

Santa
DADDY

the Daddy
CLAUS

LONI NICHOLE



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THE DADDY CLAUS

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Prologue

JORDAN

4 WEEKS AGO

“YO, ASS FACE MCGEE.”

“Stop fucking calling me that,” I growl at my brother, Roman. I’m almost forty years old, and he’s been calling me the same damn thing since we were kids. “And stop bugging me. I’ve got shit to do.”

As the owner of an AHL team in its inception season, my job is never done. I don’t mind the work, though. It beats the hell out of the tedium that comes with most of what I do. When making money comes easy, eventually, the shit gets old.

“Well, drop whatever you’re doing and get to the club.”

“Fuck no,” I say automatically. Roman owns The Sterling Rope, an exclusive BDSM club in Silver Spoon Falls. He’s been trying to get me to join since he opened the doors, but I’m not interested. The only time I ever make an appearance is when I’m there to see him. Doesn’t matter if he promises his exclusive clientele complete privacy and anything their hearts desire. He can’t offer what interests me.

There's only one woman who can do that. Hollie Janara, my baby sister's best friend... and the team's physical therapist. From the moment Gabbi brought her home five years ago, I was obsessed. I've never wanted anything like I want her screaming for Daddy to fuck her harder.

She's the sweetest little thing I've ever seen. Her brown eyes and impish smile make my dick throb every time she looks at me. Unfortunately for me, she's over a dozen years younger than I am... the same age as the sister I raised. I feel like a bastard for even thinking about her the way I do. And yet, I do it anyway. When I stroke my cock, it's to thoughts of her on her knees, staring up at me. It's to fantasies of her pleading for Daddy to take what belongs to him.

It's to memories of her curvy body in a bikini, lounging in my backyard.

If she knew, she'd never look at me the same.

If Gabbi knew, she wouldn't either.

Hollie doesn't like me much as it is. She spends most of her time avoiding me. I can count on one hand the number of times we've been in a room alone together since she joined the Falcons as the team's physical therapist. Shit. I don't need all twenty fingers and toes to count the number of times we've been in a room alone together in the past five years.

"Fine," Roman says. "But Hollie's here."

I fumble the phone, nearly dropping it on my desk. "What the fuck did you just say?"

"Hollie is here."

"You let her in?"

“I’m not the one working the door. Bronx is. He says she had an invitation.”

A growl rumbles in my throat. Who the fuck invited her? And why the fuck is she there? She’s too goddamn young to see anything that goes on in that club.

“It’s the Masquerade Party,” Roman says.

I frown. “Then how do you know it’s Hollie?”

“Her tattoo.”

Christ. On her twenty-first birthday, she got ink... a watercolor dreamcatcher held aloft by an infinity symbol. It’s unmistakable and on the back of her neck. I wanted to spank her for marking her beautiful body. But I’ve wanted to run my lips over it a thousand times since. It fascinates me. Perhaps because I don’t understand the meaning behind it. Perhaps because it’s on her body. I don’t know.

“Get her out of there.”

“No can do.”

“What the fuck do you mean, *no can do*? It’s your club.”

“I mean, if you want her out of here, get your ass over here and remove her yourself. I’m not kicking her out because you’re hung up on her, brother,” Roman says bluntly. “Sooner or later, she’s going to find someone. Maybe it’ll be tonight. Maybe it won’t. But if you don’t make a move, I can guarantee it won’t be you.”

I growl wordlessly, my knuckles white around the phone. He’s right, damn him. It’s my biggest nightmare... watching her fall in love with someone who isn’t me. But she’s never shown any interest in dating, let alone in Rome’s club. I thought I had time before I had to deal with the possibility.

Looks like my time is running out. One day soon, my little princess is going to find someone. Some motherfucker will have his hands on her body. His tongue down her throat. She'll be crying out for someone who isn't me.

No. Hell no.

“Don't let anyone touch her,” I snarl, shoving the paperwork Grayson Marrow needed me to sign to the side. It joins an ever-growing stack slowly taking over the left side of my desk. “If anyone has their goddamn hands on her when I get there, I'll burn the entire fucking club to the ground.”

I'm already on my feet, striding toward the door.

“Bring a mask,” Roman says before I hang up on him.



BY THE TIME I ARRIVE AT THE CLUB, I'M ON A DAMN MISSION. Bronx Kaiser, Roman's bouncer, waves me through as soon as I give him my name. I'm guessing Rome warned him that I was on the way.

I stride inside, eyes peeled for Hollie. I briefly contemplate heading to Rome's private area to look for her since it overlooks the public areas of the club, but as soon as I see everyone in their demi masks, I nix the idea. I need to be on the ground level to find her. Everyone is dressed as if they're at some formal event, with thousand-dollar suits and designer dresses on display. They'll be on the floor as soon as they cross into the private and exhibition rooms. But out here, they dress the part, playing by Roman's rules.

Couples and singles chat and sip expensive alcohol, discussing everything from boundaries to sex toys. It's a world apart here, one that I'll never get used to stepping into.

Here, people don't have to be anything other than who they are. It doesn't matter who they are to the world outside the doors of the Sterling Rope or what responsibilities rest on their shoulders. Inside, they're allowed to put it down and be as uninhibited as they want.

I understand the appeal, if not the desire. Public sex and sharing has never been my thing. Neither has fucking in a club full of people. Truth be told, I haven't made time for dating since our parents died, and I became Gabbi's guardian when she was four. I went from a twenty-year-old college kid to a stand-in dad overnight.

Between raising her and focusing on my company, I didn't have time to date. I didn't have a desire to date, either. Falling in love wasn't something I ever intended to do. Hollie came out of nowhere, hitting me like a fucking bolt of lightning right in the heart.

I find her at the bar. I don't even have to see the tattoo to know it's her. I'd know that ripe, curvy body anywhere. It stars in every single one of my fantasies. She's standing off to the side, a glass of wine in one hand as she looks around. Her low-cut white dress hugs her gorgeous body, making her look like a naughty little angel. Her mask matches the dress, obscuring her cocoa-colored eyes.

My dick reacts to the sight of her, pressing insistently against my zipper.

I stride toward her, fully intending to get her out of here. Except somewhere between starting across the bar and arriving in front of her, Roman's warning floats to the surface

of my mind. I think about the fact that, someday soon, she's going to choose someone. Someone else will claim her. Someone else will love her. Someone else will wake up next to her every morning and fall asleep with her in their arms every night.

She won't be mine.

Fuck that. She *is* mine.

Possessive jealousy and desire override everything.

She's here for a reason. Whatever it is, she won't be getting it from anyone but me.

"You look lost, beautiful."

She blinks behind her mask, her lips parting slightly. "N-no, I'm not lost."

Her soft response washes over me. Christ, I could listen to her speak all goddamn day.

"You sure about that? This doesn't look like heaven where you belong, baby."

A quiet laugh bubbles from her lips. "I think they might disagree," she says, nodding in the direction of the clubgoers. "A few of them seem like this is heaven to them."

"It's not for you?"

"I..." She shrugs helplessly, her gaze on her wineglass.

"First time?"

"Yes," she whispers.

"What brought you here?"

"I don't know." She speaks so softly I have to lean in to hear her. God, she's so shy and sweet. That's not all she is, though.

Hollie is as feisty as she is soft, as fierce as she is gentle. There's a reason I've been hung up on her for five damn years, a reason I ache to give her the world. I've never wanted it with anyone except her. But with her? I crave it on levels I didn't even know existed. I want to worship this girl, spoil her, and fuck her raw in the same breath.

"You're looking for something."

"Maybe. I don't know."

"Tell me."

Part of me expects her to refuse, but she shocks the hell out of me by telling me the truth. "My daddy."

Precum leaks into my boxers. "You're looking for a daddy?"

She meets my gaze again, her eyes wide behind her mask. "Yes."

Oh, princess. You shouldn't have told me that.

"I'm looking for something, too," I say, getting closer to her.

"W-what?"

"You, naked and on my cock." I place my lips near her ear, being careful not to touch her, even though I'm fucking dying to do exactly that. But rules are rules, and around here, they matter. "You were made to be this daddy's perfect little princess, baby."

I half expect her to slap me. It's probably what I deserve. But I've been fantasizing about being hers for longer than I should have. If she wants a daddy, I'll be the best goddam daddy she could ever want.

She doesn't slap me. She doesn't flee, either.

She shocks the hell out of me when she moans quietly.

“Ah, hell,” I growl. “You aren’t going to tell me no, are you?”

“I-I...” Her tongue dances along her bottom lip. “No.”

I hold my hand out to her, not wasting time... not willing to give her time to change her mind. “Then come with me, princess. I’ll show you exactly what it means to be my little princess.”

She hesitates for a split second before setting her glass on the bar and slipping her hand into mine. I immediately begin pulling her through the club, leading her toward a private room. I’d rather get her the fuck out of here, but I’ve been waiting five years to get my hands on her. I’m not waiting a second longer. Once I give her what she came here for, I’ll take her home, and we’ll sort out everything else.

But right now? I’m on a motherfucking mission.

I drag her into the first empty private room we come across, slamming and locking the door behind us. Like the rest of the club, the room is designed for comfort and pleasure. Rome spared no expense. Everything is richly appointed and tasteful but easily cleaned between occupants. A variety of tools hang on hooks. There’s a bowl of condoms on the table. I have no intention of using one.

I’m breeding this little princess when I get inside her.

As soon as we’re over the threshold, I’ve got her in my arms, kissing her. I don’t remove our masks. It’s yet another of Roman’s damn rules. Masks stay on for the duration of the party. Complete anonymity for one night of the year. It’s bullshit, but I’ll play nice for one night.

She kisses me back eagerly, running her hands up and down my back. Her kiss is unschooled as if it’s her first. That drives me fucking wild.

“Goddamn, princess,” I growl, drinking from her lips. “You taste like sugar for Daddy.”

“It’s the wine.”

