



STALKED

BY THE

Marine

DEARLY DEVOTED SERIES

CASSI HART

Stalked by the Marine

—
Dearly Devoted Series

Cassi Hart

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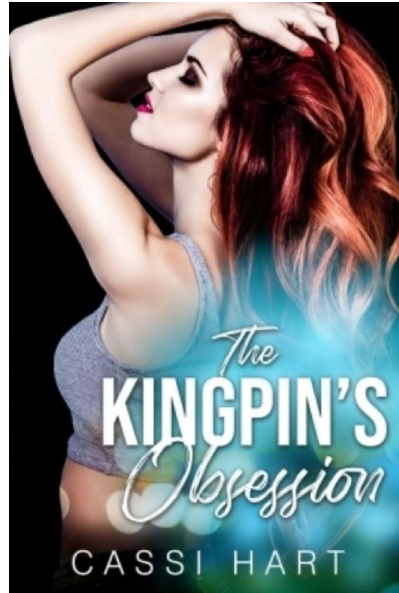
First Edition

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Free Book for You



Be the first to know about new releases,
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Dedicated to my love of bad boys, hell bent on getting what they want. Thank you for your support, enjoy!

WARNING: Dark themes, Age gap, revenge, safe stalking, extra OTT possessive hero.



Cassi H♥rt

Contents:

[Free Book for You](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Up Next...](#)

[Other Books by Cassi](#)

[Free Book](#)

[About the Author](#)

Prologue

Caleb

As I cross the busy airport, there's only one thing on my mind. For months, it has consumed my every thought, and become my sole reason for existence. There is nothing that can distract me from enacting my plans.

I'm going to bring the fuckers who framed me to justice.

It's been over a year since my life fell apart right before my very eyes, but that year has given me time to plan. Because of them, innocent people can get hurt, and I'd never live with myself if I let them get away with it. It's fine if I'm caught in the crossfire, but I'm not about to let the fuckers who threw me in military prison get away with their acts of treason. No one tells you how dirty a soldier can play when they grow bored of the structure, when someone offers to pay them more.

My strides are long as I stop by the baggage claim, but my focus is elsewhere. I ignore the chatter around me and collect my luggage. These people don't know who I am, what I've done, what has happened to me. It makes it easy to blend into the crowd, or at least, easy as it can be when you're as big as I am.

For close to two decades, I bet my entire life and career in the Marines on people I thought I could trust only for them to use me for their selfish ends. I was just a pawn for them. Someone convenient to throw under the bus to distract from their true objectives.

Perhaps they should have stuck around to ensure that I stayed down after being laid low. That was their first mistake. I've had a year to mull over how to expose their plans and make them hurt as much as possible.

A year spent locked up in the brig, with nothing to do but channel all my energy into making them pay.

My thoughts are spinning so hard as I make it out to the airport's main lobby that I don't notice I've run into someone until she's sprawled out on the floor in a disarray of long, pale hair and slender limbs.

For a moment, I'm struck dumb, unable to say anything or even move to help the person I've knocked over. The next moment I'm blinded by the smile beaming up at me. Wide brown eyes and a sweet face giggle up at me.

"I'm so sorry," the young woman giggles, her voice soft and sweet. "I didn't even see you there."

Her laugh is mesmerizing. I can't help dropping my luggage to reach a hand down to help her to her feet. As I pull her up, she stumbles into my chest and my arms wrap around her on instinct. Warmth blossoms through my clothes, and that's when I realize that this girl is truly little more than a slip, a little angel sent to bring me out of my thoughts.

"I wasn't looking where I was going. Did I hurt you?" she gasps, looking straight into my eyes and down into my soul.

I fight a laugh. It's hard to believe that someone would miss seeing me. I'm built like a tank and am used to towering over everyone around me. This little thing wouldn't be able to hurt me if she wanted to, and yet, I can't bear the thought that she

thinks she could hurt anyone. Someone like her can't be capable of doing that. She's too good, too sweet to do something like that.

But I can't find my tongue long enough to tell her that. All of the blood in my body is rushing to my cock, rather than helping my brain form the words I want to say. The longer her body is tucked against mine, the harder I become for her.

Fuck. This can't be happening now. I can't get a hard-on in public. Not after a chance brush with a sweet thing like her.

I stand rooted to the spot. None of this feels real. For the first time in months, I forget what brought me here. Perhaps I hit my head somewhere and this is all some figment of my imagination. At this point, it's the only thing that makes any sense. Well, that and the fact that this stranger has upended my life.

Her large, doe-like brown eyes blink up at me as her fist curls into my shirt. Her pale, almost white hair is in disarray, and all I can think about is helping her push it out of her face and running my hands through it. Maybe even pulling it.

Suddenly, the girl lets out an awkward chuckle, her eyes shining with something good-natured but enticing. Like a moth to a flame, I am drawn even deeper into her orbit. She backs out of my hold before reaching down to grab her bag and lifts it onto her shoulder.

"I'm sorry for bumping into you," she murmurs, her cheeks flushing a pretty pink as she now avoids my gaze. "I was a little distracted and wasn't really paying attention to where I was going. I'll be more careful next time."

I nod down at her, still unable to speak. I open my lips to say something—*anything*—when her eyes flit to something behind me and they light up.

My chest tightens as a wave of jealousy overwhelms me. I don't know who or what made her make that face, but I want to be the person to do that for her. I want it so badly that I'm half afraid to turn around and see the source of her joy.

I jealously watch her smile grow as she runs past me, her long sundress swirling around her when she throws herself at a woman that looks like an older version of her. The two are all smiles and laughter as they make their way to the doors outside.

As they exit the lobby, I still can't make myself move. I'm too confused, lost in my head once more but not because of my plans. There's something strange in my chest, as if I've lost something by losing sight of her.

I want her.

I need her.

I find myself in careful pursuit of them as I follow them out of the building. There's a car idling for them and as they load the older woman's bags into the trunk, I hail a taxi. My eyes don't leave them once as I climb into the car. When I tell the cab driver to follow their car, he tries to protest, but one look at my hardened face and cold eyes has the words dying before he can even speak them. He doesn't bother with small talk after that but does as I ask and tails the car as it makes its way through the city.

I shouldn't be doing this. I shouldn't be following some stranger I literally just ran into at the airport. And yet, there's an aching sense of loss heavy in my chest when I think about having the cab driver take me to the hotel I'm staying at. I can't do it. I can't even make myself fight the urge.

I've never felt anything like this before. Something in me rekindled the moment my eyes met hers. Nothing has felt right like this, not since I started serving in the military. My life has always had to revolve around something and for so long it was my job. Then it was making my plan.

Now it's her.

As we follow the car out to a suburb—the one I need to be in, coincidentally—I think about what this means for me now. I can do two things at once. My plan involves a lot of down time. I can use that to find out more about this little angel of mine.

I even wonder if I'm worthy of her. I'm just a former soldier, kicked out for a crime I didn't commit, shamed by a record I didn't earn. No one talks about the dirty politics at play in the military and how well they fuck the people just trying to make their way with a job they love. You're only useful to them when weak-minded, and that's why they took me out before I could do the same to them.

The bitterness I felt before comes back in an instant. Just in time for the cab driver to interrupt it by saying, "Sir, we're here." He's looking at me with a careful look on his face.

Out the windshield, I can see that the car we were following has parked at a nice restaurant. The girl who ran into me and the older woman she's with are exiting their car. The very

sight of my new obsession, my new *weakness*, sends the anger back into the shadowy parts of my brain.

I reach into my pocket for my wallet and hand the driver a wad of bills without counting before climbing out of the car.

I should turn around and leave.

I should save this little dove from a monster like me by staying away but it's too late now. She's mine. The second she bumped into me and fell into my arms, she became mine. Mine to watch, mine to cherish, mine to protect.

She just doesn't know it yet.

Chapter 1

Erin

One month later ...

“It’s hot as hell in here. Turn on the AC before I suffer a heatstroke.”

“It’s broken,” I mutter under my breath, not bothering to look up as I run the towel over the counter. I stop only to wipe the sweat off my forehead with the back of my hand before resuming with the task at hand. The air is thick and muggy. Every breath I take feels like a chore because our boss hasn’t gotten around to fixing the air conditioner. We’re stuck with toughing it out for the fourth day in a row.

I can feel Lina looking me up and down before she sighs, stepping up to the counter I’m furiously wiping. “What’s up? You seem tense.”

I shoot her a look before resuming my task at hand. After working with Lina for close to a year now, we’re close enough to get a read on each other’s moods. It can be a gift, but it can also be a bit of a curse.

“It’s hot as hell outside which is making working in here without the AC terrible, and the fact that Mike won’t fix it—”

“Are you sure it’s the heat that’s making you cranky and not the absence of a certain tasty-looking regular for his usual lunch break here?”

As if I weren’t hot enough, my cheeks flare with the heat of embarrassment. Thank goodness I’m already flushed red

because of the temperature inside the diner. I don't want to give her more to tease me about when I'm already in a low mood. "I don't know what you're talking about," I say.

"Oh? Really? He's tall, dark, and broody, orders the same thing every time he comes in, which is every single day," Lina smirks. "Has eyes only for his extra crispy bacon and a certain blonde with big brown eyes."

"He does *not* have eyes for me," I protest, even though my heart skips a few beats excitedly at the thought of being noticed by a guy like him. I continue to wipe furiously at the counter even though it's already clean. Anything to avoid eye contact with Lina. "He doesn't even know I exist. And my eyes aren't that big."

"First of all, you give Bambi a run for his money. Second, don't play that shit with me. I know you've got the hots for him. I've never seen you take a shine to a regular like this. I mean hell, I'd totally flirt with him if I thought I could but no matter who serves him, it's only you he looks at," Lina muses.

The thought of Lina trying to flirt with the stranger in question makes jealousy flare in my belly. She's so much more confident than I am, and so much better at talking to all of the different kinds of people we serve. I know she's technically all talk because she's not looking for a relationship right now, but just the thought that she would put the moves on him makes me feel sick to my stomach.

When I started working here at the diner a few years ago, fresh out of high school, my goal was to save up and buy the place from the owner once he retired, preserving it as a landmark for our little suburb outside the city. Instead, I'm living paycheck

to paycheck. I can barely afford food for my cat and buying myself ice cream, let alone a business loan. My stepdad had offered to buy it for me, but I didn't like how he talked to me when he gave me the proposition. Moreover, this feels like something I need to do for myself.

As tight as it's been for me recently, the silent, stoic stranger has been the highlight of most of my days. Not that I'd ever admit that to Lina, let alone any of our other coworkers. I want them to see me as a competent hard worker, not as some little girl with a crush.

Even so, I can't ignore the draw I feel to the man. Over the past month, he's come in every day for lunch without fail, but not today. It's almost five in the afternoon and he hasn't shown up yet. Not that I was waiting for him or anything.

