathing had he not crossed me, but he made the mistake of touching what belongs to me.” Vance steps to me. The vulnerability in his eyes a moment ago now completely gone, replaced with conviction and rage. He rubs his thumb along my bottom lip, the simple touch making me wet. He leans in, whispering in my ear, “I told you. No one touches what’s mine. If you don’t want it to happen again, you better make sure no one touches you.”

“I should run,” I say, my eyes fluttering closed, my voice barely a whisper, my body so responsive to his touch.

“But you won’t,” Vance says, pushing his body against mine. His cock presses against my stomach, and my mouth waters. “Will you, Little Bird?”

His question comes out as a demanding growl, like he is telling me who is in charge here.

“No,” I pant with so much need for this man that I might die from it.

Vance puts his arm around me. “Let’s go back to the cabin.”

We walk in silence. My only thought of him, how safe I am with his arm wrapped around my shoulder, how the only time in my life I’ve ever felt loved was in the arms of a killer.

As we walk into the bedroom, Vance immediately removes his pants. I can’t help but stare at the size of him. The man is an anaconda. Vance chuckles, leaning back against the dresser, his tattooed arms crossed over his massive chest. He is definitely good-looking. Almost Too good-looking.

“Like the view, Little Bird?” he asks.

I lick my lips, confirming that I do. I like the view very much, but my throat is too dry to utter a word. He has no inhibitions, not at all phased at his dick being on display, as if it’s the most natural thing in the world.

“That pink blush on your face is fuckin’ sexy. I’d like to see more of it.”

My hands fly to my face, as if I can literally somehow conceal my face from the smoldering expression on his. Ice-blue eyes roam down my body, and I feel naked, despite the heavy clothing on my skin.

Vance pushes off the dresser, the smirk on his face set in place as he strides towards me. I close my eyes, bracing myself for his touch and the turmoil of craving it will release, but nothing happens. I squint at him.

“Are you expecting something, Little Bird?” He laughs, bringing his thumb to my bottom lip, rubbing it, not so gently. He is still a few feet away, not so close where the heat of his body is affecting me but close enough that the desire pools in my pussy with a need I’ve never known in my life. I despise how my body just turns into jelly in his hands. In all my twenty-five years, I’d never been so affected by a man, and here I am basically a simp for my captor. “You’re gonna make me say it, aren’t you?”

Vance takes a step towards me, then another, each movement as if planned for my utter torture. His grin widens. He is enjoying the reaction he’s getting out of me. A game of cat and mouse with the mouse desperate to have the cat’s hands on her. “Remember what I told you in my office?”

I nod as the words he had said come crashing down on me. *Little Bird, I don’t rape women. When we have sex, you’re gonna beg for my cock in every single one of your holes and thank me for it.*

“Say it.”

“I want you to fuck me.”

His hand reaches up, his bloodstained fingers encircling my throat as he pins me against the wall with his massive body, his mouth crushing against mine. His lips are hot and taste like danger mixed with need. My lips part, allowing his tongue to slip inside. I feel like the room is spinning at the potent scent of him. Brutality, yearning, and intensity. He breaks away from me, his forehead resting on mine. “There’s no turning back, Little Bird. If we do this now, I can’t be gentle. My control is thin most days, but right now it’s obsolete. You got

the monster, baby. The man has gone away. If you want to stop, tell me.”

“Please don’t stop.”

Vance’s fingers slowly trail down my stomach and into the jogging pants and brush against my pussy lips. I push myself onto his hand. He chuckles. “You’re soaked for me, Little Bird, my greedy slut.”

I want to tell him I am, to degrade me, to make me his in every single way, but the words are stuck in my throat, too frightened to come out. Vance doesn’t need my words, or he doesn’t care about them. He can read my body like a book. I’ve never been with a lover who knows me so well. It is like my body is a custom toy made for him. He raises an eyebrow as his fingers move between my folds. “You’re such a good slut, Little Bird. Look how wet your dirty pussy is for me.”

He thrusts a finger inside me, driving in and out gently before adding another, and this time the thrusts are more intense, more urgent. He demands me to feel him in me. His thumb circles my clit, and my legs give out, but Vance holds me up with one arm. “Does that feel good, baby girl?”