“No, it’s you.” I back her toward the bed, nibbling on her lips. “You’re sweet and soft, exactly the way a princess should be.”

The backs of her knees hit the bed. She gasps as she tumbles backward, landing on her back with her arms splayed wide. Her tits spill out the top of her dress.

I palm my cock, staring down at her. “Fuck, princess. Look how pretty you look.”

Her gaze climbs up my body, doing a slow perusal. “You look handsome, too.”

“Yeah? You like what you see, baby girl?” I strip my suit jacket off, tossing it aside. There’s no way I can get undressed right now, though. Not unless I plan to answer a whole helluva lot of questions she’s not ready to be asking. But I roll my shirtsleeves up, preparing to feast on this woman.

“Yes.”

I smirk, crawling up the bed over her. “Good, because your daddy is the only one you look at if you don’t want to be punished.”

“P-punished?”

I hover over her on my forearms, meeting her gaze. “Fucked until you’re screaming for mercy, princess. Daddy doesn’t share,” I growl, meaning that shit to my core. I’ve been obsessing about this girl since the day I met her. Just the thought of anyone touching her makes me crazy. If anyone actually tried to put their hands on her... Well, it wouldn’t be

the first time I put my hands on someone for putting their hands on her.

Some asshole tried to slap her ass at a game a few weeks ago. I broke his hand before I banned him from the arena for life. He won't touch what doesn't belong to him again.

Her eyes darken behind her mask, a shiver running through her.

"Mmm," I hum, running a hand up her side. "I think you like the thought of being punished."

"M-maybe," she whispers, tilting her face up to mine.

I take the invitation and kiss her again. Within moments, I've got her pinned to the bed beneath me, dry-humping her. I trail hungry kisses down her chest, tugging her dress down so I can get my mouth on her nipples.

"You didn't wear a bra tonight." My teeth close around her right nipple in a little bite. "Were you trying to drive every man here fucking crazy, princess?"

She throws her head back, crying out in ecstasy.

I nip her again, demanding an answer. "Were you?"

"No, Daddy. Only you!"

I fall still on top of her, that one word reverberating like a gong in my soul. She just called me her daddy. Jesus. She's said it a thousand times in my dreams. But hearing it out loud? I don't give a damn if I'm a sick bastard for wanting to hear it. I don't care if the whole world has something to say about the fact that she's almost half my age. I don't care about anything but her and how hard my heart beats for her right now.

"That's right, only me," I grunt, sliding down her body. "Your daddy is the only man who exists to you, princess. And he's

about to show you why.” I drag her dress up her body, taking care not to rip it—can’t have her walking out of here with her panties exposed. Half the club probably wouldn’t even notice, given what most of them will change into. But Hollie has never struck me as one prone to public displays of nudity. In fact, she’s never struck me as one to show up at Rome’s club.

Had I known she was this desperate for a daddy, not even hell itself would have stopped me from claiming her long before now.

“Oh, princess,” I breathe, my mouth watering at the sight of her soaked panties. Like her dress, they’re virginal white. She’s soaked them through, leaving the thin fabric plastered to her bare lips. “Look at you.”

“Y-you aren’t supposed to,” she says, even as the little minx spreads her legs wider, giving me a better view.

“Too late for that.” I shoulder my way between her legs, push my mask up to my forehead, and run my lips up her inner thigh. “If you didn’t want Daddy looking, you shouldn’t have worn such a pretty fucking dress for him.”

“Oh, Daddy. W-what...?” She writhes beneath me, unable to stay still. “What a-are you doing?”

Ah, hell. She isn’t just playing a game with that question. I hear the nerves in her voice. My little princess has never been touched. She’s been saving herself for me.

“I’m eating it, baby girl,” I rasp, trying to get my shit together before I lose it here and now. If this is the first time anyone has ever touched her, I intend for it to be a night she won’t ever forget. Getting her addicted to me is the only hope I have at this point.

I've been watching her every move for five years. She's spent most of that time avoiding me. Because she knows I'm a perverted bastard who wants her screaming for Daddy? Because she just doesn't like me? I don't know. But if God is giving out miracles, I'm not asking questions tonight.

"It belongs to me. I can eat it whenever I want."

She gulps audibly.

"If you scream, everyone is going to hear you." I flick her panties to the side, revealing her glistening folds. Ah, Christ. I might not survive the night. She's the prettiest pink.

"I can't be quiet!"

"Then everyone is going to hear me eating it," I growl, not giving a fuck who hears. Let them. Maybe then they'll know to keep their hands off what's mine. I run my nose up her slit, breathing her in. My mask gets in the way so I rip it off, flinging it away. Fuck Roman's rules.

"Daddy!"

As soon as she whines my name, I lose it. I growl, spreading her lips and feasting on her. She inhales a sharp, surprised breath, expelling it in a wail that's pure shocked bliss. Her arousal floods my tongue, sticky sweet and potently addictive.

I grind my hips against the bed, seeking relief as I drink her down my throat, trying to drive her out of her mind before I lose mine. I knew getting my hands on her would be a revelation. But I didn't know she'd taste this good. Jesus.

"Fucking hell, princess." I stiffen my tongue, fighting to get it in her little hole. She's so damn tight. Has she even had a finger in there? "You want to break your daddy with this perfect little thing?"

“Yes. No. Yes,” she sobs. “Oh, please.”

I fuck her with my tongue like it’s my cock, grinding my nose against her clit. I pry her cheeks apart and taste her there. Christ, I want to explore every inch of her delectable body.

“Daddy!” she wails, coming all over my face when I wrap my tongue around her clit, sucking hard. She squirms, trying to get away from me, but I throw my arm across her abdomen, holding her in place. She’s not going anywhere.

I don’t let her up until she comes a second and then a third time in rapid succession, thrashing so hard I’m a little worried she’s going to hurt herself. By the time she finally stops shaking and moaning, I’m between her legs with my dick in my hand, panting for breath.

I don’t know how the hell she’s still got her mask on, but she does. I lost track of mine the moment it hit the floor.

“Goddamn, baby girl,” I breathe, leaning down to take her mouth in a hard kiss. “Did that feel as good as it looked?”

“B-better.”

I groan, tugging her leg up over my hip. My cock slides through her folds.

She grabs my shoulders, moaning.

“Daddy is taking what belongs to him now, princess,” I breathe, placing my mouth next to her ear. “So be a good girl and take all of me.”

“Yes, Daddy.”

I run my nose along hers before claiming her mouth, hoping to distract her. I grind my dick against her clit while we kiss, driving her higher and higher. I don’t have to ask to know I’m

her first, and I don't want her to feel any pain. This will be the only first time she gets. I intend for her to remember it.

Once she's mewling beneath me, unable to stay still, I press the head of my cock to her entrance and push forward. I take it slow, claiming her inch by excruciatingly perfect inch. She's burning hot around me and so fucking tight. It's the best kind of torture.

She startles slightly when her hymen tears, her nails digging into my back. But she doesn't tense up or cry out. She doesn't stop wiggling, either.

"Breathe for Daddy," I whisper anyway, kissing all over her neck. The thought of her in the least amount of pain fucking kills me. I'd take it in a heartbeat if I could.

I stay completely still inside of her for a long moment, giving her time to adjust. She sobs and shakes and moans, every sound she makes slowly unraveling me.

Eventually, I can't fucking take it anymore.

I slip forward another inch.

She's a livewire, firing against me again and again. Every time I move, she whimpers for more. Every time I stop to give her a reprieve, she squirms, determined to keep the pleasure building.

"Fucking hell, baby girl." I press my face to her throat as my hips come to rest against hers. "You trying to break your daddy?"

"Y-yes."

"Yeah? You want me crazy for you, princess?"

"Yes." She claws down my back. "Oh, please."

“Keep letting me in this perfect little thing, and you’ll have me on my fucking knees, baby girl,” I growl in her ear, sliding back before driving into her.

She cries out in bliss, her head thrown back. She sounds as good as she looks. And I can’t take it anymore. I have to fuck her. *Now.*

I wrap my tongue around her nipple and drive into her, fucking her hard and deep again and again. My mouth is everywhere I can reach, leaving little love bites all over her. I run my hands all over her, too, touching every generous curve, learning each one.

Hollie is lush everywhere, with full breasts, a round belly, and thick thighs that I want wrapped around my head when I die. Her body is a work of art, more than a handful. I fucking love every inch of it.

“It feels so good. Oh, please. Don’t stop.”

“You think I would?” I rasp, dragging her leg up higher. “Not even hell could stop Daddy now, baby girl. Not until your belly is round with my kid, and everyone knows what I’ve been doing to you.”

“I...I...”

“Your body doesn’t lie, princess. I felt your little cunt clench around my cock. You love the thought of Daddy planting his kid in you.” I drag her nipple through my teeth. “You want it, don’t you?”

“Y-yes!”

“Then come on my cock like a good girl.” I reach between us, rolling my thumb across her clit. “Cream all over Daddy’s cock like a good little princess.”

She comes on command, exactly like the good girl she is. As soon as I demand it, her pussy locks down around me, and she wails into the room. *Daddy* echoes from the corners as she shatters around me, stealing every fucking piece of my heart that didn't already belong to her.

I bury my face in her throat, fighting the urge to tell her how I really feel about her. My balls draw up, her orgasm snatching my own from me. I pound into her without rhythm as the cord snaps, and I come hard enough to see stars.

It's not at all how I imagined our first night together—in the middle of Roman's club in a bed that's seen God only knows how much use—and yet, it's somehow completely fucking perfect anyway.

“Come home with me,” I whisper as soon as I can breathe, raining kisses across her face, not ready to let her go. Fuck, I won't ever be ready for that. “We'll figure it out.”

“I-I... Figure it out?”

“How to make this work,” I murmur. There's a lot we need to hash out, like how the fuck we're going to tell Gabbi that I'm marrying her best friend. Or how HR is going to handle the fact that I'm marrying our physical therapist. Or how I'm supposed to keep my damn hands off her. Or what she needs from her daddy. There are a thousand things we need to discuss.