"He doesn't have eyes for me," I grunt, ignoring the sad pang of letting my hope die.

"You just don't see it because you only look at him when he's not looking at you," she says as she clicks her tongue. When she doesn't say anything else, I glance up to see that she's looking past me at the door to the diner.

When I turn around to follow her look, my eyes lock with a familiar blue gaze, and my heart stutters to a stop.

He's here. Oh god. I'm so not prepared for this right now.

Okay, breathe, Erin. No need to get worked up over a regular like this, even if he's the most ruggedly handsome man I've ever laid eyes on.

I quickly drop the towel in my hands back into the sani bucket before washing my hands, willing my heart to stop acting up.

As soon as I'm done, however, Lina is pushing me out from behind the counter and pressing a menu into my hands before I can even protest. She even stops the other waitress working from going out, instead giving me one last gentle shove out into the dining area.

"We're going to let Erin take this one," she says with a devious look in her eyes. The other waitress, Abby, smiles and nods with a knowing smirk.

Traitors.

I can count on one hand the number of times I've served him, mostly because getting so close to him makes me incredibly nervous. I'm satisfied with looking from afar. I don't have time to worry about men or romance, not when I'm trying to save up any extra cash that comes my way.

But now, Lina's making me do this.

With shaking knees, I walk over to the booth my stranger has elected to sit in. As soon as I get there, I place the menu in front of him and start running through my usual introductory spiel, the same one I give to any customer that walks through the door. He listens intently, his eyes not leaving my face once. It's all I can do to keep my composure, the intensity of his attention threatening to melt me on the spot.

Up close like this, I'm reminded how truly big he is. His hair is dark and thick, while his skin is tanned from being out in the sun. It makes me wonder if all the muscle he's hidden beneath his t-shirt has been earned from hard labor or if he just likes working out. Some part of me hopes that it's the labor. Something about him seems too active for spending that much time in a gym.

What am I saying? That's none of my business at all!

It's only when his gaze flickers that I realize he must have said something. I was too busy getting lost in thinking about his muscles to catch it.

"I'm sorry, one more time, sir?"

"What are the specials today?" he asks with a small smile. His eyes crinkle at the corners, making his face look kind and yet devastating all at once.

"Oh. We have an Eggs Benedict today. We can also switch out the Canadian bacon for greens to make it Eggs Florentine if you want that instead. It's served with hashbrowns and a little cup of fruit."

He blinks up at me thoughtfully for a moment before saying, "That sounds good. I'll do the Eggs Benedict. Hashbrowns extra crispy if you can and then the biggest cup of black coffee you've got."

His voice is so low and warm that I almost get lost in it and miss his order. After scribbling out what he wants on my notepad, I say in my most perky customer service voice, "Great! We'll have that out for you shortly!"

"Thank you, Erin," he responds.

The world seems to tilt on its axis and my soul feels like it's going to leave my body. Before I can stop it, a question tumbles out of my mouth. "You know my name?"

The stranger's smile grows just a little wider and his eyes sparkle. He points to the nametag pinned to my apron.

“Oh. R-Right. Okay, we’ll have that out in just a moment for you.”

I can’t get back behind the counter fast enough. I add the order to the kitchen’s queue and try to make myself scarce but before I can escape for the frigid air of the walk-in refrigerator, Lina appears at my side.

“I’m having Abby get his coffee. How did it go?”

“It didn’t,” I scowl. “You’re on my shit list for that.”

Lina shrugs. “You’re like a baby bird, hon. Sometimes you need a little push out of your comfort zone.”

The worst part is that I know she’s right. I know I haven’t done a good job of my attraction to him, but I never expected her to try to make me make good on it. I can’t even be mad at her for it. I know she’s just trying to help in her own “Lina” way.

“I just don’t get why I think he’s so hot.”

“It’s the rugged man thing. It’s just science. But then again, I think everyone that walks through those doors is hot as long as they have all their teeth and hair, so what do I know? My standards are not what I’d call high.”

The little laugh that gives me helps me center myself. I’m at work, I can’t lose myself to nerves like that, so I focus on steeling myself for when I have to take his order over to him.

I watch from afar as Abby delivers a thick-sided mug of coffee to his table, and he thanks her with a nod and a carefully neutral expression. His eyes flicker to mine as she leaves his table and I swear something strange, even hungry, passes over his face in that moment.

I swallow nervously and look away.

I don't know this man. I don't know anything about him. For all I know, he could have a girlfriend. Maybe even a wife or kids. He probably doesn't have space for me in his life and the thought has me reeling.

Suddenly, there's the ding of a bell and someone from the kitchen calling out "Service, please!" to the waitstaff. I look over and see that it's my stranger's order. Before I can even think of throwing Lina a pleading look to take it out instead of me, she's pushing me over to the service window so that she can make sure I pick up the plate instead of Abby.

"Relax, he likes you," she says encouragingly. "I've got to help someone who just came in, but I promise, you're doing great."

"I'm making you trade a closing shift with me for this," I say through gritted teeth as I force my customer service smile on. Lina laughs in response as we head out onto the floor.

I make my way over to the table the stranger is sitting at, and it doesn't escape me that his eyes are on me as I go. He watches me intently as I set the plate in front of him and ask if he needs anything else.

"A water maybe, it's a bit hot in here."

"Tell me about it," I huff before I can think better of it. "I've been trying to get the boss to fix it for days and he hasn't done it yet."

"Is that so?" he muses. "If I owned the place, I'd take better care of it and the staff."

"Tell me about it."

“I’ll go grab you that water—”

Abruptly, I’m stopped by a large hand wrapping around my wrist, gently, but firmly. This isn’t the first time a customer has invaded my personal bubble, but it’s the only time I can think of where the touch has sent a thrill shooting up my spine instead of a chill.

“Real quick,” the handsome stranger says. “You’re a local, right? I have a question about getting around.”

“Yeah, born and raised around here,” I say breathlessly. His hand is so big, the pads of his fingers rough with calluses. In spite of the heat, I can feel goosebumps prickling up and down my arms. “What can I help you with?”

He motions to the seat across from him in the booth. I glance back at the counter nervously, but to my shock, Lina nods eagerly, so I let myself sit down for a moment. My blood rushes through my ears and it takes all I can to not squeal when our knees brush against one another’s under the table.

Deep breaths, Erin. He’s just a man. A big, sexy, brooding man whose attention makes me feel cute and shy and pretty in ways I didn’t know I could feel.

He pushes his food to the side before taking a sip of his coffee.

“Oh! Did you want me to grab that water before you ask me your question, sir?”

The man waves a hand and smiles that devastating smile of his once again. Maybe that’s why he doesn’t smile much. He saves it all for moments where he needs it so that it’s extra mind-melting.

“No worries, Erin,” he says. “And don’t call me ‘sir.’ My name is Caleb.”

Chapter 2

Caleb

Erin doesn't like olives.

I watched her pick them off a pizza she ordered once after a long week. After a slice or two, she moved on to taking a pint of ice cream out of the freezer. I couldn't quite make out the flavor from my hiding spot, but it was one of quite a few tucked into her freezer.

Just as she has a sweet tooth, she's kind and sweet to everyone who crosses her path. But she also never lets them get close. Her social life isn't much of anything at all, just a handful of friends she sometimes hangs out with, including a few she works with at the diner.

Everything I know about Erin, I've learned from watching her. It's not like there was much for me to do after coming to this town—my plan needs a few more things to fall into place before I can move on it. I've spent far more time than would be considered healthy or normal sitting in my car watching her run around in the small diner. It takes everything I can to not storm in there and take her like I want to. That little waitress uniform haunts my every waking moment and honestly, most of my sleeping moments too.

Dreams aren't enough. I want the real thing.

Now she's sitting in the booth across from me.

"Caleb," she repeats to herself. It's like music to my ears. There's only so many things that could make my heart soar

higher than hearing my name on her lips. My cock twitches in my pants, already half-hard just from watching her, as I think about other, more salacious things I want her to call me.

Erin smiles softly up at me. “So, what did you need my help with?”

Right. Shit.

“I’m new to town and I just got a landscaping contract to work for a client in an area I am not familiar with,” I say. Not a total lie, but not the entire truth. Landscaping has always been my post-military plan, but I never thought I’d be using it as a means to an end.

“I can help with that,” she says, her eyes shining with curiosity.

My eyes drop down to her lips and I swallow back the need surging beneath my skin. They look so full, so soft and bitable. What kinds of sounds would she make if I teased them? If I nipped them? We haven’t been this close since that first day at the airport. Tracking her down was worth it just to see her like this once more, but I’m greedy. I want more. I *need* more.

I need to make her mine, and soon.

“Caleb?” She licks her lips, and this time the way my cock twitches is almost painful. I’m too old to have this little control over my arousal, but something about this little girl makes me utterly lose my mind.

Focus.

“The client’s address is on Mulberry Street,” I start. “But there’s two Mulberry Streets.”

A simple search online solved this question for me already, but it truly was confusing for me at first. She doesn't need to know that I've already figured it out.

“Oh! That's always confusing for anyone new in town. Even people who live around here get confused sometimes, it's a funny story actually ...”

I listen as she continues her story explaining something about new construction a few years ago and how it messed with local traffic patterns. Her dark eyes are alight and eager to explain the history to me, and I'm so enthralled that I hardly even hear what she's really saying. I don't dare interrupt.

“—So yeah! Someone in the municipal government just decided that one would be North Mulberry and one would be South Mulberry even though they're not connected at all.

“North is the more residential one, though, so I bet it's that one. I'm familiar with it because that's where my mom and stepdad live.”

“Oh?” I say, my interest piqued by her personal connection to my question.

“Yeah,” she says shyly. “If you want, I could show it to you after my shift. It's almost done actually.”

My heart practically stops. She's offering her time to me, and of her own volition no less.

“I would like that very much.”

Erin's cheeks flush that pretty pink I love so much on her. Soon, I may be able to make her blush like that myself, pushing her into new realms of pleasure only I can make her feel.

But I have to play my cards right. She deserves a man with a cleared record, and I'm not quite there yet. This little opportunity will have to suffice.

"That would be great, Erin. I have no problem waiting," I tell her, before gesturing at my food. "I still need to eat this, after all. See you in a few minutes?"

The smile she gives me brightens even the darkest corners of my heart. "Yeah, see you in a few minutes."

She rises from her side of the booth and leaves in a swirl of flouncing blue uniform skirt. My eyes are glued to her for the rest of her shift, even as I fork food into my mouth. Her plush thighs tease me. Unfortunately, my hunger isn't the sort that can be solved with eating. All I want to do is bend her over a nearby table and make her scream filthy things as she creams around my cock. Maybe it'd teach all of the wandering eyes in this god damned diner that she's mine and no one else's. Would it be more effective than pounding their faces in? It remains to be seen.