My breathing is labored. I’m lost in the feelings of his fingers inside me. “Yes. Please don’t stop.” At my please, he yanks his fingers out of me, leaving me a crumpled mess in his arms. I feel pissed, frustrated, utterly out of control. “Why the hell did you stop?”

Vance takes his wet fingers and spreads my juice on my lips like a chapstick before he bends down and takes my mouth with his, his tongue slipping out to taste me. “You taste mighty fine, Little Bird.” He offers the two fingers that were in me a moment ago, and I open my mouth, accepting them greedily. I suck them like they are the last things I’ll ever have in my mouth, licking and cleaning them properly. Vance’s blue eyes are now hooded, and a slow smile curls his lips. “Looks like you’re good at sucking, Little Bird. You think you can handle more?”

“I want you, all of you. The good and the bad. I can take it.”

His fingers sweep through my hair before he fists it and jerks. I am transfixed by the expression in his eyes, heated, forceful, and full of danger. I am a deer caught in the headlights, frozen by his stare, but I am also powerful because the woman he desperately wants is me and only me. Vance's nostrils flare, and a growl unleashes from his lips as if he knows the power I hold. It's a challenge, and he is accepting it. "Don't be so assured, sweetheart. I'm gonna wreck you." His words are vile and there is no warmth in them, but his eyes soften as he gazes at me. I know I am safe with him and always will be. He's giving me exactly what I asked for, him without the mask, the real Vance. "On your knees."

Chapter 13

VANCE

I am an asshole.

This girl is all I can think about, and here I am getting her to act like a complete whore for me, but the thing is, she seems to want it. The look in her eyes when I pull her hair back is pure heat.

She falls to her knees, her pretty eyes peering up at me. My dick twitches. I've never been this hard for a girl in my entire life. There's something about Clarissa that drives every part of me mad, my dick included.

Her mouth falls open to speak, but I ram my cock in there.

Fuck!

The warmth of her mouth engulfs me, burning me to the very core. I peer down at her, my fingers tangled in her jet black hair. I should have fuckin' had her lying on the bed with my tongue on her sweet cunt, treating her like a queen. I don't know why I am doing this, but shit, I am so turned on that a part of me doesn't care. There will be a ton of time to fuck her like she's my good girl. Right now, I need her to be my whore.

"Eyes on me, Little Bird."

She glances up at me, her eyes hooded and full of lust, and I'm a goner. My fucking heart beats so fast, I might have a heart attack. The way she licks my cock like it's her favorite lollipop

flavor sends shivers down my spine. Death by blow job. Not a bad way to go if I croaked right here in Clarissa's mouth. She bends so easily for me, and I know I would do anything for her. She could fucking ruin me, and I wouldn't give a damn. I fist her raven hair in my hands. It's so soft—one could say some sappy shit, like it feels like clouds. I need to get some control back. To the naked eye, it might look like I'm in charge but we both know she is the one in the driver's seat. From the moment I saw her, she had all the control and I was left at her mercy. She's so fucking beautiful.

I pull her head, holding my cock still in her mouth, just enjoying her pretty lips covering my dick like a warm blanket. I push in and out slowly, just watching her. She squeezes her legs together, trying to give herself some relief. But I'm not having any of that. I want her like a bitch in heat, so mad with lust that all she can think about is my cock, mouth, and fingers. I push my foot between her thighs, pressing my toes to her pussy, before I nudge her legs apart. "Open your legs. If you do a good job slobbering on my dick, I might let you come."

My hands hold her face as I take a moment to just take in her sheer beauty before I ram my cock in her mouth and hear her moan. A growl escapes from my throat, and I tug her hair back as I push farther until I fuck her mouth like it's her pussy. I keep my eyes glued to hers the whole time, wanting her to know it was me and she was safe. She gags on my cock. The vibrations feel so good that I think I am gonna come like a teenager. I pull her off my dick, a thin line of saliva connecting her tongue to my cock like a leash. As soon as she catches her breath, I ram my cock into her again and hold her down. Her face is getting red, the fucking hottest thing I've ever seen. "You're doing such a good job, Little Bird. A natural cock sucker. You like a mouthful of cock in your mouth, don't you?"

I pull her hair to get her off my cock. When she goes to answer, drool falls out of her mouth. I catch it with my hand and smear it along her face, mixing it with the blood on my hands. "You make such a pretty whore."