But right now, I just want her in my space where she belongs. The rest we can deal with later. I'll give her whatever she wants, whatever she needs. Whatever it takes to make her mine permanently. Because one night isn't enough. One lifetime won't be, either.

She tenses in my arms before pulling back. “No, I can't.”

“Tomorrow, then.” It feels like a lifetime from now, but I can hang on one more night. I’ve waited five years for her.

“No.” She squirms out of my arms, quickly rolling off the bed.

“Beautiful?”

“I don’t want this,” she blurts, frantically shaking her head as she straightens her dress. “This isn’t what I want. This... this was a mistake.”

What the fuck?

“This wasn’t a fucking mistake, princess.” I climb from the bed, determined to soothe whatever has her ready to run. “This was the best fucking night of my life.”

“Yes, it was!” she cries. “We shouldn’t have done this.”

“Why the fuck not?”

She spins to face me, her mask askew on her face, but still covering half of it. “Because... because... because I don’t want to figure it out. I’m in love!”

I rock back on my heels as a knife sinks into my chest, slicing deep into my heart. The woman I breathe for is in love with someone else?

Jesus Christ.

Roman was right.

I just didn’t think I’d have to live the rest of my life knowing what it’s like to have had her, only to watch her love someone else.

Chapter 1

HOLLIE

CHRISTMAS EVE

FUDGE MY LIFE. I ROLL OVER AND GLANCE AT THE CLOCK. IT'S freaking eleven-twenty-seven. I should be off in dreamland, but I'm wide-awake staring at the ceiling, trying to figure out a way to tell my best friend that I'm skipping her family Christmas celebration.

My stomach clenches as the persistent nausea I've been experiencing the last few days rears its ugly head, and I breathe slowly through my nose trying to will away the discomfort.

When the urge to puke my guts up finally passes, I snuggle under the warm blanket and hope I wake up four weeks ago. Before my entire life imploded. Before I spent one hot, incredible night with the man who owns my heart. And most importantly of all, before I ran out on him without revealing who I am.

About an hour before the sun is due to rise, I admit defeat and drag my exhausted rear-end out of the nice warm bed. I stand

up a little too fast, and the floor tilts beneath my feet as the room spins. Somehow, I manage to stumble into the bathroom before my stomach loses the battle.

I finish throwing up and collapse on the cool, tile floor and regret my life decisions.

Four weeks ago, I acted on impulse without considering all the consequences. I crawl over to the bathroom vanity and reach inside the bottom drawer for the pregnancy test I hid there a few days ago.

I can hear my mother's voice "No time like the present," echoing through my mind. My parents might be the most uninvolved parental units in history, but they did love to give totally irrelevant advice.

Before I'm able to change my mind, I open the little package and take out the white stick that will decide my fate. I go through the routine of taking the test and set it on the counter. Four minutes and I'll have the answer.

While the test is percolating, I hop in the shower to wash the ickiness of my sickness off of me. I stand under the hot water until it runs cold before opening the cloudy glass door and stepping out.

As the chilly air assails me from all sides, a shiver runs through me, and I debate going back to bed. I could lay under my snuggly covers all day long and forget about my problems. Speaking of which, I glance out the side of my eye and see the little white stick taunting me. I almost look at the result, but I'm not ready. I haven't built up the courage. Yet.

It's too cold to walk around in a thin towel so I head to my bedroom to find something to wear. As I'm dressing, I glance

over at the bathroom door, working up the nerve to look. “Get it over with already,” I grumble to myself.

My cellphone dings as I take a step toward the bathroom, and I breathe a sigh of relief at my reprieve.

GABS

You aren't getting out of coming.

So stop trying to figure out a way to cancel and get your rear end ready.

MY BEST FRIEND KNOWS ME. ALMOST TOO WELL. I SIT ON THE edge of the bed, searching my groggy mind for the right words.

ME

I'll be there at eleven.

WHAT THE HECK? THAT WASN'T WHAT I MEANT TO SEND. IT'S like my fingers took over for my brain and typed it out before my sleep-deprived, stressed-to-the-limit mind could catch up.

GABS

See you then. I'll send Jordan over to pick you up if you're late.

GOD. HER MESSAGE REMINDS ME OF WHY I'M TRYING TO FIND a way to avoid this Sterling family celebration. Jordan Sterling, the much older, billionaire, philanthropist, and hockey team owner who stole my heart five years ago.

He's also the man who has no idea I've been secretly obsessing over him since the day Gabbi introduced me to her older brothers. Eighteen-year-old me almost melted into a puddle of goo when the tall, dark, devastatingly handsome older man smiled at me.

Over the last five years, I've fantasized about throwing caution to the wind and jumping his bones countless times. But there was always one big thing standing in my way—my best friend, Gabbi. I couldn't risk my friendship with her.

I reread her message before replying.

ME

That was downright mean.

WITHIN FIVE SECONDS, MY PHONE RINGS AND GABBI'S FACE flashes across the screen.

"I already said I'm coming," I answer, grumbling. My sleepless night and the anticipation of what the little white stick will say cause my reply to be a little grumpier than I'd intended. "I'm getting ready right now." Even though it's barely eight o'clock and I have three hours before I'm expected, it's going to take me that long to work up the nerve to face Jordan.

“Merry Christmas to you, too.” She doesn’t let me get away with my snarkiness.

“Merry Christmas, Gabbi. I can’t believe you’re up and calling me at this time of the morning.”

“Atlas is in the shower.” I really didn’t need to know that. “So, I thought I’d make sure you aren’t trying to avoid our family celebration. Jordan promised to get us a nice big tree to decorate.”

She already knows why I’m reluctant to attend the freaking Christmas party at the Sterling mansion. The thought of facing her older brother is giving me indigestion. I can’t believe I offered the big jerk my heart on a silver platter, and he threw it back in my face when he suggested we “figure out” how to have a secret fling. Maybe he didn’t know it was me because of the masquerade mask, but I recognized Jordan behind his disguise the moment he walked up to me.

“I promise I’ll be there.” I can’t risk hurting my best friend again, no matter how much it crushes me to see him. I’m not sure I’ll survive being in the same room with Jordan, remembering what it feels like to have his muscular body wrapped around mine, and knowing it will never happen again.

“And don’t forget to wear your ugly Christmas sweater,” Gabbi interrupts my doom and gloom to tell me goodbye.

It all started when I lost my freaking mind four weeks ago. I stopped by Curvology, the plus-size boutique in Silver Spoon Falls, for a new dress. Jazzy Matheson, who owns the store with her two sisters, offered me her ticket to the Masquerade Party at The Sterling Rope. I had no business going to the party at the exclusive BDSM club Gabbi’s other brother, Roman, owns, but that didn’t stop me.

Before I could talk myself out of it, I bought a slinky white dress and matching mask and crashed the party. When Jordan showed up, I threw caution to the wind and practically threw myself at him. Ouch.

Unfortunately, my bad decisions didn't end there. Gabbi realized right away that there was something going on with me, and it didn't take her long to figure out what my secret was. Only she had no idea who I'd given my virginity to. I didn't want to admit to my best friend that I'd tricked and slept with her brother, so I pulled a name out of thin air. Atlas Jacks, the goalie for the Silver Spoon Falls Falcons hockey team.

As the lead physical therapist for the Silver Spoon Falls Falcons hockey team, I spend my days dealing with pain-in-the-rear athletes, and his was the first name that came to mind when Gabbi asked me who I'd slept with. Of course, she also jumped to the conclusion he'd run out on me afterward, and I conveniently neglected to correct her.

Things went from bad to worse when Gabbi met Atlas and reamed him for the way he treated me. He denied it convincingly, which convinced Gabbi to question me. It was honestly a relief to admit the truth to my best friend. I hate lying, and having that secret hanging over me was horrible. Especially since Atlas fell for Gabbi instantly. The thought of coming between my best friend and her soulmate was horrible.

Luckily for Gabbi, their relationship went from zero to sixty as soon as I cleared the air. Fast relationships seem to be the norm in this small Texas town. Rumor has it, the water is responsible for the insanely high amount of love-at-first-sight relationships happening in Silver Spoon Falls. Not only did Gabbi find Atlas, but Roman met his own soulmate around the

same time. The magic water dropped the ball with me and Jordan. One-sided love is worse than no love at all.

I have no idea how I'm going to handle the family Christmas celebration with the lovey-dovey couples and the man who shattered my heart and knocked me up. Maybe I can fake a hideous stomach ailment and escape early.

It's time to find out if there is going to be nine months to life consequences for that one night of pleasure in Jordan Sterling's arms. After dropping my phone onto the coffee table, I slowly make my way back to the bathroom to face the little white stick. The walk across my small apartment feels like a mile as I slowly inch across the room, one step at a time. I step into the bathroom and close my eyes.

Taking a deep breath, I grab the little white stick and stare down at the window. *Pregnant*. That one little word circles through my mind on a continuous loop as the urge to puke returns. Full force.

Now, I have to find a way to tell my best friend and her older brother, who doesn't even know we had sex, that I'm pregnant. Yay me.



MY HEART KICKS INTO OVERDRIVE WHEN I TURN DOWN THE private lane leading to the Sterling mansion. It's time to face the music.

I park in the circular driveway between a ridiculously huge black SUV and Atlas' Challenger Hellcat and hop out. Moving

at a snail's pace, I open the back door and reach in to grab the presents I brought. It's show time and I'm sweating.

Gabbi throws the door open before I even knock. "It's about time you got here." She's wearing an adorable green Christmas sweater with "Santa's Favorite" splashed across it.

"I'm three minutes late." I roll my eyes and follow her through the large, ornately-carved, solid wood door and set my presents on the hall table.

"Three minutes too long," Gabbi grumbles and hugs me. "I haven't seen you in four whole days." It seems like an eternity to me, too. I had no idea how much I would miss living with my best friend until she moved in with Atlas. Nothing feels the same.