The minutes pass by quickly, and soon she's standing next to my table, her purse over one shoulder and her apron in her hand. We walk out of the diner, but not before her friend, one of the waitresses, winks at us as we walk out.

"Did you drive?" I ask. I already know the answer, but it's the polite thing to ask. She takes the bus to work every day because her apartment is close to a stop on the same route the diner is on.

"No," she says, stopping to think. "I usually take the bus here from my apartment. Is that going to be a problem?"

“Not at all, are you okay with me driving?”

She nods. “Of course.”

My hand slips to the small of her back as I lead the way to where I’ve parked my truck. She tenses for just a moment before she relaxes into the touch. After helping her up into the passenger seat, I pull myself into the driver’s seat and start the vehicle.

Even though I’m familiar with our route, I follow Erin’s softly given instructions with care. The street we’re headed to is actually where my target lives. I’ve done some basic surveillance, but I haven’t made any more specific moves. My plan to take down the people who framed me is still in progress, but this is the closest I’ve gotten to actually trying to put it in motion.

It all starts with Donald Berkely.

It’s because of him and his treasonous circle of subordinate goons that I got framed for drug possession while trying to personally investigate suspicious activity. The only mistake they made was not fully silencing me. Getting me landed in the brig by planting cocaine on my person hasn’t kept me from remembering their names, remembering their foreign contacts, remembering every single detail about their information ring.

All I have to do is procure proof. And this landscaping business I’ve started is the front to get closer to that proof.

“Welcome to North Mulberry Street,” Erin murmurs as I turn onto the street, breaking me out of my thoughts. I glance over at her, looking at her face as she bites her lip. Something about her demeanor seems closed off, but I’m not sure what.

“Which house is your parents’?” I ask, trying to relax my grip on the steering wheel.

She leans forward and points to a house a block away.

My heart stops.

That’s my target’s house.

“Really? That’s my client’s house.” It had taken some finagling, but over the past few weeks I’d managed to get this business of mine onto Berkely’s radar. When I got the call, I knew I’d gotten my chance to access his home and plant some bugs and monitoring devices around his property.

Over the month I’ve been following Erin, however, I’d never followed her to this side of town. Not once. Is this related to why she seems uneasy?

“My mom had mentioned a while ago that my stepdad was looking for a new landscaper. Is that what you’re doing?”

I nod, fighting the rising tension in my hands and shoulders.

“Yeah. Your stepdad’s a Mr. Don Berkely?”

“One and the same.”

I park on the side of the street and look out at the house. The house itself is nice but could use a basic power wash to clean up the siding. The lawn is well kept, but a lot of the plants and trees around the property look like they need a good pruning and some love. It’ll take some time for me because I’m working alone, but that just gives me more time to do what I need to do.

I turn to Erin. “What a coincidence,” I say, smiling at her. She smiles back at me, but it doesn’t quite reach her eyes. I can’t

ignore it any longer. “Is something wrong?”

“My stepdad’s just a lot, sometimes,” she says. Her hands twist nervously in her lap, drawing my eyes to her the way her skirt only just covers the tops of her luscious thighs. “To be honest, I kind of avoid coming here.”

My blood begins to heat. Don Berkely is already a traitor, but is he making my woman uncomfortable as well? “Why’s that?” I ask, my fists clenching so tightly I can feel my blunt nails trying to bite into my palms.

She shrugs. “Just not his biggest fan.”

While I don’t think she’s lying to me, I don’t think that’s the entire story. I’m not about to press for more details, however. She’ll tell me when she’s ready. Earning her trust is something I’m invested in, my following her around notwithstanding.

I’m not sure what this new information means for my plan, though. On the one hand, the world will be a better place without Berkely walking around in it, endangering people, and selling state secrets. On the other, my world revolves around this little dove sitting beside me. Even if she doesn’t seem to like her stepfather much, she may still care for him in some way. He’s a part of her family.

If I take Don Berkely out, exposing him as a military information kingpin, what does that mean for Erin? Do I risk hurting her to enact my plan?

Chapter 3

Erin

“So, what do you think?” I ask, trying to change the subject. My dislike of my stepfather isn’t something I enjoy talking about, and Caleb is practically a stranger. I don’t want to bore him with family drama. I’d hate to chase him away with it. “I don’t know what landscapers do, but does it look like you can do it?”

He nods slowly. “It’s a lot for someone working solo like me, but I personally like that sort of hands-on approach.”

Something eases in my heart at his words. “If you want, we can get out and I can show you around. The backyard probably needs some work too.”

Caleb raises an eyebrow. “Are you sure?”

“Might as well while we’re here, right?”

The corner of his mouth quirks up in a smirk as he gets out of the truck. Just as I pop my door open, he appears at my side. He wraps his big hands around my waist and lifts me out of the seat. I let out an embarrassing squeal of surprise as my hands fly to his shoulders, but he picks me up like I’m nothing. I slide down his front to the ground, something hard on his front brushing against my abdomen as I go.

His eyes are dark as he looks down at me, but he lets go of me and takes my hand. His voice is rough when he says, “Lead the way.” His tone makes me shiver with something I’ve never felt for another person before.

I can feel my face turning red as I start to guide him through my stepfather's yard, and I know it's not the heat of the day doing it. Caleb listens intently as I point out things that look like they might need some attention. His hand is comforting around mine, serving as a reminder that I'm not here alone as I try and fail to avoid thinking about how creepy my stepdad is. With Caleb at my side, I feel safe and protected, like no one could get near me if I didn't want them to.

As I wrap up our brief tour around the property, I stop to show him the garden shed in the backyard as a sort of finale. I know for a fact that a lot of the tools and equipment inside are in disrepair, but maybe something would be useful for him. I wrench the door open and step inside to show him what he's working with, and he steps in behind me, the heat of his body close to mine.

"There's a lot of useful things in here," he says, voice still low and raspy against my ears. "A little tune up and most of it will be working like new."

"That's great!" I smile up at him.

His dark eyes practically pierce me as they gaze down at me.

"So ... You don't live here anymore?" Caleb asks.

I shake my head at him. "Not anymore," I whisper. It wasn't a choice easily made. When my mother married Don shortly after my high school graduation, I'd been excited to have a father figure in my life. Instead, I got a man who scared me a little and made me uncomfortable with the comments he made about my body when my mother wasn't around. Soon after, I found my own apartment closer to the diner.

“House is plenty big enough for you to still be at home, it seems.”

“I wanted to prove to myself that I could survive on my own,” I say. Caleb looms over me in the shed, even though he has to stoop a little to avoid hitting his head. He steps closer to me and licks his lips hungrily. My heart flutters in my chest.

“I have a feeling you can do anything you put your mind to, little girl.”

A shiver wracks my spine as his words hit me. Where my stepfather’s advances had always made me feel disgusted, this man getting close like this is doing nothing but make me tremble with want. Caleb is a complete stranger, but alone out here in this shed, it’s like we’re the only people for miles. I don’t know him at all, and yet I find myself wanting him.

He reaches a hand forward and brushes the back of a knuckle against my cheek. The tips of his fingers drift lower, brushing against the sensitive parts of my neck.

“C-Caleb—”

“You drive me crazy, Erin,” he breathes, his gaze heated and feral. “I can barely control myself, seeing you in this little uniform like this.”

“Really?” I ask. Is ... is this huge, gorgeous man really attracted me?

His hand gently wraps around my neck as if feeling for my pulse. He doesn’t squeeze, but his intent is clear as day. “Yes. Tell me you don’t want this and I’ll stop.”

I shake my head, seized with a strange confidence. “Don’t you *dare* stop.”

Caleb smirks dangerously at me as he surges forward and captures my lips with his. His hands around my waist and pull my body flush to his. He's tall, so tall that he towers over me and there's no reason that should make me feel the way it does. I've spent my whole life being good, keeping myself out of trouble and playing it safe with everything. I barely even have a social life so that I can save up money to buy the diner.

This thing happening between Caleb and me in this garden shed, on a property I don't live on any longer, feels sinful. Selfish, even.

And I want more of it. I'm tired of putting aside my needs to serve my ultimate goals. I want him.

Caleb brushes his lips over mine once more and my eyes flutter closed. I lean into the kiss but just as it gets deeper, he pulls away. He lets out a raspy chuckle at my whine. The sound he makes is low and deep and it makes my knees weak.

His eyes are filled with heat, and I realize abruptly that I am at the mercy of this man. He is a complete stranger, but it's only him that has ever made me feel like this. With Caleb, I am vulnerable, but I can't think of ever having it any other way.

That thought alone leaves me wanting *more*—aching with the need to feel his hands on me.

“So gorgeous,” he rasps, his lips brushing against my neck. “Do you have any idea how long I've thought about this? How long I've wanted to take you as mine? Watching you talk, joke, serve everyone but me day after day ...”

The last words come out in a growl. Maybe I should be terrified, but I'm not. It's thrilling. His declaration of jealousy

only serves to fuel my need for him.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know—”

“That I wanted you? That I still do?”

“Y-yes.”

Caleb pushes back to look at me. He cups my jaw and doesn’t say a word until my eyes finally meet his. “Why else would I go there every day? Why else would I be with you right here, right now?”

My mouth falls open. I know my coworkers had said that he’d been watching me, but never in my wildest dreams did I think a man like him would be into a girl like me. I’m a homebody, an inexperienced virgin, a girl with a dream but no money to make it happen.

Caleb lets out a low growl before he lunges forward, crushing his lips to mine. I whimper when he claims my mouth, parting my lips for him to take more. These kisses with him are my first, and I have a feeling he’s spoiled me for anyone else.

There is something wild and possessive in his touch as he slips his hand through my hair and deepens the kiss. I tilt my chin up, straining my neck trying to lean into him.

“Fuck, baby girl, you’re so much smaller than me,” he groans, dropping his hands to my thighs to lift me up onto the workbench. My legs part for him as he steps between them. His fingers brush the hem of my uniform dress, making sparks alight on my skin.

I rock against him on instinct as his hands work their way up my thighs, desperately searching for friction. Caleb smirks against my skin.

“I’ve even thought about doing this to you in the diner with everyone watching,” he rasps. “Would you have liked that? Daddy eating your pussy where everyone could see?”

D-Daddy?

Goosebumps tingle all over my body.

The name has no right sounding so ... right.

That he wants to be that for me ... it makes me feel cherished and wanted. I didn’t think I needed a daddy, but now I do, and he is the only man who can ever do this for you. He’s older and wiser and can show me everything he wants to do to me, while making me feel good too.

“Yes,” I whisper shyly.