I take a step back, watching her, mouth open and panting. Crouching down, I fist the bottom of the hoodie and drag it over her head, displaying her perfect tits and pretty pink nipples. All I want to do is bite into her tits like they are apples. I take in her beauty as I stroke my cock. “You’re gonna look so hot with my come plastered on your face and in your hair. Crawl to the bed.”

Clarissa bats her eyes at me and follows my command. I want to kick myself for not taking the jogging pants off her first. She stops at the end of the bed. I rip off the pants, dragging them off her feet, discarding them onto my bedroom floor.

I grip her by the waist and hoist her onto my bed. She yelps but takes it in stride. “Get on all fours, head down and ass up. You need my cock, Little Bird?”

“Yes!”

I brush my fingers through her folds, her juice coating my fingers. She is so fucking wet. She shudders from the slight touch. I press her clit, and she lets out the sexiest moan I’ve ever heard in my damn life. “You need a firm fucking, don’t you?”

“Yes, please, fuck me.”

“It’s time for your punishment.”

She swirls her head around, defiance laced in her eyes. “Punishment?”

“Yes, Little Bird, your punishment. You don’t think I forgot about that little stunt when you ran away from me, did you?”

“What are you gonna do?”

I bend down, eye level with her soaking cunt. I press my nose to her glistening hole and inhale. I’d dreamt about burying my face so deep in her cunt. Using the tip of my tongue, licking her sweet juice from the source. “You smell so good, slut. I’m gonna demand this cunt be available to me whenever I want a little treat.”

“Don’t stop.”

I run my hands slowly from the back of her knee, up her thigh, across her pussy, and squeeze her plump ass.

Smack. My hand connects with her ass, leaving a handprint. She moans, raising her ass. “Did you like that, slut?” She doesn’t answer right away. My hand lifts and contacts firmly with the other cheek. She lurches. “I asked you a question. Did you like it when I spanked your ass?”

“Yes.”

The urge to take her is so strong, bruising the head of my cock against her folds when I thrust once, making her moan. She greedily tries to impale herself on my cock. I step back to enjoy the view of her ass in the air, her hips circling, her body desperate for release. “Beg for it.”

“You’re an asshole.”

“I told you, you’ll be begging for my cock in all of your holes. Now beg.”

My hand moves up and down my shaft, pointed at her glistening pussy, and my mouth waters with her taste lingering on my tongue.

“Please fuck me, Vance. Please, I’m begging you.”

Grabbing her hips, I line my cock with her entrance, kissing her back. “That’s all I wanted to hear.” I push inside her, taken aback by how her pussy grabs my cock like a vise. I growl, “You’re so fuckin’ tight.” My legs almost give out on me as I slide in and out of her wet pussy. She feels so damn good, I’m not sure I’m not about to nut after a few minutes.

“Oh God.”

I slap her ass hard to gain her attention. “When I’m fuckin’ you, I only want my name coming out of your mouth.”

“Vance!”

“Good girl.”

My hands latch on to her hips, holding tight, my cock going full force, assaulting her pussy. Clarissa’s head drops, her screams muffled by the pillow. I pull her hair back, arching her

back. My hand wraps around her throat, squeezing, not enough to harm her but enough for her to know the full force of the fucking she is getting. My heart constricts at the level of trust she's putting in me. "Rub your pussy for me."

Her hand shoots down to her clit, and she moans as we move in unison.

Her breathing is ragged. "I'm gonna come."

I place a kiss on her shoulder. "Come for me, Little Bird. Let me hear you scream."

Her pussy constricts on my cock as her body falls forward, and she comes with my name on her lips. I slam into her, my hand holding her body immobile on the bed until I come with such force that I think I might pass out.

She smiles at me, the smile of a woman who just got thoroughly fucked. "That was amazing."

"Oh Little Bird, I'm nowhere done with you yet."

Chapter 14

C LARISSA

I am not sure where this man came from, but the sex I just had was so mind shattering that he could chain me to a bed for the rest of my life and I wouldn't complain.

The bed moves slightly as Vance lies down beside me. "Get on my face."

"What?"

"You heard me, Little Bird. Be a good girl and sit on my face."