"Hello, Gabbi." Atlas Jacks, the Falcon's goalie, walks up and smiles at me. At least he isn't holding a grudge against me for almost wrecking his relationship with Gabbi before it even started. "How are you?"

"I'm great," I lie and swallow down the nausea crawling up my throat. "And you?"

"Couldn't be fucking better," he grumbles, and the poor guy has good reason to be a little salty. Over the last few weeks, he's suffered back-to-back concussions and nearly met his maker when a porch collapsed on him in the middle of nowhere. Fortunately for Atlas, his luck has improved significantly since he and Gabbi found each other. He has a lifetime of keeping my best friend out of trouble ahead of him, but I'm betting the massive hockey player is up to the task.

He pulls Gabbi against his side and leans way down to whisper something in her ear that causes her face to turn bright red, and the green-eyed monster rears its ugly head as I watch the

exchange. I feel torn. I'm happy for my friend finding her soulmate, but my life is spinning out of control and I don't know how to fix it.

"Being my goalie won't save you from an ass-kicking if you get too handsy with my little sister." The hair on the back of my neck stands up as I sense Jordan walking up behind me. I don't even have to turn around to know he's standing a few feet away. My senses go into overdrive as I fight the urge to run or to throw myself into his arms. I haven't quite decided what I want to do.

"Bite me." Atlas nips at Gabbi's ear, causing Jordan to growl unrepeatable threats, which breaks the spell of having Jordan this close wove around me.

"Stop." Gabbi's eyes narrow as she points her finger over my shoulder. "We are going to enjoy a nice, relaxing Christmas without you two giving Atlas hell."

"Keep those happy thoughts," Roman replies, and I finally work up the nerve to glance over my shoulder. Both Sterling brothers are standing a few feet away.

Jordan might be an inch or two shorter than Roman, but he's way more imposing. He looks more like a hockey player himself than the owner of the team.

He wears his thick dark brown, nearly black hair a little longer than his younger brother, and has long dark eyelashes that would make any woman jealous.

Today, the billionaire businessman is wearing a ridiculously ugly Christmas sweater with "I have a big package for you," written across it under a picture of Santa holding up a package. I blink several times, attempting to believe what I'm seeing. If

my heart wasn't in a million pieces, I would get a kick out of seeing him in the silly outfit.

Swallowing, I paste a fake smile on my face. "Hi, Jordan," I tell him, barely making eye contact before moving on to the safe brother, the one who has no effect on my heart. "Hi, Roman." Okay. I can handle this if I ignore the older Sterling brother and what he does to my heart and body. "Where's Raven?" Roman and Raven met recently when she held a business meeting at The Sterling Rope. Evidently, the Silver Spoon Falls water did its trick and the two of them fell instantly in love.

"She's in the den on a video call with her family back home." As Roman's kind knowing eyes hold mine, I wonder if he's figured out my secret.

When he pulls me close for a brotherly hug, Jordan growls something intelligible and tugs me out of his younger brother's arms. His dark brown eyes hold mine captive as he leans over to whisper, "Merry Christmas, princess." His spicy scent wraps around me, and I almost forget the other people in the room.

I step back from him, planning to return his greeting when his words penetrate.

He knows. He freaking already knows. Did Gabbi tell him? Did he figure it out on his own? Oh my God, does Roman know, too? The room spins as confusion cuts through me.

The nausea I had hoped would stay under control for the day comes roaring to life, and my stomach turns as I shove Jordan out of the way before making a mad dash for the downstairs powder room.

I barely close and lock the door behind me before I lose my measly breakfast of saltine crackers. The doorknob rattles as Jordan's fists bang on the wood door. "What the fuck? Unlock this fucking door or I'm going to spank your gorgeous ass until you can't sit down."

Intense lust mixes with the nausea, and I swallow both down as I lean back against the wall. "I need a few minutes," I manage to call out. Maybe if I'm lucky, the floor will open up and swallow me before I have to face Jordan and the rest of the Sterling family.

"You've had all the goddamn time you're getting." The door splinters as Jordan shoves his way into the tiny bathroom.

"You broke your door," I gasp as he drops to his knees next to me.

He runs his hand across my heated cheeks and growls, "Fuck the door. Are you okay?"

I swallow down the next round of nausea and shake my head. "I've been feeling a little off." That's an understatement.

He lays his finger across my lips. "No more lies." His words confirm my worst fear. He freaking knows everything. "It's time for us to clear the air."

Chapter 2

JORDAN

I SCOOP HOLLIE UP FROM THE BATHROOM FLOOR, CARRYING her to the sink so she can clean up. She looks like she's ready to pass out... or flee into the world and disappear. I'm not willing to let either happen.

Four weeks ago, she ripped my goddamn heart out of my chest when she told me she was in love with someone else. I haven't had a single moment of peace since.

I've spent every waking hour torturing myself with thoughts of the motherfucker who claimed her heart. Only to arrive at the absolute certainty that she lied to me the night we got together in Rome's club. I just can't figure out why. She had stars in her eyes when she looked at me that night. She fucking loved every minute of what we did together.

So, why the hell did she lie?

And why the hell didn't she tell me that she's carrying my baby? She hasn't even confirmed it yet, but I know that's what sent her running for the bathroom. I've been obsessed with her

body for years. Her breasts are fuller. Her skin is brighter. There's a softness to her that's brand-new.

I grab her a spare toothbrush from under the sink, and she scrubs her teeth while I hover, refusing to even give her breathing room. As soon as she finishes, I scoop her into my arms again, step over the remnants of the bathroom door, and stride down the hall.

"The living room is the other way."

"I'm aware, princess."

She's silent for several moments before she huffs, clearly annoyed I'm not telling her where I'm taking her. She doesn't ask, though. She's too damn stubborn for that.

I let her stew until we reach my room.

"I'm not sleeping with you, Jordan," she hisses. "Your brother and sister are right down the hall."

"So, you would sleep with me if they weren't here?" I can't resist teasing her a little.

She harumphs at me, making me grin despite the situation. She's cute even when she doesn't intend to be. It makes my dick hard when it shouldn't.

I carry her into my room and kick the door closed behind us. Gabbi is nosy. So is Roman, for that matter. I want to talk to my girl in private, not with them listening outside the door.

"Jordan."

"I'm not trying to get you naked and on my cock again, princess. I just want you comfortable while we talk," I promise, depositing her in the bed.

She looks precisely like she belongs there. Her alabaster skin is like silk against the slate gray counterpane.

Her wide, guilt-stricken eyes meet mine. “Gabbi told you.”

“Told me what?”

“That I was the one who... that I was there that night...” She trails off, nervously licking her lips. “That I’m the one who seduced you in the club during the masquerade.”

“Why would Gabbi need to tell me that, Hollie?” I ask, genuinely confused. And then realization dawns. “Jesus Christ. You think I don’t know who I slept with that night?”

“I don’t know!” she cries, distressed. “I’ve told myself a thousand times that you had to have known, but then I think maybe I’m just telling myself that to make myself feel better about seducing you.”

Seducing me? What the fuck?

I remember every moment of that night, and her version and mine don’t align. If anyone did any seducing, it was me. I had her coming on my tongue before she even had time to think about what we were doing. But her version of events raises about five thousand questions that have my heart pounding like a jack-hammer.

“Hollie,” I say carefully, trying like hell not to read into anything she’s saying or twist it to mean what I want it to mean. “Why were you really at the club that night?”

“It doesn’t matter.” She exhales a breath. “All that really matters is what we’re going to do now.”

“About what?”

“The b-baby.” Tears well in her eyes. She places a hand over her stomach, cradling it as if it’s the most important thing in

the world.

Fuck. Right now, it is. She's carrying my kid.

I lock my legs to keep myself from falling to my knees and thank God.

"I didn't get pregnant to trap you, Jordan," she hurries to say.

"I don't want anything from you. But I'm keeping my baby. "

"Our baby," I growl.

"Our baby."

"Why were you at the club? We both know it wasn't because you were looking for a daddy."

"I was," she lies.

"So, what? You thought you could sleep with me and then go running into the arms of some other motherfucker, and I'd let you?"

"Some other..." She blinks at me. "What are you talking about?"

"You sleeping with me five minutes before you told me that you were in love with someone else," I growl. "I should turn your little ass red for that."

"You aren't spanking me."

"You've earned it. Daddy is mad as hell, princess."

"Don't." She flinches.

"Don't what?"

"Call yourself that."

"You were screaming it a month ago," I remind her.

"That was before," she mumbles.

“Before what?”

“Before you broke my heart!” she cries, emotion snapping in her eyes.

“I broke your heart? You ripped mine out of my goddamn chest, baby girl.” And yet, it still beats for her.

“I didn’t do anything! You’re the one who decided to walk it back, Jordan. I didn’t need to figure out anything. I already knew exactly how I felt. I was there because I knew how I felt about you. I was in love with you.” Tears well in her eyes again, spilling over in two drops that crack my heart in half. “And I was just something you needed to figure out.”

“You told me you were in love with someone else.”

“No, I did not. I never said that.” She stares at me, her sad expression killing me. “I told you I was in love with you.”

Is that what she said?

Because... because... because I don’t want to figure it out. I’m in love.

Ah, Jesus, no. She was trying to tell me that she’s in love with me. That’s what she meant. And I let her walk out of that fucking room believing I didn’t feel the same.

I’ve let her spend the last month believing it.

She’s right. I don’t deserve to call myself her daddy. I don’t even deserve her time.

I’ve spent so long convincing myself that I can’t have her, that I think I sabotaged us myself. It wasn’t intentional. Fuck no. The only thing I want in this world is the woman currently crying in my bed.

But I've been telling myself for five years that wanting her makes me a lecherous asshole. She's the same age as the baby sister I raised. I get off on her calling me Daddy. At the first hint that I wasn't good enough, I accepted it. Why wouldn't I, when it's what I've been trying to tell myself since the day we met?

Of course, she found someone else, someone who deserves her. Of course, someone else could make her happier. Of course, I was too late.