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

His eyes darken as he trails them down my body, his palms warm on my thighs. Suddenly, they’re drifting to my back. A shiver trails down my spine when he starts unzipping the back of my dress. He draws it over my shoulders before tossing it aside, leaving me in nothing but my bra and panties.

“Say it again,” he murmurs as he begins to gently pry my legs further apart. My lips part in a moan as his touch overwhelms me and I can’t get a coherent word to come out.

“Say it,” he demands once more, teasing the back of his fingers over my center. He pulls them back when I lean into the touch, waiting for me to give in to him.

“Daddy,” I whimper, my chest heaving as the need builds up with his teasing. “Please, Daddy.”

“Please what?”

“Touch me,” I whisper. Even to my own ears I sound desperate. I can feel Caleb tense against me as he sighs. There’s a deep ache between my thighs and all I know is he’s the cause of it. Only he can take care of it.

No one else is allowed to.

“Thank you for telling me what you want, baby girl,” he groans, mouthing at the top of my breast before helping me slip my bra off. His mouth closes over a nipple before sucking at it wetly. “I’ll make you mine tonight and erase any memory of other men that have touched you before.”

“No one has touched me before. I ... I’ve never wanted anyone to before now.”

Until you, but I don’t need to say those last words. They are clearly written on my face, in my eyes, and in the way my body leans so needily to his.

Caleb stands motionless for a few seconds, staring at me in a mixture of shock and heat.

“You’re a virgin?”

I nod. This moment reminds me once more that we know nothing about each other. I don’t once question my decision, however. I want to offer myself to this man, even though we barely know each other. Maybe it’s strange, but somehow, I know that he’d never hurt me, never put me in danger.

He licks his lips a second before his eyes drop to my breasts. “I’m going to spoil you for anyone else, make you mine.”

I gasp when the man drops to his knees and firmly grabs my thighs, dragging me to the edge of the workbench. I don't even get to say that I don't want anyone else but him. My cheeks flush when he leans in and drags his nose up the thin material covering my pussy.

"You smell so fucking good, baby," he says, his dark eyes meeting mine as he leans in again and inhales deeply.

Heat pulses low in my belly. Can he feel it? How hot and wet I am for him? The ache is so unfamiliar and yet I'm desperate for more, for him to make it feel better. I moan when he drags the edges of my panties and draws them down my thighs, leaving me naked and exposed to him.

"So pretty," Caleb says, sounding awestruck. The warmth of his breath on my skin sends need rocking through me. "Such a beautiful cunt, all pink and dripping for me."

I grab the edge of the table as he continues to tease my soaked folds, but he doesn't move beyond that, sticking to laying kisses on my inner thigh.

"Please," I whimper in frustration. "Please, Daddy."

I'm desperate. I'd do anything for him to relieve this ache. The longer he waits, teasing me, the needier I grow ...

My lips part in a scream when I feel his hot tongue finally slide up my slit. He doesn't give me any warning before he dives in, dragging his tongue over my wetness and sending shockwaves of pleasure rocking my body.

My back arches as I ignite with blissful heat that's unlike anything I have ever experienced or could have ever prepared for.

“Oh, Daddy,” I moan as he slips his tongue through my folds, exploring places no one ever has. Not even me.

I had no idea it could feel like this. Is it supposed to feel this good, always?

“Fuck me, baby,” he rasps between licks. “Your juices are dripping all over my chin.”

His fingers tighten around my thighs as he brands me with his tongue. Making me his in more than just physical ways.

The thought of Caleb making me his in a place where we could be interrupted at any moment has my sex throbbing hard against his mouth. The thought is dirty and tempting. It’s unlike me to be this reckless and yet, with Caleb buried between my legs, driving me to the point of madness, I can’t bring myself to care.

“Yes. Yes, more Daddy,” I pant as he swipes his tongue over my clit before wrapping his lips around the aching bud to suck on it. I arch my back as my eyes squeeze shut when I feel his fingers slip up to my breasts. He pinches my nipples between his fingers, heightening my pleasure.

I roll my hips, rutting my aching pussy hard against his mouth, desperate for something to bring me to a peak.

“Look at me,” he demands, his voice leaving no room for question and my desire-clouded eyes shoot to his. He looks hungry. Predatory. It should scare me away, not make my center pulse with need against his tongue like it does.

“I want you to come all over my face, baby girl,” he commands me.

“Yes, Daddy,” I moan, fighting the need to close my eyes. I am hypnotized by his gaze.

My hips roll desperately over his tongue, but it’s the lust in his eyes that has me soaring to my peak. I sob as my body tightens with a delicious rush of ecstasy that I feel from the roots of my hair all the way down to my toes.

“Daddy,” I cry out as I drown in bliss, his tongue dragging out my release until I’m a sobbing mess in his arms. His licks are slow and soft as he caresses my trembling sex with it, drawing out the last moments of my orgasm. I’m still trembling when Caleb gets to his feet and gathers me into his arms.

“It’s okay,” he whispers, combing his fingers through my hair. Even though he’s fully dressed, I can feel the hard ridge of his erection pushing against me through his clothes. “I’ve got you, baby.”

My head drops to his shoulder as I process all of the things I’m feeling. I didn’t know this was what intimacy could feel like, but then again, I have a feeling that what Caleb just made me feel is rare. I’ve never felt connected to a person like this before.

I want to be with Caleb, I realize. All of those days spent glancing at him with longing in the diner ... it’s not enough for me. I want more. I don’t care if he’s a stranger, if I don’t know anything about him. I just know that I want to belong to him. The thought of someone else...

“Fuck,” Caleb hisses, his eyes flying to the door to the shed. He leaves my side for a moment to peak out the shed door before swearing again.

“What is it?”

“Looks like someone’s home,” he says to me, voice urgent even though his face is calm. “Let’s get you decent.”

My mind is still foggy with the haze of my orgasms, so it takes me a moment to hear what he’s hearing, but sure enough, I can hear a car running in the driveway before suddenly, it putters off. A chill runs down my spine as we listen to a car door open.

Is it my mother getting home?

Or is it my stepdad?

Chapter 4

Caleb

“Oh, God!” Erin whispers, a tremble wracking her body as I help her into her clothes. “I really wasn’t expecting to run into anyone today.”

My brows draw together in confusion. I guess it makes sense for her to be afraid to be caught with a stranger around the house, but there’s something else here. The trepidation in her eyes doesn’t sit well with me.

“Do you mean your mother or your stepfather?”

“Um—” She bites her lip, which is still swollen and pink from our kissing. “Like I said before, I’m not the biggest fan of my stepdad. Honestly, I only come here when I absolutely can’t get out of it.”

Anger edges into my mind, desperate to know more about why this man makes Erin uncomfortable.

“Have you talked to your mother about this?”

She shrugs as I zip her dress up for her. “She doesn’t really listen to me. They even fight all the time, but she thinks he’s worth being married to because he’s a high-ranking officer in the Marines. She always says something about him being honorable.”

If only she and her mother knew the things I knew about Don Berkely. Erin’s gut instinct is right, it sounds like. If only her mom listened to her.

Now that I know she doesn't like her stepfather, however, I have no problems at all taking him down. It seems that he's made my baby girl feel unsafe, in addition to all of the other things he's done.

I will make him pay.

Erin's voice is trembling as she breaks through my thoughts. "I shouldn't have brought you here, I'm sorry. This was a bad idea—"

I gently cup her face with my palm and give her a kiss on the forehead. "Don't apologize, sweetheart. You've done nothing wrong."

She smiles up at me weakly. Something dangerous stirs in my chest.

"Has he ever hurt you? Touched you?" I ask through clenched teeth.

"No," she replies. She inhales a shaky breath. "He just makes me uncomfortable. He says things about my appearance and describes things that men want to do ... to women like me."

It takes everything I can to keep myself from storming out of the shed and finding this bastard. I want to do more than punish him for his crimes, now. I want to fucking kill him.

Outside, I hear the car door finally shut, and then a voice talking. The voice is familiar, and it's enough to make my blood boil.

"Caleb, please," Erin pleads, her hand curling into mine. "You have to be careful if you're working for him. He isn't nice to people who work for him."

Oh, I know that all too well. He didn't have to even know me to have me framed for something I didn't do. All to just get me out of the picture so that he could continue organizing his selling of state secrets to the highest bidders. And now Erin, *my* Erin, is threatened by him too.

"I can handle a shitty client, baby," I assure her.

"I know, but ... Don, he has connections with powerful people in town. He can get away with things that other people can't."

Something I already know all too well.

I can't let her know that. It could put her in more danger.

Thankfully, I've never actually met Berkely. In fact, I'd be surprised if he even remembers my face. He probably didn't look at my record before telling one of his underlings to take me out of the picture. He thought a soldier like me—just a Marine trying to put together a string of suspicious happenings and make sense of them—was just a nuisance, one easily taken care of by a less-than-honorable discharge.

Still, I don't want to give him reason to start digging into my history. Seeing me with Erin may make him curious enough to look me up, and I don't want to risk my plan quite yet. There's more than just state secrets at stake now. Erin's safety is on the line.

I'll have to lay low and continue following her for now.

Fucked up as it is, it's the easiest thing to do to keep her safe from scum like him while I wait for the information I need to come in.

I run my fingers through Erin's hair, to help straighten it and to sooth her as well. The most important thing besides her safety

at the moment is making sure she knows that I'm here for her and that she doesn't have to worry at all for her safety anymore.

"If he ever makes you feel unsafe ..." I start, before trying to decide what to say next.

"I can handle it," she says, a determined look in her eye. "I don't want anything to happen to you, Caleb. I'm a big girl. I've dealt with him since he married my mom, and I can keep doing it."

I can't help but smile at the fierce little dove in my arms. I'm never letting anything or anyone put that fire out. She doesn't need to know that I'll destroy anyone who dares to lay a finger on her. Nothing would be able to stop me.

She's my ultimate weakness, and she doesn't even know it.

"Alright," I smile down at her before pressing the keys to my truck into her palm. "I want you to go out to my truck and get out of here. I'd rather you get home safe and sound, and without any reason for him to ask questions. I can just sneak off the property and down the street to call a car. I'll stop by your apartment and pick it up in a bit."

Erin nods slowly. "That's fine, but you don't know where I live."

My head swims with the realization that I almost just blew my own cover. I'm not ready to reveal that I've been stalking her, not yet. "Uh, no, I don't," I say. "We can trade numbers and you can text it to me."

I'm not supposed to know that she lives in an apartment, and not a house. I'm not supposed to know about her love of ice

cream or that her freezer is filled with it. I'm not supposed to know that her cat's name is Snowball even though she's a fluffy black cat that follows Erin around her apartment like a shadow.

Her face is still as she reaches for her bag to pull out her phone. After we trade numbers, I give her one last once over to make sure she looks presentable. Just in case Berkely happens to see her going out to my truck.