I stare at Vance beneath me as I move up, his come sliding down my thigh. His hand shoots up as he traces the come with his fingers before sucking the finger clean. "My come mixed with your juice... Delicious." Reaching up, his hands land on my thighs as he pulls me down.

"I don't want to suffocate you."

"Little Bird, you don't need to worry about suffocating me. I'm gonna tongue-fuck you so hard that you should worry about drowning me."

I hover over his mouth.

"Sit on my fuckin' face, Clarissa. Don't make me tell you again." His hands grip my hips firmly as he forces me down on his tongue.

Vance licks up and down my tender flesh. I jolt when he gently nips at my clit before his tongue soothes me. I never thought a

man eating me out after sex could be so hot, but here I am, riding his face like an animal. His teeth graze my lips, a gentle nip letting me know to behave before he slurps at my pussy. He mumbles into my pussy, “So wet and so fuckin’ delicious.”

My hips move on their own, grounding in his face.

“That’s it, babe. Ride my face. Use it to get off. Your hungry cunt is so fuckin’ hot. I want you to drench my face with your cream.” His dirty words are driving me wild.

I grab the bed frame, holding myself up, afraid my legs will give out of me. He squeezes my outer lips, spreading me wider as he growls into my pussy, his tongue exploring the sensitive flesh. His tongue grinds against my clit. A slow, torturous rhythm at first, then an increasing tempo that becomes more aggressive, faster, and intense. I move my hips up and down, moving with his tongue until I come like I’ve never come before.

I move to climb off him, but he holds me still as his mouth clasps onto my center and he gently licks me. The intensity of his touch builds until I come undone from the unimaginable pleasure. My body shudders as another tiny orgasm surges through me, which causes Vance to let go.

Vance grins, his face glistening from my juice. He reaches for me and cups my face before bringing my face down to his and crushing my lips with a searing kiss. His lips aren’t gentle. The need he has is apparent as he bites my lips, hard. He isn’t a gentleman but I don’t care because he is mine. Even with all the brutality, I know he is mine just like I am his. As we break apart, he brings his forehead to mine. The look in his eyes is concern laced with desire, and I can see how he is battling within himself. “I’m sorry, Little Bird.”

“What? What do you have to be sorry about?”

“You’re fuckin’ perfect. I want to do this right. I say we take a shower and we start over. This time I am going to worship your body like the temple it is.”

I don’t know why, but his words are arrows to my heart. This beautiful man who rocked my world just moments ago seems

to be rocking my heart even faster. “Okay.”

“Good girl.”

Chapter 15

VANCE

The water cascades down her tits, making my mouth water. My raven is so fuckin' hot. I palm her tit in one hand while my other hand pushes her to my raging hard-on. She sighs as her head tilts back. I nuzzle her head then trail kisses along her shoulder all the way to her neck.

"You're like Midas."

I chuckle, nipping at her earlobe. "You're better than gold, sweetheart." My hand trails down her body to her cunt. "Wet again so soon?"

Her breathing is labored as I gently rub her clit. "Wrap your legs around me, Little Bird."

Clarissa doesn't hesitate. I support her weight as she slides her legs up my calves, across my ass, until they are finally around my waist. My dick twitches as it touches her pussy. This girl has me leaking. I thrust my hips, and suddenly I am in her warmth.

I bury my head in her shoulder and groan. "Fuck."

I pound into her, letting her know how much she controls me, how desperate I am for her. Trying to tell her with my cock how I'm hers forever and only hers.

She whimpers, "Please don't stop. Oh God."

I stop moving. Her eyes flash open, looking at me with concern. I hold her up with one hand while my other hand grabs at her throat, pushing her up against the tile. "I will not tell you again, Little Bird. The only name I want on your lips when I'm fucking you is mine."

She has the nerve to smirk at me. The brat. Clarissa slowly licks her lip, like a challenge. I loosen my grip on her jugular. "If you don't want me to call to God, then don't fuck me like one."

I drop her legs, turning her around. My arm on her neck, my hand fists her hair. I line my cock up to her pussy and plunge into her, hard. She screams, her hands running along the wall tiles. "You wanna be a brat? I'm gonna fuck you like a brat."

She moans, backing her ass to meet my thrusts. "Fuck. I think I prefer being your brat over your good girl."