It's easy to believe what you've conditioned yourself to believe.

But fuck that. She's sitting in my bed right now, crying over me. I'm a fucking asshole for that. But those tears give me hope, too.

That I can fix this.

That it's not too late.

That she still loves me.

That maybe God or Santa or the fucking elves are handing out Christmas miracles. Because I'm going to need one if I'm going to convince this little princess to give me a chance to fix what I fucked up.

Right now, I think she'd rather shiv me between the ribs than give me a chance. But I'm demanding one anyway.

I sink down onto the bed beside her, pulling her into my arms. She resists me for a long moment before ever so slowly leaning into me.

"I'm going to fix this," I vow quietly. "By the new year, I'm going to prove that I'm the only daddy you'll ever need. "

Chapter 3

HOLLIE

IT'S ALL TOO MUCH TO TAKE IN AT ONCE. I LEAN AGAINST HIS muscular body and feel warmth wrap around me. His words echo around my mind, planting seeds of hope.

After spending the last torturous month thinking I'd spend the rest of my life missing the man who owns my heart, I'm afraid to believe what I'm hearing. "I'm not jumping back into bed with you until we work everything out." I have more to consider than just myself now. Our little one's future hangs in the balance, too.

"I'll do whatever it takes to win your heart back." He nuzzles the side of my neck, and all the pain I experienced during the last month flies right out the window. I'm tempted to say the heck with it and jump his bones when I remember how much it hurt when he threw my love back in my face. "If you'll give me the chance."

"Uh... Maybe." I swallow and glance over my shoulder at him.

“Maybe?”

“Yes. I’m not ready to just jump in. I need time to figure out if I can trust you with my heart.” Jordan is offering me everything I’ve ever wanted, but I need to know he isn’t going to shatter me again. I’m not sure I could survive it a second time.

He stares into my eyes and rubs his bottom lip. “I said I’d do whatever it takes and I meant it.”

“Good.” At least, I think it’s a good thing. “Right now, we’re going to have a nice, relaxing Christmas with your family. Once the holidays are over, we can work on fixing our relationship.”

“Whatever makes you happy.” He frowns, and I can see the wheels spinning in his mind as he agrees with my request. “Are you feeling up to this?”

“I’m much better.” It’s amazing what clearing the air does for morning sickness. We haven’t even started working out everything, but knowing Jordan wants to repair things with me lifted a heavy load from my shoulders. Now, I have to figure out if I can trust him with my heart again.

We return to the family room and find everyone decorating the tree. “I can’t believe we’re putting all this shit on today, and we’re going to remove it tomorrow,” Roman grumbles, and Gabbi smacks him on the shoulder.

“We’re not going to take it down before the new year,” she huffs and glares at her much taller older brother. “Now, shut your trap and get to work.”

“We must’ve dropped you on your head one too many times when you were little,” Roman teases. When Gabbi was four years old, her parents died in a plane crash, on Christmas Eve.

Although she doesn't remember her parents, Roman and Jordan do. The two teenage brothers stepped in and raised her.

Gabbi sticks her tongue out at her middle brother, causing him to roll his eyes, then looks up and notices us standing in the doorway. "Are you feeling better?" From the curious looks on everyone's faces, I'm pretty sure they all know what sent me fleeing to the bathroom.

"Bad sushi," I automatically fib, not wanting to bring our issues to the family Christmas celebration.

"Bad sushi, my ass," Jordan growls. "Good swimmers caused it." Four pairs of shocked eyes stare at us like we just announced the end of the world is coming today.

Fudge my life. My face turns beet red as I mentally explore all the ways to kill Jordan.

Roman blinks away his shock and rushes over to slap his older brother on the back. "Congratulations. Next Christmas, we'll have little ones to celebrate with."

"Ones?" Atlas suddenly pales and glances down at Gabbi. "Is there something you haven't told me?"

Roman and Jordan both forget all about our big announcement and storm over to their sister and her soon-to-be-injured boyfriend. Each Sterling brother grabs one of Atlas' shoulders. "Why don't you ladies continue decorating while we take care of business?"

"Stop right there." Gabbi glares back and forth between her two older brothers. "If you harm one hair on his head, I'll never forgive either of you."

"We won't touch his head." Jordan smirks. "But the rest of him is free game."

Raven wraps her arm around Gabbi's shoulder. "Ignore them." She turns her toward the three men standing in the doorway. "They're probably taking him out into the backyard to smoke cigars and drink expensive whiskey."

"I'm going to spank your gorgeous ass for giving away our secrets," Roman promises his wife.

"Now, who's giving away secrets?" Raven calls after him.

"It really isn't a secret," Gabbi whispers to her sister-in-law. "We all know what goes on in The Sterling Rope." Boy, do we ever.



AT THE END OF THE DAY, JORDAN INSISTS ON DRIVING ME home. "You aren't driving around in that tin can on wheels." He leads me out the back door and into a huge garage. "Not when I have a garage full of cars for you to choose from." My mouth falls open as I glance around at the impressive collection. Each of these cars is worth more than most people's homes. "Or I'll buy you whatever car you want."

"Hold up right there, mister." We need to get a few things straight right this minute. He isn't going to buy my affection. Little does he know, he actually already owns me, heart and soul, but I refuse to roll over and let him have his way. Oh no. I'm going to make Mr. Jordan Sterling prove his love to me. "I'm not driving a car that costs more than a house." That's just not me. "I already own the perfect car. My car is reliable and easy to drive."

As he stares down at me, I can see the wheels turning. “We’ll talk about it later.”

Typical man. He thinks he’ll eventually get his way. Oh, Mr. Stubborn will learn soon enough. I mutter under my breath, “Whatever,” and watch as his eyes narrow. “I’m driving my car home tonight because I have plans for tomorrow.”

“Plans?” His roar echoes around the large garage. “Who do you have plans with.”

We aren’t going to start this relationship off with him telling me what to do. “None.” I poke in the middle of his chest, “of,” another poke, “your,” another poke, “business.” I glare at him. “I saved myself for you for five freaking long years. I’m not going to turn around and start seeing someone else on the first day of our relationship and the day we find out we’re having a baby.” I throw my hands up in the air.

His face turns bright red as he opens and closes his mouth silently. After a few seconds, he takes a deep breath and slowly blows it out. “You’re going to need to have a little patience with me.” He smiles ruefully. “I’m going into this blind, and it seems like I fuck it up at every turn, but I promise you I’ll figure it out.”

He pulls me into his arms and hugs me close to his warm, muscular body. I forget everything when he leans over and places soft kisses on the side of my neck. “I’m sorry I’m being a brat.” These hormones are no joke. “I’m still reeling from finding out about the baby and...”

He lays his fingers across my lips, halting my words before sighing. “We’ll work on this together.”

Since I’m tired and he’s trying hard, I cave in and let him follow me home. I keep glancing in the rearview mirror the

entire ten-minute ride to Silver Spoon Falls, and each time I find his huge black SUV behind me. A safe distance behind me.

I park in the back lot and watch as Jordan pulls into our guest parking spot. “I don’t like you parking all the way out here.” I mentally roll my eyes.



TWO WEEKS LATER, I MEET GABBI AND RAVEN FOR LUNCH AT the 5th Avenue Diner. It’s my day off, and I need some girl time with my friends. I step into the adorable restaurant and glance around at the recently remodeled interior. They installed fancy burnished gold floor and plush red leather booths that scream luxury. I’m pretty sure the gorgeous small painting hanging over the entrance to the back hallway is an original work of art from a famous artist.

In a way, it’s exactly what one would expect in this small Texas town where the population is made up of more millionaires and billionaires than regular, middle-class residents.

“Hey, girl.” Gabbi stands up from a booth in the corner and waves me over.

I drop down in the large circular booth and scoot in. “What can I get you to drink?” The middle-aged, red-headed waitress smiles and sets a glass of water in front of me.

“Is it too early for alcohol?” I joke, but there’s no way I’d risk my baby’s health.

“Yes,” Gabbi cuts in. “Eight months too early.”

The waitress’ eyes widen as she comprehends my friend’s meaning. I’m betting the Silver Spoon Falls grapevine will be buzzing with the news within an hour. “I’ll have a large mimosa.” I smile and reach for one of the menus stuck between the condiments as my two friends gasp. “Minus the champagne.” They both roll their eyes at the same time.

“So, a large orange juice?” The waitress blinks down at me, mentally filing away all the juicy gossip so she can spread it around once she finishes with us.

“That sounds great.”

“I’ll get your drinks and come back to take your orders.”

After the waitress disappears, Raven snorts. “I thought her eyes were going to bulge out of her head.”

“Me too.” Gabbi laughs and turns to me. “She’s probably in the back dialing up the grapevine right now. You and Jordan are going to be the talk of the town.”

“She’s too late.” I sigh. “We’re already the talk of most of the town.”

“Oh boy.” Raven shakes her head. “What did the clueless caveman do now?” My friends started calling Jordan that silly nickname after his third failed attempt at wooing me. I spent my entire seven-day vacation fending off wooing attempts.

I’m not going to lie. He stole my heart a long time ago then turned around and stomped on it the night of the masquerade party. I need to know I can trust him not to break my heart again.

“What day do you want to know about?” I sit back.

There are several for her to choose from. Every day is something new. Jordan sent four hundred roses to my tiny apartment while I was working late one night. My landlord let the delivery men in with the flowers, and I returned home, exhausted, to find every single inch of space in my apartment covered with gorgeous red roses. I kept a dozen and asked two Falcons players to come and deliver the rest to the nursing home for me.

“Gabbi told me about him following you around the arena while you tried to work.” God. I almost forgot about that one.

The first day back after my week-long Christmas vacation was a freaking nightmare. Jordan kept interrupting my sessions all day long. Each time he stuck his head in the door, I’d have to start all over again because the players would tense up in front of the big boss.