I watch her as she leaves, heading for my vehicle, but unfortunately, I hear a male voice call out her name. Berkely swings into view, looking every bit the pompous asshole I know him to be in his garish golfing pants and polo.

"Erin, I didn't know you were here," he says.

"Y-yeah, just needed to check on something in the yard," she says hurriedly.

"I'm sure your mother is taking good enough care of those rose bushes, you don't need to worry about that. Is that truck yours?" Berkely asks. He steps closer to her, and I don't miss that she takes another step back as he tries to get close. "I didn't know you'd replaced your old beater. You should have said something! I could have gone to the dealership with you."

"Oh, it's not mine. I'm just borrowing it from a friend for the day."

Berkely nods, convinced by her lie. "Ah, well, it's getting late! You should stay for dinner."

"That's okay, I ate at work."

Her stepdad steps closer to her again. My fists clench tight enough that my nails bite into my palms. "Have you given

some thought to my offer?”

Erin gets a flustered look on her face as her hand fiddles with the strap of her purse.

“One word from you and I can buy that diner for you,” he continues, reaching for her even as she steps out of his arm’s reach.

“I’m—That’s—”

“You shouldn’t have to work so hard to get what you want, Erin. Anything you want can be yours. All you have to do is ask.”

I watch Erin’s chest rise and fall as she takes a deep breath. Her next words are quiet, but I can hear the strength she’s mustered behind them. “No, thank you. I like working for things myself.”

“Come on, little lady. I’m getting tired of asking you when I could just take it instead. You know I only want what’s best for you—”

“I know what’s best for me, thank you. I have to go. Say hi to mom for me,” she says through audibly gritted teeth, before turning and making her way to my truck. Within moments, she’s pulling herself into the driver’s seat.

I hear the doors lock as soon as she’s inside. Smart girl, my little dove. She’s got some bite when she wants to, and it makes me yearn for her all the more.

Don Berkely stands with his hands on his hips in the driveway, watching Erin as she peels off down the road, clueless to the fact that he has a dangerous enemy hiding in his garden shed.

I could end this. I could end this right now. I could take him out and leave him bleeding out on the concrete and no one would be the wiser.

That's not enough, not anymore. Erin's safety on the line means that I've found a renewed sense of desire to make sure this man pays for what he did to me. That he pays for putting countless people, including his own stepdaughter, into harm's way for his selfishness.

I've done terrible things before. I've been paid to do them. It's part and parcel of being a member of the military. But the difference between a man like me and a man like Don Berkely is that I was doing something to ultimately protect lives. This man is the lowest of the low. He thinks he has a right to her when Erin will only ever be mine.

Killing for my little dove would be nothing. I'd do it gladly.

But for what this man has done ... I'm going to make sure his life is so ruined that he wishes he never existed in the first place.

Chapter 5

Erin

Something feels unsettling as I step into my apartment after getting home.

If I didn't know any better, I'd say it was because Don was so forceful when I was trying to leave the house, but as awful as that is, it's something I'm used to. No, this weird feeling is related to something else.

Maybe it shouldn't bother me that Caleb knows I live in an apartment, but it does. I mean, I guess he knows I work at a diner so it would make sense that with my wages, I wouldn't be able to afford a house. But still, the way he'd said it made him sound so sure. And that makes me uneasy for some reason.

A little meow hits my ears as I start flicking lights on in my unit, and I see Snowball pad out from the bedroom. She walks up to me and starts rubbing herself around my feet as I try to untie my shoes.

"Hi Snowball," I coo. "I missed you too."

She chirps up at me, trying to get her head under my palm for scratches as I finally slip a shoe off.

"So impatient. I know I was late getting home, but I wasn't *that* late getting home," I murmur. "Let's get you fed."

Snowball rubs her little body around my ankles even more now that my shoes are off, nearly tripping me as we go to the kitchen, but I'm smart enough to keep a hand on the wall for

balance. She does this every time I get home, no matter how late I am. Adopting her was a great idea, because moments like this help me forget all of my stresses and worries.

Moments after I put food and fresh water in her bowls, there's a knock at the door. When I check the peephole, I see that it's Caleb, and my heart seizes in my chest.

I look down at my phone and check my message history.

Oh my god.

In my haste to get home and start my evening routine, I forgot to text Caleb my address.

And yet ... he's here. That's definitely him on the other side of my door. No one else is that massive, that handsome, that dark and brooding.

H-how does he know where I live?

There's another knock at the door, and I hear an achingly familiar voice say, "Erin, it's me. Can I come in?"

I wrack my brain for reasons why he might know where I live, but I come up with nothing. I think about all of the times he's come into the diner, all of the times coworkers pointed out that he was looking at me.

I think about the moments we shared in the garden shed. How he said he wanted to make me his.

I think he's been following me.

I mean, how else would he know where I live? I don't have any location sharing apps on my phone, and I've never mentioned where I live to him. My heart pounds in my chest as I listen to Caleb knock on my door again.

“Baby, is everything alright?” he asks through the door.

Damn it. I need to get ahold of myself.

I take a deep breath and open the door. Caleb’s so big he practically fills the whole frame. This whole situation feels threatening, especially because I suspect that he’s been following me. But one look into his eyes and I can feel myself relaxing.

He may be stalking me, but I also know he would never hurt me.

“I’m okay,” I finally tell him.

“You don’t look okay,” he says, his face creased with worry.

“You don’t have to hide anything from me, you know that, right?”

A shiver runs down my spine. There’s more to his words than he probably realizes. He’s hiding something about himself, after all. And yet, I still know that he means it. He wants me to trust him, and he wouldn’t betray that trust.

I know I shouldn’t. But I do. I trust him far more than is healthy.

“Thank you,” I say to him. And I mean it. “It means a lot to me.”

I stand aside from the door to finally let him walk into my apartment. He walks in and looks around. In a dark flash, Snowball is at his feet, meowing for attention. The smile on his face as he leans down to pet her melts my heart.

When he looks up at me from his crouch however, the warmth becomes searing and full of want.

“C-can I get you anything?” I stammer.

“No, but maybe I can get you something,” he rasps as he stands up. He kicks off his shoes before stepping into my space. “What do you want, baby?”

“I want you,” I whisper, looking up to meet Caleb’s blue eyes. The way this big, beautiful man looks at me makes me feel loved and safe in a way I’ve never experienced. I want to feel what I felt earlier today, but without my stepdad coming along and spoiling it.

I want to belong to this man, and I’m ready to become his.

“And here I thought I was going to come here and be good, let you get some rest,” he says as his hands drift up to grab my hips.

“No,” I whine vehemently, leaning into his chest and throwing my arms up around his neck. Heat is already pooling at my center. “I want you, Daddy. Please.”

Caleb groans as he leans down to take my lips with his. His hands start to fumble with my work dress before giving up and lifting me into his arms. My legs thread around his hips and that’s when I feel how hard he’s become.

“So hard, Daddy,” I giggle before I can think better of it.

He swears as he begins to carry me through my apartment. I don’t think about how he seems to know his way around already, focusing instead on the heat and lust blossoming underneath my skin. “Gonna show you just how hard I am for you, baby girl. Ruin you for any other man with this cock.”

“Please, make me yours,” I whimper as he drops me to my mattress. He starts to rip my clothing away, starting with my

panties before pulling my dress over my head without even touching the zipper. His hands on my skin are searing, making my skin tingle. A low, pulsing heat starts to pool in my pussy as he undresses me, and when I'm fully naked for him, I can't hardly take it anymore.

When his thumb runs through my slit, I cry out.

“So wet for Daddy already,” he rumbles against my skin. “Do you want me to do what I did back in that shed? Lap up your juices until you're begging for my cock?”

God, his voice could make me come on the spot.

“Please,” I keened, crying out as he slips a finger into my wet heat.

“Please what?” he rasps into my skin. “Tell me what you want. My fingers, my tongue ...”

I sob when he strums his thumb over my clit as he rubs a finger against spots inside me that make me see stars. I dig my nails into his arms as pleasure shoots up my spine.

“I could get you off like this,” he whispers, brushing his lips against mine. “Dripping all over my hand like this, I bet I could get you to come again and again.”

My lips part in a silent scream as he starts to thrust his finger inside me, adding a second one and filling me in a way I've never experienced before.

“Or I could give you my tongue ...”

Oh god oh god oh—

“... You liked it back there, didn't you? Liked it when daddy fell to his knees and kissed your little virgin pussy?”

“Yeah,” I cry, my eyes fluttering closed as he rakes his teeth over my neck. “Daddy ate me out so good.”

“Or maybe you’re just ready for my cock, hm?”

I whimper when he tips my head sideways and kisses me like I am air and he’s starved for it. I open up for him, letting him take control of my body, my heart, and my soul. I trust him with everything.

“Erin, baby girl,” he breathes against my lips before pulling back to stare at me. “God, you’re going to be the death of me.”

And then suddenly, he’s pulling away from me, leaving me breathless and starving for his touch. He pulls his shirt off, and I can’t help leaning forward to start fumbling with his belt. His hands stop me as soon as his shirt’s off.

“Not yet, baby,” he groans. “If you touch me like that, I might finish before we even get started. Want to get you ready instead.”

“Please,” I breathe, my whole body humming with need.

Caleb pushes me back down to my bed before dropping between my legs. My face flushes red when he lifts my legs to his shoulders. Even though he’s already had me like this, I can’t help feeling shy.

“You’re too tense,” Caleb rasps, his eyes meeting mine. “Let me help you with that.”

Unlike the teasing earlier today, Caleb doesn’t give me any warning before he buries his head between my thighs. My back arches off the sheets with a scream as his tongue begins to work against my heated flesh. He’s a man on a mission,

working me relentlessly, sucking my clit between his lips and driving me to the point of madness.

I dig my fingers into my sheets as my body trembles and shakes. “Feels so good. More, Daddy! Please!”

Caleb nips the side of my thigh before sitting up and gazing down at me hungrily. “Eyes on me.”

I nod wordlessly, running my eyes over his muscled torso. He has tattoos here and there, and a trail of body hair leading down into the front of his pants. He’s formed perfectly, every inch of his body made to make me utterly crazy. Even the outline of his cock in his jeans has my mouth watering. My body thrums with need just from staring at him, as if I wasn’t already desperate for his touch.

“Like what you see?” he asks teasingly.

I flush deeply and nod, abashed that I’ve been caught staring. He smirks down at me as he starts to unbuckle his belt and lower his fly.

My breath catches when his cock springs free of his clothes. It’s long and thick, hard and flushed with arousal. I’m not sure how something like that is going to fit inside me, but I’m practically quivering with the anticipation of finding out how.

It doesn’t make sense to want this man the way I do. It’s too soon to feel like this, and about a man I suspect is more dangerous than he appears. There’s so much I don’t know about him, but I am eager and willing to find out every bit I can.