I pound into her with no mercy. I am an ass once again. My dick has no self-control with her. Her pussy walls contract, squeezing my prick, and I pull out.

She angles towards me, her tits the only thing I can focus on. "What are you doing? Why did you stop?"

"Brats don't get to come."

She grins. Her arms run along my torso before she flings them around my neck and sulks. "I'm sorry I was a bad girl. What can I do to make it up to you?"

A growl erupts from deep in my chest. This girl is going to be the death of me. I turn the shower off, picking her up and then almost running to the bedroom and tossing her onto the bed. I move to the closet and grab a thick leather belt.

Clarissa's eyes widen. "What are you gonna do with that?"

A smirk forms on my lips as I walk towards her. Fear flashes in her eyes before she reins it in. "You trust me?"

"Yes."

I need to be sure. "Little Bird. I promise I'll never hurt you. Anything I do to you is for your pleasure." I run the leather

strap of the belt in my hands while my eyes lock with hers, holding her stare. “*Our* pleasure.”

Her shoulders move back, making her tits look even larger. “I trust you.”

I move to the bed, gathering both her wrists with one hand, holding them against the metal headboard. I tie her hands together with the belt, sticking my fingers in the knot, making sure they are tight enough that she can't move but not tight enough where they can hurt her delicate flesh. Leaning down, I kiss her forehead. I caress her hair before gliding my fingers down her face. “I will take good care of you, sweetheart. I promise.”

She is so beautiful. The trust she has in me makes me feel like a king. She will never doubt my admiration or my love. I'll never give her a reason to. I plan to worship her like the queen she is for the rest of my life, laying my life down at her feet. I trail my tongue down her flesh, stopping at her breasts and taking a nipple into my mouth. I suck at her nub. Her hips come up, her pretty pussy grinding against my chest, making me chuckle. My girl is insatiable. I bite her nipple. “Behave, Little Bird.” I continue down her body, licking her navel as my fingers fondle her nipple, and I tweak them. When I get to the top of her pussy, I bite her flesh, loving the way she squirms under me. Spreading her pussy apart, I take a long lick. “So sweet, so soft, so pink.”

She thinks I am about to fuck her with my tongue, but she's wrong. I pull her legs up, and my hand glides along her soaking slit before I slap it. Clarissa moans, her eyes closed as her head lashes back. “Eyes on me.”

Clairssa's eyes flash open. They are wide, and she looks so innocent, so sweet. I grin at her before I lick her pussy again. She moans, relaxing on the bed as my tongue glides from her hole to her clit. I press my tongue on her clit before adding a finger to her cunt, moving it in and out before adding a second finger and curling to find her g-spot. Her hips move back and forth, her body writhing in need, so fucking hot. I palm my cock with my other hand and pump hard and fast, matching

the rhythm of my fingers in her pussy. “You wanna come, Little Bird?”

“Yes,” she whispers as I ram my cock into her and fuck her in a slow, torturous rhythm.

“Eyes on me, sweetheart,” I grunt, sounding more like an animal than a man. I stare into her beautiful eyes, kissing along her lips, cheek, along her jawline, whispering in her ear, “I love you,” right before we come apart together.

Reaching up, I undo the belt and rub her wrists. “You okay?”

“Okay? That was the best sexual experience of my life. Everything you do is so damn intense.”

I chuckle, pulling her into my arms and kissing the top of her head. “It’s only intense ‘cause of how I feel about you.”

Clarissa snuggles into me.

“Close your eyes, sweetheart. Get some rest. You’re gonna need it in the morning.”

Epilogue

Five Years Later

CLARISSA

Vance is pacing back and forth in the bedroom. His hands open and close into fists. I am not sure what his reaction is going to be. He doesn't hide his thoughts or feelings from me anymore, but from the moment I took the test out of my purse he's been hiding his emotions. He sees me and stops in his tracks, his eyes boring into mine. "Well?

I cast my eyes down, twirling the little stick in my hand. He's at my side in an instant, his hands in my hair before cupping my face. "Little Bird, what's the matter?"

I shove the stick at him. "We're having a baby."

Vance falls at my feet, a loud thud from where his knees hit the hardwood. Sobs rack through him as he nuzzles my belly, placing gentle kisses on the entire surface. "Hello, little one. I'm your daddy."