“Following me around is an understatement.” I smile and thank the waitress as she drops off my orange juice. Once she takes our orders and walks away, I finish explaining. “He stalked the room, snarling if anyone dared to get too close to me. Hello!” I throw up my hands. “My job is to help the players recover from injuries and manage pain. It’s kinda hard to help them if I can’t get within five feet of them.” Gabbi has tears rolling down her face as she bites her bottom lip to keep from laughing out loud. “He freaking terrified the players so badly, I’m pretty sure they’ll have to be at death’s door before they try to see me for therapy from now on.”

“Oof.” Gabbi winces and wipes her eyes with a napkin. “Please take it easy on my poor, clueless, caveman brother. He hasn’t ever dated anyone that I know of.” That definitely makes my heart soar. “He has the Midas touch when it comes

to business but absolutely zero clue how to approach this relationship.”

I’ve already told myself the exact same thing over and over again. It suddenly occurs to me they don’t know the latest. “Wait until you hear what happened yesterday.”

Gabbi leans back against the red leather and takes a deep breath. “Give me a second to prepare myself.” After a few seconds, she looks over at me and slowly blows out her breath. “Okay. I’m ready. Lay it on us.”

“He brought me lunch.” I hold up my hand when Gabbi frowns. “Wait. That isn’t all. After we ate, he nonchalantly offered to give me a ride home from the arena. It sounded so sweet and thoughtful, and I agreed.” I pause for effect. “Then he showed up with a brand new SUV that costs more than eight times my yearly salary. Eight freaking times. Do the math on that. Then he announced he bought it for me.”

Raven whistles through her teeth. “I bet that went over well.”

“You’d win that bet.”

“I can see my oldest brother needs some assistance.” Gabbi rubs her hands together as a wicked gleam fills her eyes. “Leave it up to me.”

I’m not sure what scares me more, what Jordan will attempt next or how my best friend will “assist” her brother.

Chapter 4

JORDAN

“YOU’RE STRESSING HOLLIE OUT,” GABBI ANNOUNCES, sailing into my office at the arena like she owns the place. She tosses her coat over the back of a chair before plopping down into it, making it clear she came to read me the riot act.

Awesome. Just what I needed today. I thought the four weeks I spent without Hollie were hell. The last two are coming in hot to steal the crown. I find some new way to fuck up with her every day.

“I miss the days when you didn’t hang out around here.” There’s a reason I didn’t want her dating one of my players. I mean, aside from the fact that she’s too goddamn young to even be living on her own, let alone dating. I didn’t want her here all the time. She’s one of the lights in my life. And the biggest pain in my ass. Affectionately.

“I miss the days when you weren’t an idiot,” she says, smiling brightly. “But we can’t all have what we want, now can we?”

Ouch. Harsh... but she's not wrong, either. I am a fucking idiot.

"Hollie told you about the SUV?" I guess.

Gabbi's narrowed eyes and scornful expression are answer enough. Hollie definitely told her about the SUV.

"I'm not going to apologize for making sure the mother of my child and my child have a safe vehicle." To hell with that. I don't care if Hollie is pissed about it. Her car is an accident waiting to happen. I need her and our baby safe.

"You can't just throw money at everything."

"I'm not."

"Oh, really?" Gabbi crosses her arms, arching a brow. "Four hundred roses, Jordan. Really?"

Okay, so maybe that was overkill. I didn't anticipate exactly how much space that many flowers would take up. Or how tired Hollie would be when she got home and saw them covering every surface. Or how long it'd take Colter and Noah to remove them from her apartment. By the time they were done, she was exhausted.

I felt like an asshole.

I'm *acting* like an asshole. Every time a player gets near her, jealousy rattles through me like a fucking demon. She has to touch them to do her job, but I don't want her hands on them. I don't want them smiling at her or laughing with her. I don't want them looking at her.

She's been my obsession for years, and I had her right where I wanted her, only to watch it all slip away. I know I don't deserve her, and I'm worried as fuck that she knows it, too.

I was supposed to be her daddy, the one man she trusted above all others. And I broke her heart. What if she can't forgive me for that? The thought is giving me nightmares.

I know I need to ease off and approach things in a different way. But the thought of losing her and our baby for good this time is literally my worst nightmare. I can't stop worrying about it.

"You're afraid you're going to lose her, aren't you?" Gabbi asks, her expression softening when several minutes pass without me saying anything. I don't know how the hell she always sees so much, but she's done it since she was a kid. Roman and I never could keep anything from her.

"Like a motherfucker," I admit, scrubbing my hands down my face. "I fucked up, and I'm trying to fix it. But if I can't fix it, I'm going to lose them both."

"Why didn't you ever tell me that you were in love with her? All these years, and you never said anything. I had to figure it out myself."

"Figured you'd kick my ass."

"I still might if you don't fix it."

"I'm working on it," I mutter.

She snorts at me. "If this is you working on it, I don't know how you became a billionaire. You suck at it."

"Is this supposed to be a pep talk?" I question, one brow arched.

"Nope. Atlas and Roman can give you one of those tonight. You're having dinner with them."

"Uh, no, I'm not."

“Uh, yes, you are.”

“I have plans.”

“Well, they aren’t with Hollie because she’s having dinner with me.” Gabbi makes a face at me. “So, if you want to see her, you’re just going to have to do it from a table across the restaurant with Atlas and Roman.” She pops up from her chair like her ass is attached to a spring. “You’re welcome.”

“For what?” I ask, genuinely mystified how she thinks saddling me with Rome and Atlas when I could be having dinner with Hollie is helping me. Maybe she’s the one who hit her head when she and Atlas were lost in the woods. She acts more like the crazy goalie every day.

I’ll never admit it, but it’s good to see. She’s so happy she glows. I’ve never seen her so peaceful and at ease in her own skin. And I’ve never known this version of her, the girl who dives headfirst into life. I may give Atlas ten kinds of hell, but he’s the best thing for her.

“For keeping your pregnant future-wife from having to hide your body.” She blows me a kiss, grabbing her coat off the back of the chair. “See you at dinner tonight. Mind your business and stay at your own table. No boys allowed at ours.”

She sails out as quickly as she sailed in, leaving me shaking my head.

Fuck, I guess I’m going to dinner with Atlas and Roman tonight.



“WHY THE FUCK CAN’T WE SWITCH WAITERS WITH THEM?” Atlas growls, glaring daggers at the bastard currently grinning at my sister as he jots down her order. He’s been awful fucking smiley since he approached their table.

“We’re in the wrong section,” Roman says, his eyes locked on Raven.

“We’re literally two fucking tables away,” Atlas points out. “How is that a section?”

Rome shrugs, sipping his water. He doesn’t seem any more thrilled about the asshole serving our girls than Atlas is. In fact, he’s the one who firmly suggested to our waitress that she swap tables with the fucker.

She shot him down.

So did the manager when we called him over.

Bastard.

“We should just join them,” I growl, eyes narrowed as Hollie smiles at their waiter. The one time she looked in my direction, she scowled at me. I want her smiles, goddammit. They’re supposed to be mine.

“Fuck no. I’m not sleeping on the couch tonight,” Atlas mutters.

“Me neither.”

I drag my gaze away from my little princess to look at my brother and future brother-in-law. “Why the fuck would either of you sleep on the couch?”

“We’re under orders to keep you away from their table.” Roman eyes me sideways, a disgruntled look on his face. “You really need to get your shit together. I could be having dinner

with my wife right now instead of with the two of you. I like her better.”

“I didn’t ask to have dinner with either of you. Gabbi forced me.”

“It’s an intervention.” Atlas shrugs. “We’re supposed to tell you to get your shit together.”

“Jesus Christ.” I wave our waitress over. I need alcohol for this.

She’s at our table inside of five seconds. I order whiskey. Atlas sticks to water. Thanks to the back-to-back concussions he suffered a few weeks ago, alcohol is off the table for him for a while. So is hockey, for that matter. He’s out for the rest of the season and weighing whether he intends to return at all. Roman switches to beer.

“Let’s get this over with,” I mutter once she leaves with our drink order. “What, exactly, does Gabbi expect the two of you to do?”

“Talk you down,” Rome says. “She says you’re spiraling.”

“I’m not spiraling.”

“The guys have a pool going, trying to guess who you threaten to trade first.” Atlas leans back in his chair, smirking. “You’re definitely spiraling.”

“What’s the deal?”

“There is no deal. I fucked up. I’m trying to fix it.”

“Stop trying. Start doing.” Roman smirks at me. “Isn’t that the shit you used to tell me?”

I discreetly flip him off.

“What’d you do?”

Rome and I both look at Atlas.

“You said you fucked up. What’d you do?”

“It’s a long story.”

Atlas nods at the girls’ table. “Does it look like they’re going to be done anytime soon? We got time.”

The asshole waiter has moved on. They’re deep in conversation about something. Judging from the way they’re giggling and shooting furtive glances in our direction, they’re talking about us. Hollie seems happy, though. Happier than she has in a while.

Because I’m not hovering? Because she’s with Gabbi? I don’t know, but I want to be the one putting that smile on her face. I’m supposed to be the one she leans on, the one who lightens her load. One way or another, I’m going to find a way to show her that I am that man.

I’m going to prove that I can be the daddy she deserves. I don’t need my brother and Atlas to tell me how to do that. They don’t know her like I do. It’s up to me to figure this one out.



“PRINCESS.” I GENTLY WRAP MY HAND AROUND HOLLIE’S wrist, halting her before she can slip out of the restaurant and disappear on me. I know damn well that’s what she planned to do. She was halfway to the door before I noticed she was gone from the table.

“Jordan,” she says, resigned.

“Let me walk you out, baby girl.”

“My car is right out front.”

I know it is. I saw the damn thing when I got here. I should have stolen the keys and sent it to the dump when I bought the SUV, but I didn't think that far ahead.

“Then we won't have to walk far.”

She mumbles something under her breath but doesn't argue further.

I lace our fingers together, leading her outside. A blast of cool air hits us, causing her to shiver.