Is this what they call love at first sight? Because these feelings aren’t what I’d call new. When he’d first walked into the diner

and locked eyes with me, just for that fleeting moment, I'd felt drawn to him. And it's only intensified since then.

I want to be taken by Caleb. Make him feel the way he makes me feel.

I part my legs for him as he leans over me, offering myself to him in a way I have never done before and will never do again.

“I'm ready for you, Daddy.”

I'm all his, and I want to make sure he knows it.

Chapter 6

Caleb

This feels too good to be true.

Maybe it's a dream. If it is, I never want to wake up. It's the best dream I've ever had, seeing Erin spread out for me on her sheets like this.

My cock throbs with the need to be buried inside her body, to breed her and claim her as mine. Hell, I can taste her on my tongue still and that alone may drive me to madness. I wanted to take my time with her, but I have to speed things up or I'll finish before I have the chance to get started.

I have the rest of our lives to tease her and drag her pleasure out, after all. After this, I won't want anyone else, and she won't either. Right now, all I want to do is fuck her full of my seed so that her body knows that it's mine, so that she knows no one else can make her feel the way I do.

"So big, Daddy," she murmurs as I position myself above her. She pouts playfully, and I can feel my sanity fraying at the edges. "How is it going to fit?"

Good fucking god. This little girl is going to be the death of me.

"You were made for me," I say through gritted teeth. "You're going to take me so well."

"I trust you."

And with that, I press my cock to her entrance and start to slowly ease forward. I take my time, knowing that even if she's perfect, it's still going to be a tight fit. I don't want to hurt her, so it's worth it to make myself slow down and appreciate the way her wet cunt grips around me.

"Such a tight little pussy," I groan. "So fucking perfect."

"Feel so full," she gasps, her hands gripping my shoulders.

"Yeah?" I ask as I pepper her face and neck with kisses, waiting for her to adjust to me.

"N-need more, Daddy," she whines breathlessly. "Fuck me, please."

She's so fucking tight that my hips act on instinct at her request. I pull out almost to the tip only to thrust back in, making her breasts jiggle as a little cry escapes from her throat.

"Again," she begs.

What my little dove wants, she gets. I thrust into her again, taking her gently at first, before making her body quiver with the little cries and moans she makes every time my thick cock drags against her soaking wet walls. She buries her face in my neck, the bed beneath us creaking as I make her mine once and for all.

"Mine," I can't help growling.

"Yours, Daddy," she responds, her eyes looking up at me, hazed over with pleasure.

Just as I think I'm finally about to lose my control, Erin cries out and I feel her pussy clamp down around my cock, pulsing

as she comes with me inside her.

“Perfect, baby girl. Ready for Daddy’s come?”

She nods as tears start to gather in her lashes and seeing her wrecked and writhing beneath me is what finally pushes me over the edge. My entire body tenses as I finally come inside her, filling her up with my seed to the brim, breeding her like she deserves.

It feels like it goes on for ages, but it’s also over too soon. Before too long, I’m pulling out and laying at her side, brushing her hair out of her face as we both come down from our pleasure-highs. The only sounds in the room are from our labored breathing.

“Wow,” Erin whispers after a moment. “I didn’t know it could feel that good.”

“Honestly, me neither,” I reply. It’s the honest truth—no one can compare to this woman. She’s it for me. She’s the only person for me in this world. She’s mine.

We lie there in her bed for a few seconds, catching our breaths, unwilling to break the magical moment. After a few moments, I realize how sticky with sweat we both are, and decide it’s time to get us both cleaned up.

“We should probably grab a shower,” I say as I help Erin sit up. I lean in and brush my lips against her cheek, and she flushes prettily at the gesture. So sweet, even after we’ve been so intimate with each other.

Even though it’s hot and humid outside, we decide to take a warm shower together. Easier said than done, because I have to resist the urge to take her again against the shower wall. I

have to remind myself that there's plenty of time ahead of us to do whatever we want to each other, and that getting clean and getting some rest will be worth it.

When we finally lie down in bed atop clean sheets, however, I realize that I can't sleep. Neither can Erin. Only her cat, Snowball, curled up at our feet, seems to be capable of resting at the moment.

"Are you awake?" she whispers, as though reading my mind.

I roll over onto my side to look at her and see those big doe-like eyes of hers staring back at me. Her long blond hair is still a little wet from our shower, but it shines in the light coming in through her window. "What is it?"

"Can I ask you something?"

Her face has that same careful, neutral expression she had on earlier today. The one she wore when she first talked about how she didn't like her stepfather. I'm not sure what she's about to ask me, but I'm powerless to deny her anything at this point. She's my ultimate weakness.

"You can ask me anything, Erin."

"Okay," she whispers, worrying her lower lip. "How old are you? I figure you're in your thirties, right? Maybe mid or late, I can't really tell."

"I'm thirty-six," I say, confused about where she's going with this.

"I'm just curious about you. I mean, we don't really know anything about each other. Like, I know you're a landscaper, but you're also new to the area. Where were you before this?"

My blood runs cold at her question. How do I explain that I came here to expose the man who had me framed for drug possession, just to throw me off the trail of his state-secret-selling crime ring? That the man in question is her stepfather, and that the landscaping gig is just a front for getting the chance to bug his house? Do I dare tell her that we literally bumped into each other at the airport and that was the moment I decided I would make her mine for the rest of our lives, no matter what it took?

“Y-you don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to. I’m just ... I’m curious, you know? I care about you a lot already, so much so that it scares me ...”

At her confession, all of my racing thoughts come to a screeching halt.

“You care about me?” I ask. Even though I could feel it in our lovemaking, the declaration makes my heart soar.

“Yeah,” she smiles shyly. “I do. I want to know everything about you because of that, both good and bad.”

I let out a low breath, wondering how and where to start. Best to start at the beginning, I guess. If she trusts me with her feelings, with her body, then I should trust her with my secrets in return.

“I joined the Marines right out of high school,” I start. “It was good for me. I liked the structure, the order, the feeling of being a part of something bigger than myself.”

Erin nods as she listens attentively, so I continue.

“A few years ago, I started working on the intelligence side of things, and almost immediately I started noticing some

discrepancies in reports. I did a little monitoring and over time I saw a pattern. Someone was leaking classified information to a hostile group, revealing the identities and locations of people who were working with us, thus putting the lives of those people in danger.”

Her eyes go wide. “What?”

I nod at her grimly. “Exactly. It’s unthinkable, right? That someone would do that to people who were helping soldiers overseas. I started to watch for more discrepancies and eventually put together the pieces and figured out who all was responsible. I even figured out who was heading the entire thing. Before I could report it, however, I was arrested for drug possession. Someone had planted cocaine in my belongings and had then turned around and reported me. I ended up sitting in military prison for a year.”

“Oh my god,” she mutters. “That’s awful. No one believed you?”

“Nope,” I shake my head. “All the people above me discredited my claims. I’m pretty sure they were all in on it. I was discharged less-than-honorably. They got me out of the way so they could keep selling state secrets.”

For a moment, Erin looks at me, her expression strange and guarded. Then she asks, “Do you think they’re still doing it?”

I nod wordlessly, feeling wrung out and exposed for revealing what happened to me. The one saving grace is that Erin listened. I’m just terrified to hear what she thinks of me now.

Finally, she sits up, the look on her face now darkly determined. “I know I told you I don’t like him, but if it’s

alright, I think I want to talk to my stepdad about this. He's a Marine, and an officer at that. Maybe he can get your case re-opened or help you appeal to the judge, whatever you need to do."

I stare at her a long moment, completely in awe.

Her first reaction is to talk to a man she does not like at all to help make sure justice is served to the right people. Never mind the fact that the man in question is the man who got me discharged ... that doesn't matter. That she'd do something like that for me makes me feel seen in a way I haven't felt in years, if ever.

Her determination to make things right, to defend herself and the people she cares about, has me awestruck. This little dove of mine is fierce and protective, even when she doesn't need to be.

I can't help smiling up at her. "You don't have to do that, Erin."

"No, you deserve better than that."

"I've got it covered," I say as I sit up and pull her into my lap. "I've already started my own reconnaissance on the people I suspect are in charge. You have to remember that your stepdad's an officer and that he might be as corrupt as rest of them."

She sighs as she leans into me. "I'd believe that. He and his military buddies are always talking about the random things they've gotten away with doing to their subordinates. It makes me sick." Erin looks up at me, eyes wide and open with

feeling. “You’re not like them. You’re better. You care about helping people, even if it lost you everything.”

For the first time in a long time, I don’t hate myself for what happened. She’s right. I got caught trying to expose an illegal operation and help the people that it put in danger. Instead of regretting that I got caught and wanting to seek revenge, I want to expose Don Berkely and his ilk because it’s the right thing to do.

I can’t help marveling down at Erin as she nestles in my arms.

This little slip of a woman has flipped my world upside down. She’s made me rethink my entire outlook with just a few words. The moment she bumped into me at the airport, she became mine, even if she didn’t know it at the time.

And yet, I’ve also become hers. She holds my heart in her small, hardworking hands, and I trust her to be gentle with it.

As long as she believes in me and what I want to do, I can do anything.

I flash her a smile as she yawns widely. Snowball even cracks open an eye at the sound and meows a complaint at being disturbed by our conversation.

“Snowball’s right,” I joke. “It’s past our bedtime.”

Erin nods sleepily as she lets me lay her back down before nestling her into my chest. As she drifts off, I think about how she’s the only person in this world that could truly bring me to my knees.

I wouldn’t have it any other way.

Chapter 7

Erin

The moment I walk into the diner the next day, Lina gives me a funny look.

“What’s that look for,” I tease her. “One of our more toothless regulars hit on you again?”

“No,” she says flatly. “I just ... something’s weird about you today.”

I narrow my eyes at her. “Weird how?”

“I don’t know,” Lina replies, looking at me closely. “There’s something about your expression today ...”

“That’s just my face, Lina,” I grumble as I clock in and put on an apron.

But it doesn’t stop there. Lina follows me around the space behind the counter as I start going over what still needs to be done for this part of the day. “Well it’s not just your face, it’s like your whole demeanor. You seem different.”

“N-nothing’s different,” I stammer as I start to brew a fresh carafe of coffee. “Why would I seem different?”

Lina snaps her fingers as realization dawns on her face. “You went home with Mr. Tall, Dark, and Broody yesterday.”

“I did *not* go home with—”

“No, but I saw you get into that big truck of his after your shift ended,” she grins wickedly at me. “You’ve been holding out on me, Erin!”

“I’ve been here for five minutes, that’s not even enough time to hold in information.”

“You have to tell me everything. Where did you go? Did you kiss? Did you do ... other things?” Her smile gets impossibly wider as she wiggles an eyebrow at me knowingly.