I rub his head as he talks to our unborn child, not believing how lucky I am. This strong, crazy, powerful man had taken my heart and put it back together again.

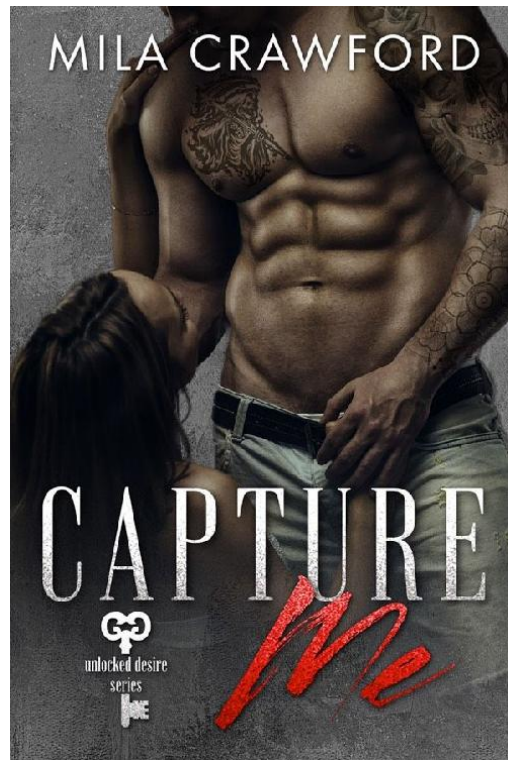
Vance Matthew is the best thing to have ever happened to me. Before him, I was alone, sad, and lonely. Then he came into my life with all his psychotic ways and turned it upside down. When he asked me to marry him three years ago, I jumped on him like a banshee, wrapping my arms and legs around him,

and screamed yes. Today proves it is the best decision I've ever made.

I bend down, looking into his tear-filled eyes. "I love you. Thank you for my life."

He kisses me gently on the lips. "I love *you*. Thank you for *being* my life."

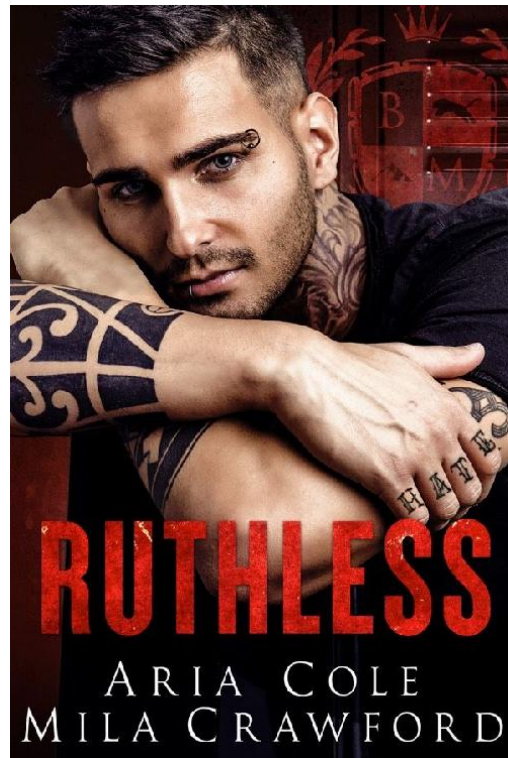
The End



I'm not your savior princess, I'm the monster that's been lurking in the dark.

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Excerpt from *Ruthless*



“Angry people are not always wise.”

- Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice

Madison

I was seventeen when we moved to Black Mountain, a neighborhood brimming with affluence in such a coveted zip code that the idea of knowing someone without massive wealth was like knowing a Martian.

In this case, *me*.

I took in my clothes, all purchased on a frugal budget at Target, and then my eyes drifted to the massive stone and brick mansion with the large, rounded wooden door, adorned with a large lion knocker.

This mansion was the size of our entire block back home.

With slow movements, I edged open the door of the car and stood. I stretched my legs, eyes taking in the property and looking for any nearby neighbors. But the main house, two small guesthouses, and acres upon acres of forest dominated my view. The land around us was absolutely breathtaking, a country hamlet in the midst of the city chaos, but the house was the most surprising of all—Gothic spires and cold, hard angles, in complete contrast with the lush green of the trees.