“Shit.” I immediately release her hand, stripping my jacket off. I drape it around her shoulders, gently tugging her hair out from beneath the collar. “There, now you won't freeze.”

“Thank you. It wasn't this cold when I left.” She snuggles into the jacket. It might be my imagination, but I swear she sniffs it.

“The temperature dropped.” I place my hand on the small of her back, leading her toward her car. “Did you have a good time?”

“Yes.”

“Are you still pissed at me?”

She sighs. “I'm not mad at you. I just don't understand you. You don't owe me a car just because you got me pregnant, Jordan. I'm not your responsibility.”

I spin her around to face me. “You think that's why I bought it? Because I think I owe it to you?” I shake my head, not waiting for an answer. “Your car isn't safe, princess. It's old and unreliable. You're not my responsibility because you're

carrying my kid. You're my responsibility because my world doesn't fucking work without you in it," I growl. "I need to know you're safe. It's the only way I get any fucking work done."

"I..." She cocks her head to the side, eyeing me. "Really?"

"I haven't stopped thinking about you. Not once." I tuck a strand of hair behind her ear, cupping her cheek. "I know you're scared to trust me again. I know I fucked up, princess. I keep fucking up with you. But what's between us is something worth fighting for. I know you believe it, too."

"I do," she whispers, tears welling in her eyes. "But I'm so afraid, Jordan. I don't want to be something you have to figure out if you're ready for or not."

"Fuck," I groan, pressing my forehead to hers. "I hate myself for hurting you, princess. When I said we'd figure it out, I wasn't talking about us. You have to know that."

"What were you talking about?"

"Gabbi. Moving you in with me. Sorting out HR and your parents." I tip her chin up, brushing my lips against hers. "There was never a time I needed to figure out how I feel about you. I've known that since the day I met you."

"I want to believe that."

"Then let me take you somewhere tomorrow. I'll prove it."

"Where?"

"You'll have to wait until tomorrow to see, princess."

She bites her bottom lip, hesitating.

"Just one day, baby girl. If you're still not sure about us after that, I'll back off." I grimace. "I'll *try* to back off and give you

a little bit of breathing room at work. I won't stop fighting for you. I won't ever fucking stop doing that. But I'll try to stop hovering so goddamn much and give you a little space."

"Just one day?"

"Just one." I tip her chin up until our eyes connect. "But just so we're clear, I'm not after only one day here, princess. It won't satisfy me. I want forever, and I have no intentions of giving up until you're on the same page."

"One day," she agrees with a soft sigh, and for the first time in weeks, I feel like I can fucking breathe.

Chapter 5

HOLLIE

I GLANCE IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR AND SEE HE'S STILL behind me. As I pull into the back parking lot, the big black SUV stops and idles on the road.

The tingling on the back of my neck tells me Jordan is watching as I walk toward the building entrance. After stepping through the glass door, I turn and give him a little wave.

He drives away, and I instantly miss his presence. These freaking hormones have turned me into a crazy woman. One second, I'm telling him I can take care of myself, and the next, I'm ready to cry because he left.

I fight with the lock on my apartment door and then open it to step in. After kicking off my shoes, I let them drop onto the tile floor with a thud. The black dress flats aren't comfy like my usual work athletic shoes.

The two-bedroom apartment feels so small without Gabbi here to share it with. A crazy idea hits me out of the blue. Maybe I

should get a cat to keep me company. Or even better, a dog.

While I contemplate complicating my life even more by adopting a pet, I change into my cozy pink and purple plaid pajamas and drop onto the sofa. Maybe I can find an episode of Supernatural.

I'm flipping through the channels when my phone rings. My heart jumps in my chest when I see Jordan's name flash across the screen. "Hello," I answer, wondering why he's already checking on me.

"I needed to make sure you got into your apartment okay." Goosebumps erupt all over my body as I remember his heated stare following my every movement at the restaurant.

My temperature rises as I sit back on the sofa. I bite back the snarky response flashing through my mind and sigh. "I made it in fine." It's a pretty freaking safe building. Both Sterling brothers insisted on investigating the building and neighborhood before Gabbi and I could sign the lease.

"What are you doing, princess?" The tone of his voice sends a shiver rolling through my body as my blood heats.

"Uh... I'm getting ready for bed." It's mostly true. After I watch a show, I'll be tired enough to fall asleep.

Lately, I've been staying up later and later. Sleep eludes me as memories from our first night together refuse to leave me alone.

Every time I close my eyes, I remember the little things. I can still feel warm puffs of air hitting the side of my neck as he exhaled with each thrust, and the way he brushed my sweaty hair off the side of my face and a strand caught in the mask. He gently worked to release it, and the simple act melted my heart.

“Tell Daddy what you’re wearing to bed tonight.” Hearing the word “daddy” coming from Jordan instantly sends a spark of electricity straight down my spine, awakening nerve endings along the way.

“Pink...” I pause and look down at my cozy, completely unsexy pajamas. “Pink plaid pajamas.” I sound like a seventy-year-old grandmother now.

“You’d look stunning wearing a brown paper bag.” His words cause my heart to jump. “Daddy wants to play with you a little. Are you up to it tonight, princess?”

“We can try. I’ve never done this before.” I’ve never understood the appeal of phone sex.

“Good girl.” His deep voice wraps around me. “Daddy wants to know what the fabric feels like against your skin.”

“It feels good.” Good? It’s my first dirty sex call, and I’m winging it here. “I mean, it’s warm and soft, but I’d rather have Daddy’s warm hands moving over my body.” I’m pretty impressed with myself.

The phone muffles for a second, and I’m pretty sure I hear him growl, “Fuck me,” before his voice comes through strong again. “Do you have buttons on the pajama top?”

“Yes, Daddy.” I forget everything and fall into the intimate moment with him.

“Slowly unhook the buttons and let the top fall open.”

I follow his directions and pull the flannel pajama shirt open, exposing my sensitive boobs to the chilly air. “Okay.”

“Okay, what?”

What? I close my eyes and force my mushy mind to get with the program.

“Oh.” A light bulb goes off over my head. “Okay, Daddy.”

“You’re Daddy’s good little princess.” His praise melts the last of my resistance.

“Yes, Daddy. What do you want me to do now?” I hear his indrawn breath on the other end of the line and smile proudly to myself.

“Slide your hand slowly up your chest to your tit and rub your thumb across your nipple.”

He has no way of knowing if I’m doing what he’s telling me to do, but I can’t resist the urge to follow his orders. My breathing accelerates as I trail my fingertips slowly up the center of my chest. I lightly touch my extra-sensitive nipple.

“Daddy heard you gasp. Are your tits sensitive?” I answer his question by shaking my head. “Answer me.” His stern bark cuts through the sensual fog enveloping me and I jump.

“Yes,” I groan as my fingers keep moving over my skin on their own.

“Yes, what?” Oh, shoot. I forgot again. Maybe I’ll earn a spanking.

“Yes, Daddy. My nipples are so sore. Pregnancy hormones are no joke.” I drop my hand into my lap and wait for his next instruction.

“I’m sorry my baby is causing you discomfort, but we’ll figure out a way to make it more tolerable for you. After all, I’m planning to knock your gorgeous ass up several times in the next few years. Daddy isn’t getting any younger, and I want a fucking houseful of little girls that look just like their mother.”

I always wanted several children, but I’m not sure I want them all within a few years. Although we have a lot to work out, I’m

finally able to admit that I'm ready to take a chance on something wonderful with the man I've been in love with for years.

"We'll have to negotiate, Daddy," I whisper to him.

"Daddy is an expert at negotiations, princess." His words come across as a warning, but I'm looking forward to negotiating with him. "I have an idea. Hold on one second," he tells me and hangs up the phone.

I stare down at the phone in my hand, wondering what is happening. I tell myself not to jump to a crazy conclusion until I know what's going on.

A few seconds later, my phone rings again, and I glance at the screen and see he's Facetimeing me. Oof. I look down at my unsexy outfit and wince at the thought of him seeing me in the unflattering pajamas.

I push the button to answer and set my phone on the coffee table. "Hello again, Daddy."

"Hello, princess." His dark eyes move over my body, and I bite my bottom lip and stare back at his gorgeous body. The black leather chair he's sitting in must be huge since it nearly swallows him. He's pulled his gray dress shirt out of his black dress pants, which are open at the waist. For some reason, he still won't take off his shirt, and I'm starting to wonder what he's hiding.

When he reaches for the glass of whiskey sitting on the table next to him and takes a drink, I watch his throat move and imagine placing small kisses along the tan skin. "Let Daddy see you pinch your nipple."

My eyes fly to his, and I debate within myself for a second before throwing caution to the wind. Swallowing, I lean back

and spread the two sides of my pajama top open.

“Like this, Daddy?” Hunger glows from his dark eyes as he nods his head.

“Now, pinch your nipple for me.” He leans forward and places his elbows on top of his legs. I curl my thumb and forefinger around my nipple and squeeze slightly as he stares intently at my movements. “Does that feel good, princess?”

“Yes, Daddy. But I wish it was you touching me.”

“Me, too, princess.” He leans back a little and slowly spreads the waistband of his pants open, allowing his hard erection to spring free. I watch as he grasps his cock tightly and slowly slides his hand up and down. “I can’t wait to feel your tight little pussy wrapped around my cock.”

“I want that, too.” The words slip out before I’m able to stop them, but I’m not sorry I said them. It’s time to move on from the past and fight for our future.

“Pull down your pants and touch your sweet pussy for Daddy.” I follow his instructions and tug my pajama pants down under my hips. I slip my finger between my legs and slide it through the wetness dripping from me. “Show me how wet you got watching Daddy stroke his cock.” I hold my finger close to the phone camera and hope he can see.

His groan wraps around me as his movements become frantic. At the end of each stroke, he squeezes the tip, and I’m jealous of his fingers. Without waiting for him to tell me to, I slide my finger deep into my wet opening and cry out his name as pleasure courses through me.

I reach up with my other hand and pinch my nipple, remembering his lips and teeth wrapped around the same

nipple. I stare into his eyes while we pleasure ourselves together.