My mouth drops open in shock. “First of all, that’s none of your business. Second of all, I’m not giving you any details right now! We’re at *work*, Lina.”

She shrugs. “Never stopped me before.”

“I’m not you,” I sigh. “I don’t just kiss and tell.”

“Oh, so you did kiss—”

“Among other things, yes,” I snap, finally giving in. “That’s all I’m telling you until the next time we hang out.”

Lina looks at me slyly as she says, “I’m holding you to that.”

“That’s fine,” I reply before taking the opportunity to change the subject. She always has a way of getting things out of me, as all the best friends a person can have do. I’d hate to tell her more than I really need to—my concerns about Caleb stalking me, for example. Or maybe the fact that I care less about it than I should. No, it’s best to change the subject while I can. “Have you heard anything about getting the air conditioning fixed?”

“Nope,” she says, popping the “p” sound. “Boss says it’s going to be another day or two, but to be honest I don’t think he’s even called it in yet.”

“Figures,” I groan.

It's easy enough to sink into the normal rhythm of the shift after that. Lina and I have always worked well together, and it's easy to let ourselves go about our days as usual, even if I'm feeling a little distracted.

When I'd woken up that morning, Caleb had already been gone. He'd left a note saying he'd stop by the diner later today, but it's after his usual time already and he still hasn't come in. It's making me question everything, from the chemistry that we have to the fact that he's probably stalking me. I mean hell, he knew where I lived *and* he knew where my bedroom was last night ... And I'd given him no information about that before.

I resolve to talk to him about it the next time I see him, no matter how difficult or awkward it might be. I just want to know at this point. That's the biggest thing for me. I need him to understand that I know he'd never hurt me, but that I also need him to be forthright about this sort of thing.

"What are you pouting about?" Lina suddenly asks me, shortly before her shift is supposed to end.

"I'm not pouting," I quip back, though I definitely was.

I need to get out of my thoughts and focus on closing up the diner for the evening. So what if Caleb didn't actually show up like he said he would. It's fine, he's probably busy doing something. I should be glad, because it means he wasn't watching me while I worked or something ...

The thought shouldn't disappoint me like it does.

"Well, I think you can stop pouting, looks like your man's here," my friend says, that trouble making smile of hers

evident in her tone.

My head flies to look at the door and sure enough, Caleb's intimidating figure is walking across the rapidly darkening parking lot. I was so lost in my thoughts that I'd missed the fact that the sun was going down, but at least I get to see him again. Relief washes over me like a wave as he walks through the door.

"And on that note," Lina starts before checking the time. "My shift is done and the diner is closed. Cook's closing the kitchen down, and I've wiped down all the tables."

"You can go, then," I tell her, my eyes not straying once from Caleb as he walks up to the counter, looking smoldering and handsome as ever.

I almost can't believe that he's real. That he's standing right in front of me.

"Great, you two kids have fun. Wipe up after you're done, alright?" Lina laughs as she pulls her bag over her shoulder and clocks out. "And don't do anything I wouldn't do!"

"There's not much, I know, Lina," I call after her. Her cackle is faint through the door as it closes behind her, but it makes me laugh none the less.

"Hey," Caleb finally says. The diner's quiet but for the last cook in the back, finishing his closing tasks, and a few appliances humming in the background.

"Hey," I repeat to him. I can't even fight the smile as it spreads across my face. Something about this man just makes me happy, and I can't even wrap my head around why that might be.

“I’m sorry I’m so late,” he explains. “I got held up at a client’s place doing some last-minute work.”

“It’s okay. I’m just happy to see you.” My heart falls when I realize this may be the only chance for me to ask him about how he knows where I live. If I wait, I’ll forget to ask because we’ll be wrapped up in each other, lost to the world outside my bedroom. It’s now or never. I suck in a breath and let it out slowly. “I actually have something to ask you.”

“Of course, baby. Fire away.” He pulls a seat out from the counter and sits in it.

“Well, I just ... how did you know where I live? I don’t remember telling you how to get to my apartment yesterday, and I totally forgot to text you my address ...” I trail off, at a loss for words. Asking about this is harder than I expected.

Caleb goes still as soon as the question sinks in.

“The only thing I can think of is that you’re following me ...” Blood rushes through my ears in a dull roar, my nerves making me tense and nervous. “And if that’s what you’re doing, I just want to know.”

He’s silent, his brow furrowed, and his mouth set in a hard line as he stares at me, deciding what to say.

“I need you to know that I *know* you’d never hurt me. I know you’re a good man, Caleb.”

“Good men don’t follow little doves like you around, Erin,” he says through gritted teeth. “You’re right that I would never hurt you. I’d take a bullet for you before I ever harmed you. But that doesn’t mean I’m a good man.”

“That’s not true,” I protest. “You were framed for something you didn’t do, while trying to expose bad people doing bad things. That’s different.”

He gives me a desperate look. “But there are other things I’ve had to do, baby. I’m a soldier. I’ve had to kill people before. I’ve had to hurt people to protect others. And I’ve been following you since you ran into me at the airport because I’m a sick fuck who thinks you belong to me. One look at you was all it took to convince me of that. It’s been a month and you haven’t left my fucking mind once.”

His words hit me like a waterfall, crushing and powerful.

And yet ... I like it.

I like that he thinks I’m his.

“I am yours, Caleb,” I say, taking his hand. “Did you not understand that after last night?”

His brow furrows. “Do you not have a problem with the fact that I’m stalking you?”

I bite my lip. “No. It’s you. I know you wouldn’t hurt me, and that it was something you were doing because you were protective of me. I like that you think I’m yours.”

“I don’t just think it,” he says darkly. “I know it. It’s always been a matter of making you see that too. I’ve been thinking about you all day, about how I want to show you that you’re mine by sinking my cock into your warm, wet—”

He doesn’t get to finish his sentence, because someone walks in the door. When I lean around him to tell whoever it is that the diner is closed, the words die on my tongue.

“Am I interrupting something?” the person says, and my blood runs cold.

My stepdad just walked into the diner.

Chapter 8

Caleb

I've spent over a year coming up with a plan to bring Don Berkely down. I've spent the past month manipulating my way into landing him as a landscaping client so that I could plant bugs and surveillance equipment around his house to help gather evidence.

This afternoon, I started doing just that, and I've already managed to gather a few key pieces in the few short hours my monitors have been in place. Getting the work done while also making it look like I'd worked on his lawn was a lot of work and it kept me from seeing Erin sooner, but it was absolutely worth the work, especially because I knew Erin would understand, even if she didn't know that it was her stepfather I was bugging.

But now, the bastard is standing feet away, red in the face with anger as he stares me down.

"Is this the sort of man you go for, Erin?" he drawls angrily.
"Big and thuggish?"

I can feel Erin tense behind me under her stepfather's anger, and the thought that this man thinks he can deride my woman makes me see red.

"Do you have a problem, sir?" I spit at him, my words dripping with sarcasm.

Berkely's eyes narrow as he looks me up and down. "Where do I know you from?"

“He’s your landscaper,” Erin says softly, sounding shaken.

“Is he now? That’s not it, though. I know you from somewhere.” The man scratches his chin for a moment before snapping his fingers and pointing at me. “You’re a soldier, aren’t you?”

This is a plot twist I wasn’t expecting. I’m surprised he remembers a man like me, someone so far beneath him he doesn’t even know my name. I relish the idea of taking him out, knowing that he’ll never see me coming. I already have everything I need. Don Berkely had a busy day fucking over innocent people and because of that, I already have a wealth of evidence, more than enough to prove that he’s a treasonous bastard.

“Former,” I grit out. “Marine. Worked in intelligence.”

His eyes flash as Erin’s hand wraps around mine on the counter.

“Former, huh? Why’d you leave?”

He really doesn’t know. Oh, this is perfect.

“I got thrown in the brig for cocaine possession. I’d started poking around the wrong places you see, noticed some patterns. When I finally went to present my case that there was an illegal operation leaking information to our enemies overseas, I got framed for drug possession. Funny how that works.”

Berkely’s face goes pale. “Erin, this man has been dishonorably discharged. He’s a criminal. Let me drive you home.”

“No,” she says firmly. She doesn’t move a muscle, instead standing her ground behind the counter as I let go of her hand and stand, drawing up to my full height.

“You know, I’ve thought of this moment for a long time,” I say, flashing him a toothy grin as I slip my hands in my pocket casually. “When I first realized who oversaw the whole crime ring, I didn’t think I stood a chance at getting him to pay, but I was going to try anyway. And then I realized that the guy in charge was also making the woman of my dreams uncomfortable. Unwanted advances, comments that made her feel ill at ease—all the classic shitty stepdad stuff.”

Erin gasps behind me but says nothing.

I take a breath before I finish. “Because of that, I can promise you one thing, Don Berkely. You’re fucking done endangering innocent people.”

The room rings with silence for several long moments before Berkely breaks it with a scornful laugh.

“You think I’m scared of you? Caleb Wilson, I know exactly who you are. I got you arrested for doing drugs. That’s not a crime, that’s just public service. You should be thanking me. Everyone should be thanking me.”

I smile at him menacingly. “Then you get it, don’t you? Me compiling evidence of your crimes is a public service, so you should thank me as well.”

“What proof?” the man spits, stepping forward and seething with rage. “You have nothing to prove.”

“Tell that to all the data I accessed this afternoon. Your wife was so accommodating, she offered me some water and

everything. All I had to do was get on the property, look after her rose bushes, and access your computer remotely. I have everything I need, asshole. You're fucking finished."

"That's not possible—"

I pull my phone and check it for notifications. "Says here I have responses from contacts at the FBI, the CIA, and CID saying thank you for the leg work. It's not even possible anymore, it's a fact."

Berkely stammers and scowls for several long moments. He goes from looking like a pompous prick to an overaged child that just got caught doing something bad. "H-How did you—"

"You'll find out in court," I say.

The man's eyes dart between Erin and I as he grows red in the face once more. I step in front of Erin before growling. "If you know what's good for you, you'll leave now and never talk to your stepdaughter ever again."

"I'll get you for this," Don hisses at me, turning around to leave. "I have friends in high places, places you can't even fathom."

I scoff, not bothering to dignify his threat with a response. He's cornered, even if he doesn't know it. My FBI contact just sent me an encrypted message saying that they're about to raid his house. He won't even have the time to change out of those hideous golf shorts. He's going to be booked in the next hour or so with any luck.

The door rattles as he slams it behind him. Erin rushes to the door and locks it without a word before turning to look at me.

"I didn't use you to get to him, Erin," I say.

“I know.”

“I had no idea he was your stepfather. I should have told you as soon as I connected the dots.”

“Considering the fact that you’ve got a bunch of government agencies wrapped up into this investigation, I understand why,” she shrugs. “I’m just glad that justice is going to be served.”