“Debbbbbie! Oh my gosh, you’re finally here! How long has it been? Almost twenty years?” A tall, elegant blonde approached my mother, embracing her warmly.

“Nineteen to be exact. It’s so good to see you, Monica. I’ve missed you,” my mother said, smiling. *“This is my daughter, Madison. Maddy, come here and say hello to Mrs. Sinclair.”*

I walked around the front of the car, offering my hand to the woman. Her hands were long and elegant; I couldn't help but wonder if she played the piano.

"Oh, come here," Monica said after shaking my hand, pulling me to her for a hug. I liked her instinctively; she was warm, and her eyes looked kind.

"It's nice to meet you, Mrs. Sinclair. You have a beautiful home," I said, both my hands in hers.

"Oh, hon—you're Debbie's baby girl, please call me Monica. No need for all that Mrs. Sinclair business." She smiled at me, and I noticed how her eyes seemed to light up when she did.

She looked genuinely happy to see my mother and me; her kindness made me feel a little better about being there.

"You two must be starving, I have lunch waiting."

My mother put her arm around me, and as we walked into the house, I looked up to the intricate detail of the widow's peak, shocked to see a figure in the window peering at us.

A man dressed in what looked like all black clothing.

As soon as my eyes connected with his, he dropped the drapes and disappeared from sight.

Monica ushered us in through the front door, and I was overtaken by the magnitude of the house. It felt like I was just plucked out of an ordinary life and plopped into the house of a celebrity. Luxury dripped from every corner of the opulent home. The floors of the grand entrance were a cream marble, leading all the way to and around a large mahogany staircase in the middle of the space. Solid gold mirrors and trim highlighted the crimson and wood-hued details.

Art covered nearly every wall, and sparkling drops of crystal hung from the grand chandelier.

"Wow, Monica. Your home is breathtaking," my mother said, her voice laced with awe. I couldn't help but feel the sting of pain and shame. For as long as I could remember, my mother had worked her fingers to the bone—until she was tired and deflated, with little time or energy left over for chaperoning school dances or volunteering for field trips.

When my father died, life wasn't easy. Bills piled up, debt suffocated us, and my mother, being the woman she was, refused to let life ruin her. After a few weeks, she was in the workforce, making the most of it for us.

For me.

I never felt slighted or that we wanted for anything, and it was because she wouldn't allow that to happen. I was her everything, and there wasn't a day that she didn't show it.

She even moved us here—to Black Mountain—one of the wealthiest areas in the country, and took a job working for her private-school best friend, so we could afford the tuition for my own private education. She wanted me to have the choice of the best universities, and she knew that would come with a price. My grades qualified me for a small grant to attend the prestigious Black Mountain Academy, but it nowhere near covered the full cost of my schooling. Luckily, I only had one year before I graduated and then I would be off to college, Black Mountain fading in my rear-view mirror.

I knew deep down Mom hadn't wanted to come back here. She never talked about her time going to college with Monica, it was almost as if her life started after she left here—after she moved to the small town I was born in. She never talked about her past; it was as if life never existed before me.

"This old house is a mausoleum. I absolutely hate it, but it's been in Edward's family for generations." Monica interrupted my train of thought. "If it were up to me, we'd be living somewhere else. This place is completely void of warmth. Every few years I mention listing it, just to see if we'd catch any bites, but he won't hear of it," Monica said, her perfectly manicured hand gliding across an art sculpture on a white marble table. "The kitchen's this way; the chef has put out a gorgeous spread. I wasn't sure what you might like to eat, Madison, so it may look like a lot," she said with a laugh, putting her arm around my mother.

Their heads pressed together like a couple of girls plotting their next adventure. I was surprised how drawn I felt to Monica, but what the house lacked in warmth she made up for tenfold.

I especially loved how relaxed my mother was with her. I'd never seen that young and carefree smile on her face before.

I followed quietly behind the two of them, down the long hall, admiring the various rooms as I went by: a living room, an old-fashioned parlor, and a powder room that was probably larger than our entire old apartment.

When we got to the dining room, a vast spread awaited us. A table covered in sandwiches, delectable fruits, and pastries that looked like they'd fallen out of some Parisian bakery drew me in.