I pull her into my arms and give her the searing kiss I’ve been craving from her all afternoon. “Still, I didn’t like keeping it from you.”

“Caleb,” she breathes as I nuzzle at the skin of her neck. “Not here.”

“Why not?”

There’s a cough from somewhere behind us, and we both look up to see an older man standing at the kitchen window. That must be the cook, or one of them.

“That’s why,” she whispers to me with a laugh.

“I’m all done with shutting down, so I’m headed out,” the man says, looking the two of us over. “You good to lock up, kid?” he asks Erin.

“Just did. I’ll finish up,” Erin says as she disentangles herself from me. “Just have to count the till.”

“Alright,” he grumbles. “You kids have a good night.”

“Say hi to your wife for me,” she calls after him.

“Sure thing.”

The back door to the diner clatters behind the cook as he leaves.

I watch Erin as she sighs and shuffles over to the register to start counting cash.

“Didn’t I hear you say yesterday that you wanted to buy this place?” I ask as she pops open the till.

“Yeah. Don’s been offering to buy it for years but aside from that being creepy, it’s never felt right. It’s something I want to do by myself. I want to work for it,” she explains as she starts to count cash with practiced ease.

“You should tell me about your plans,” I smile at her, waiting for her to finish rifling through the stack of twenties before moving to the tens.

“I wouldn’t want to bore you with all of the random details.”

“Nothing about you is boring, baby. I want to know everything.”

“Fine,” she smiles up at me. “But don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Epilogue

Erin

Five years later ...

I tiptoe out of my son's room, closing the door gently behind me.

Our two kids are the greatest joy we could have ever asked for, but our youngest is a menace at bedtime. If anyone wakes him up before he has the chance to finally get some sleep, I will crazy murder them. You'd think he'd be tired enough by the end of the day to just let himself pass out, but no. He's stubborn, just like his father.

Noah may be as stubborn as his father, but his older brother is the one that looks more like Caleb. Anthony is a spitting image, but he's much more laid back than I thought a kid could be. We had it easy with him, and then Noah came along, but I wouldn't change a moment of it for the world.

I sigh in relief once I make it down the hallway without hearing his plaintive cry. All seems to be well.

Time to have ice cream without the kids begging for any.

When our family started growing, my usual stock of ice cream had to get smaller. Feeding a family of growing boys takes up more freezer space than you'd expect. Even so, I always keep a few pints around so I can steal a few spoonfuls after the kids are in bed.

The cool air of the freezer feels good on my face as I open it to look and see what I've got. The current cook at the diner has started working on a few new flavors and I've never been happier to have started employing a pastry chef. She's the best for feeding the monster that is my sweet tooth.

"I figured I would find you here!"

I jump back from the freezer, guilt flooding my system at being caught. I quickly shut the freezer and turn around to smile at Caleb.

He's still wearing his work clothes. I can't help but wonder how the heck he still looks that hot while being sweaty and gross from a workday spent outside in the heat. It's honestly unfair that my husband is this handsome all the time.

I step up to him and run my hands over his chest, smiling sweetly up at him. "You're home early."

"You think you can distract me from the fact that I just caught you red-handed trying to cheat on me?"

"It's not what it looks like," I whisper, looking over his work clothes and picking at the little specs of grass I find. "I was just ... counting the tubs to make sure they were all there. And also, maybe some quality control for the diner. I promise I don't love ice cream more than I love you."

He raises a single brow in skepticism, but his eyes filled with mirth. He can act all scary and gruff like this, but he and I both know he's a gentle giant. The only things he's capable of hurting are the weeds that keep popping up in his client's flower beds.

I'm glad that he allowed himself to truly start a landscaping business. He'd started it as a front to get closer to my stepfather, but it was work he'd always enjoyed in spite of that. And it turned out he had a way with planting things and transforming outdoor spaces. He didn't have to start the business—he'd gotten a sizeable settlement after suing the responsible parties involved for what happened to him in the military—but he knew he needed to do something to keep him from going nuts while truly adjusting to civilian life. It's been a pleasure to watch the man I love grow into his profession like he has.

"You asked me to stop you from having too many sweets," Caleb whispers as he backs me to the wall.

"Did I? I don't seem to recall asking you to do something so ridiculous."

"You don't, huh?" he chuckles, his hands dropping to my waist and he jerks me forward so I am plastered against his massive chest. "How convenient."

I suck in a sharp breath when he slips his hand underneath my shirt and runs his callused fingers over my peaked nipples. He leans down, crashing his lips into mine; I open for him with a low, needy whimper. He angles his head and kisses me deeper, a growl rumbling in his chest as his tongue slides against mine. The sensation has me pushing up against him, my craving for him growing wilder with every taste I take.

My head is spinning when he pulls back from the kiss. His eyes are wild with lust, and I'm sure I look the same.

"I missed you," I whisper, gasping when he takes my nipple between his fingers and pinches, making heat ache between

my thighs. “I ... Oh!”

“Did you now?” he murmurs, low and deep, slipping his hand under my leggings. My breathing grows frayed as his fingers dip down closer and closer to my throbbing sex.

We’ve been married for five years and I’m still waiting for the hunger between us to cool off. Now I’m starting to think that wanting each other is the one thing that will never change, even as our babies grow and our bodies age.

I will always crave his hands on me, the caress of his fingers, his warm breath skipping against my skin. I know it’s the same for him, though he’s come to enjoy teasing me almost too much. Watching me fall apart in his arms bit by bit really gets him going. It works because he always knows when to make me crumble.

I cry out and buck in his arms when he sinks a finger inside me. I’m wet and aching for him already, and I know that I’ll soon need more.

“Oh, Daddy! More, please,” I cry out, squirming in his arms and bucking my hips against his hand. My fingers are trembling as I close them around his shoulders to pull him closer to me, desperate to be as close to him as I can.

“You’re dripping, baby,” he rasps, adding another finger and twisting them deliciously. “Tell me, sweetheart, do you want my cock in your tight little cunt?”

I nod frantically at him. “Please,” I beg.

Caleb draws his fingers out of me, and I whine at their loss. My hands drop to his clothes to start pushing them off. He’s taking too long. Can’t he tell that I need him *now*?

“Eager, are we?” he grunts but his eyes are just as wild as mine. Within moments I have his pants open and I tug them down his legs to wrap my hand around his rock-hard erection. He turns me around and tugs my leggings and underwear down around my knees so that he has just enough access to me.

“You gonna be a good girl for Daddy, sweetheart?”

“Yes,” I gasp as I feel the head of his cock prod at my center. Even after all these years, his girth stretches me deliciously every time.

Tonight is no different, and I sigh as he pushes inside me, the feeling of him filling me second to none.

“Fuck me,” I whisper, barely holding on to my sanity. I place my hands on the wall and buck my hips back onto his cock.

“Please, Daddy!”

Caleb swears under his breath before gripping my hips and starting to thrust. His pace is forceful and rough, enough to have us both panting and sighing as we start seeking pleasure from each other.

Yes.

“So perfect, Erin,” he grunts, his hips slamming into me, one brutal thrust after another. “I could live in this pussy forever.”

My back arches as he hits spots only he will ever get to inside me. I can feel every pulsing bit of him. The ridge of his cock, the veins, the girth ... everything.

The heat in my pussy climbs quickly to new heights until suddenly, I’m falling. A whimper tears out of me just as my orgasm crests. Stars explode behind my eyelids as my body

spasms. I tighten around Caleb's cock and he stiffens at the sensation, gasping as he floods me with his warm seed. His grip on my hips is relentless as he rides out the high of his release until he's completely drained.

He bends forward and kisses my neck, his hands rubbing comforting circles on my flesh. Our breathing is ragged and I can already feel his release beginning to trickle down my thighs as he pulls out.

Being claimed by him like this will never get old.

"So, how was work?" he asks as he helps me pull my leggings back up.

"I ..." My mind is mush and I can hardly gather my fried brain cells to conjure up a thought.

"How about we talk about it over ice cream," he grins at me.

"But I'm only letting you cheat this once, okay? Don't tell the kids."

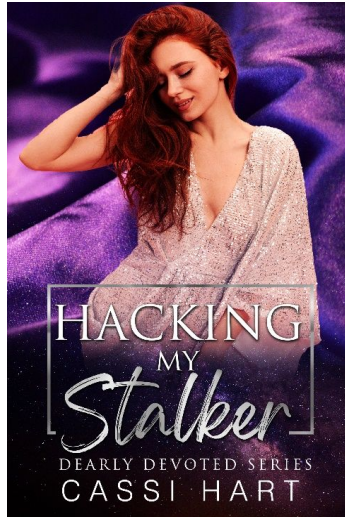
My face lights up with a smile as I stare at my gentle giant. He's the sweetest man on earth, even if he also tends to terrify everyone when they first meet him. I'm okay with that. I love that he saves all of his sweetness just for me.

"I would quit ice cream for you, you know that right?" I tell him. "It would be a hard and painful process, and it would probably require some therapy but ... for you, I would."

His eyes shine with mirth as he stares down at me. "I love you too, Erin."

~The End

Up Next...



Hazel

Most of my friends know me as Hazel, the computer science major. Only one person knows my alter ego, Monarch, the black hat hacker. I might be a wizard with computers, but I'm not a hacker by choice. I'm trapped, like a butterfly in a net, doing someone else's bidding. But I made a mistake and attracted the attention of a dangerous man. Bishop says he can protect me, but how can I believe him when no one ever has before? Do I choose the nightmare I know or take a risk and hand myself over to the one man capable of breaking the only thing I have left ... *my heart?*

Bishop

I've worked hard to get where I am and build my reputation as the most feared man in this city. So, it's infuriating when someone thinks they can hack my system. Finding Monarch quickly becomes an obsession, but the last thing I expect is the cute little redhead to be the elusive hacker making a fool of me and my system. I quickly realize that there's more to my little hacker than meets the eye and she's in danger from more than just me. Hazel may not believe me, but she'll soon realize that I protect what's mine. And make no mistake, Hazel is *mine*.

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The Kingpin's Obsession

Alice

I saw something I shouldn't have, and my life is in danger.

The police won't listen, and I have no choice but to seek help at Benedetti's, a bar known for its criminal clientele. But I'm barely inside the door before a dark eyed devil drags me back out and demands to know why I'm there. I shouldn't trust him, but I don't have a choice when he's the only one willing to help me.

Too late, I learn who he really is, and now I'm left to wonder... when this is all over, will he save my life only to break my heart?

About the Author

Cassi lives to write brazen OTT, insta-love, short stories, about possessive alphas and the women they love. Stories that will leave you satisfied, and maybe blushing a little. Cassi loves pedicures, being pampered in any way possible, her darling golden Princess, amazing coffee, and traveling to anywhere warm.



Cassi H♥nt