"Please, eat," Monica said, handing each of us a tiny decorative plate, embossed with the initials of the house. Precious china with gold lacing the edges.

I couldn't help wondering exactly how rich you had to be to afford gold-embossed plates.

"Thank you so much—this looks amazing," my mom said, taking a bite of a cucumber and cream cheese sandwich. I picked up a square and nibbled, the taste of decadent cream and puff pastry invading my mouth and creating a delicious symphony.

"This is absolutely divine," I said in a moan, immediately embarrassed at my sheer pleasure.

"It's good, isn't it? We fly those in from this amazing French pastry shop in New York City. They're vegan." Monica smiled.

"Wait, this doesn't have any butter in it?" I asked.

"No butter. They're Kyler's favorite. He is anti-any-animal. Just one of his many idiosyncrasies." She waved her hand in the air.

"How is Kyler doing?" Mom asked, shades of sympathy lacing her warm, dark eyes.

"Kyler is Kyler. He at least does well in his studies," Monica said, her own eyes shadowed with longing, elegant features now etched with sorrow. "If you see him around the house, just give him a wide berth. I don't know what to do with that boy.

For the last seven years, all he's been doing is getting into trouble. We've tried everything. I think he just likes to *torture* his father and me. He used to be such a good, sweet boy. I remember when he would curl up beside me in the library and read one of his picture books while I read one of my mystery novels. At least his love of reading hasn't changed." Monica took a sip of her coffee. My mother

rushed over to her and placed her arms around her shoulders, like she was trying to help unload some of the burden her friend carried.

“Monica, is it okay if Madison visits the library? I think she would really enjoy it up there.” My mother sent me a look. Monica may not have noticed my mother’s motivations, but I knew my mom well enough to know she wanted me out of the room in order to talk to her best friend. Mom didn’t want me to hear that particular conversation. I wondered how close they were back then, and what my mom might say to her now, after so many years apart.

“Oh, yes! Of course, Madison. It’s up the stairs on the left; you can’t miss it. Please feel free to treat it as your own; any book you want—take and read.”

I nodded gratefully, getting up from the table and leaving all those pastries behind me. I paused at the massive staircase and then began climbing it slowly, gliding my hands along the smooth carvings on the wood railing. This house felt more like a museum than a home. I wasn’t sure how anyone could actually live here. At least, that’s what I was thinking until I saw the large room stashed wall to wall with books.

The library was a paradise, it smelled of leather and rich, oiled wood. All the walls, covered with bookshelves, thousands of leather bound works, and just whispering the pads of my fingers along the spines made my heart flutter. A desk sat in the corner, and comfortable seating consisting of large chocolate-brown leather chairs, decorated the space. It looked like it belonged in a showroom more than someone’s personal residence. I crossed the formal space, touching each book I passed as if saying hello, until my hand found an old copy of *Pride and Prejudice*, my all-time favorite. I flipped through the pages and picked a random one. I began to read, and then all of a sudden a deep voice read the words before me.

“There are few people whom I really love, and still fewer of whom I think well. The more I see of the world, the more I am dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the inconsistency of all human characters,” the voice deepened at my ear, *“and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of merit or sense.”*

I jumped, turning around to face the voice that’d interrupted me. There stood the most beautiful boy I’d ever seen. He leaned against one of the bookcases, dressed in black jeans and a t-shirt, his jet-black hair falling in his face, piercing blue eyes mesmerizing. My gaze settled on his full lips, adorned with a silver loop on the right side.

My eyes trailed down his lean yet muscular body, and I couldn’t help but notice his thick arms and neck, covered in tattoos. He didn’t look like he belonged in a house like this, or in a town like this one. He looked like someone who didn’t want anyone to notice them, but I noticed.

I noticed so much that I couldn’t yank my eyes away.

“What are you doing in here?” he asked, his voice deep and demanding. I was stunned.

I stood frozen, not sure what to do.

The way he looked at me was like he was trying to set me on fire. His eyes looked to be filled with hatred and I wasn’t sure why. Those hard eyes traveled down my body and made me feel exposed and vulnerable. His index finger came out and he trailed the top edge of the leather bound book in my hands, his fingers slender just like Monica’s.

I noticed the letters tattooed boldly.

H-A-T-E.

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