“I’m about to come, Daddy,” I cry out as sparks flow through my body.

“Come with Daddy,” he roars as ropes of cum shoot up into the air while he strokes faster. I fight to keep my eyes open, but it’s too much. My eyes fall closed as fireworks go off behind my eyelids.

Wow. I barely have the energy to drop my hand to the sofa next to me. Hopefully, this little bedtime workout will help my insomnia. It sure can’t hurt.

We silently stare at each other while our breathing slows. After a while, Jordan tucks his dick back into his pants and smiles at me. “Go get some sleep, princess.”

“Goodnight, Daddy.”

Chapter 6

JORDAN

I'M ON HOLLIE'S DOORSTEP AT TEN MINUTES 'TIL TEN THE following morning, unable to wait a moment longer to see her. I thought it'd take weeks to earn back enough of her trust to hear her call me Daddy again. The fact that she gave it to me so willingly on the phone last night has me floating on cloud nine.

I never knew how much one little title could mean until she gave it to me. I never knew how fucking much I needed it until she showed me. Now, I'll do anything to be the daddy she desires, the only one she ever craves.

I just hope like hell my plan for the day doesn't backfire like all the rest have lately.

"Hi," she whispers, looking up at me through her lashes as soon as she opens the door for me. Even dressed in a simple t-shirt and leggings, she's the prettiest little princess I've ever met.

“Are you going to kick my ass if I kiss you, baby girl? Because I’m not going to lie, I’ve thought about nothing else since I watched you coming all over your hand for me,” I drawl, not even hiding my smile when heat blooms in her cheeks.

“You can kiss me.”

She doesn’t have to tell me twice. I gently pull her into my arms and then tip her backward. She stares up at me with wonder in those big brown eyes.

How the fuck did I miss it for so long? The way she feels is right there in her eyes, shining out for all to see. I should have seen it a long fucking time ago. I should have let myself see it instead of convincing myself that I’d never deserve her.

“I love you,” I say, giving her the simplest truth I’ve ever spoken. Before she has a chance to respond, I claim her lips, kissing off every bit of her cherry lip balm. I don’t stop kissing her until she’s boneless and pliant in my arms, breathing heavily.

“Wow.” She gives me a glossy smile. “What was that for?”

“Letting me in.” I press my lips to both cheeks and her forehead. “I know how much it cost you to give me another chance. I won’t fuck it up, princess. My only concern in life is you and being the daddy you deserve.”

“This is a good start.”

“Yeah? You think so?”

She nods.

“Then we better get out of here before I forget our plans and make you remind Daddy how you sound when you’re coming for him, princess.”

Her blush deepens, her gaze darting around.

“Hey.” I draw her focus back to me. “Fuck what anyone else thinks. I’m sure as hell not worried about it, and I won’t let you be, either.”

We’ve both spent far too long worried about everyone else. It kept us apart far longer than it ever should have. That’s my burden to carry now. That’s my cross to bear. I never should have let it continue for as long as I did. But I’m fucking done living without her. And I’m done caring if I’m too old, too fucked up, too unworthy, or any of the other thousand things I convinced myself mattered.

They don’t. She matters. And she chose me.

She can shout Daddy from the rooftops and I won’t waver. Her happiness is all that matters. It should have been that way for five years now. I can’t change the past. But I can make damn sure her future is everything she ever dreamed.

She smiles at me, and I know I’ve done something right with her for once.

I wait outside while she runs in to get her shit. Five minutes later, we’re in her new SUV, with her muttering under her breath about stupid expensive cars.

“We can take it back and pick something you like,” I offer.

“I like my car.”

“It’s falling apart, princess.”

“My dad helped me pick it out,” she says quietly.

Well, shit. The minute she graduated high school, her parents sold everything and started traveling the world. They used to visit often, but their trips stateside have become more and more rare over the past few years. They’re living their best

retired lives with no regard for the daughter who misses them intensely.

It infuriates me, but she adores them. If they intend to see their grandchild, they will be making amends with their daughter first. That isn't open for negotiation.

"I'll make you a deal," I say, pulling out of the parking lot. "If you'll give the SUV a chance, I'll have a mechanic look at the car. We'll see what can be done to save it so you can drive it occasionally."

"I can't afford that."

"You're about to marry a billionaire, baby girl. You could hire someone to build you a car from the ground up every fucking day for the next ten years, and my bank account still wouldn't feel it."

"I don't want your money, Jordan. Maybe I should sign paperwork or something."

"Fuck no," I growl, turning onto Bleaker Street. Our destination is a converted warehouse just up ahead. "You aren't signing a prenup. We don't need one."

I fucking love that she isn't arguing about marrying me, though. That'll definitely be happening. The ring has been in my pocket since Christmas.

"I don't need one. I'm not a billionaire. You are," she mutters. And then realizes where we are. "Bleaker Street Tattoo? You want to get a tattoo today?"

"Something like that." Coby Kaiser started the tattoo a week ago. He just needs to finish some of the line work today. But I want her here for it. She needs proof that this thing between us is real and that I'm not just here because of the baby. She's about to get it.

I pull into the empty lot and kill the engine. “You’ll see. “



SLADE LOOKS UP FROM THE FRONT DESK WHEN WE STEP INSIDE the shop a few minutes later. His dark eyes come to me before running over Hollie. His brow lifts, but he doesn’t comment on her presence.

“Coby said you were coming in today,” he says by way of greeting. “He’s setting up for you.”

“Thanks.” I place my hand on Hollie’s back. “Princess, this is Slade Stark. He owns the shop. Slade, Hollie.”

“We’ve met,” Hollie says quietly. “He did my tattoo.”

I fight the urge to glower at him, instantly jealous he had his hands on her. The instinct is ridiculous and automatic. It’s been over a year since she got her tattoo.

He must see something on my face because his lips kick up into an amused grin. “That’s right. The dreamcatcher.”

Hollie nods.

“You getting more ink today?”

“No,” I snap. “She’s pregnant.”

“Jordan!”

“What? You are?”

“That doesn’t mean you just tell everyone.” She rolls her eyes at me. “We’re supposed to wait.”

“For what?”

“I don’t know. Stuff.” She shrugs. “I haven’t even been to the doctor yet!”

I make a mental note to set up an appointment for her. Especially if she has to see the doctor before we tell everyone she’s carrying my kid. I definitely won’t be following that bullshit rule. The sooner everyone knows she’s carrying my baby, the better.

“My lips are sealed,” Slade promises. “Congratulations.”

“Thank you.”

Coby pops his dark head out of the back before Slade can say anything else. He glances at me and then at Hollie, his eyes widening. “You brought her.”

“I did,” I say quietly.

“It’s about fucking time.”

“Hollie, princess, this is Coby. He does all of my ink.”

“Hi,” she whispers before turning to me with a question in her eyes. “All of your ink?”

“You’ll see.” It’s better she sees for herself.

“Come on back,” Coby says, helping me out. “I’m still setting up, but you can get ready. “

“Come on.” I lace my fingers with Hollie’s, tugging her toward the back.

The shop is one of the best in the state, if not the entire region. When you come from money like Slade does, it’s not an obstacle. Everything is top of the line, from the tile beneath our feet to the furniture to the ink and equipment they use. He spared no expense, and it shows. He didn’t spare expenses when it came to hiring his artists, either.

The walls in Coby's work area are covered with artwork, awards, and photos of the celebrities he's tattooed. Hollie gapes at them when we step inside.

"You know Laura Groves?" she asks, homing in on the picture of the curvy starlet and her giant husband, Kaiden Huxley. They visit from time to time. Kaiden grew up with Tate Grimes, a pediatric surgeon in town.

"Mmhmm," Coby says. "Sweet girl."

"Wow," Hollie whispers, clearly impressed.

Coby grins at me, amused. "Go ahead and take your shirt off. I'll be right back."

I jerk my chin in a nod, waiting for him to duck out of the room—literally duck. He's six foot seven. Once he's gone, I pull my shirt off over my head, setting it aside. It takes Hollie a moment to notice. When she turns around and sees me standing there without a shirt, her eyes immediately drift down my body.

A soft gasp escapes her lips as she sees what no one has in years.

"I didn't need to figure us out when the way I feel about you is written all over me, princess," I murmur, letting her see every bit of ink she's inspired.

"Jordan." She drifts toward me, her hand outstretched. "When...? How...?"

"I got the first one the day after we met." I point out the monogrammed initials inked over my heart. "I knew then that my heart was yours. Didn't think I stood a chance in hell of ever owning yours, but you had mine, baby girl." I touch another tattoo and then another. "I've gotten one every year

since to commemorate the most important day in my life. I got one for every birthday, too.”

I’ve been inking her into my skin over and over for the last five years, embedding her into my flesh like a brand. Every important moment, I commemorated with ink, turning my body into a canvas dedicated to her. I couldn’t get undressed that night in the club. She would have known how deep my obsession ran. But maybe that’s exactly what I should have done... put all my cards on the table then and there and let the chips fall where they landed. Maybe the last six weeks would have gone differently then.

I don’t know. All I know for sure is that I belonged to this curvy little princess long before I let myself believe I could have her. There was never going to be anyone else for me. I knew that the day we met, and I accepted it. It wasn’t a hardship. Loving her, even if I was only ever allowed to do it from afar, has been the best part of my life for the last five years.

“I don’t know what to say,” she whispers.

“You don’t have to say anything, baby girl. But I’m not willing to let you spend another minute of your life thinking you’re only an option to me when you’re the most important thing in this world. Even when I couldn’t have you, you were mine. Even when you didn’t know, I loved you. Even when I was an idiot, I was obsessed with you.” I reach for her, pulling her into my arms. “I didn’t let you go that night in the club because I didn’t care. I let you go because I loved you enough not to stand in your way if someone else made you happy. It would have fucking destroyed me to watch you love someone else, but I would have given you that if it’s what you needed.”

“I’ve never loved anyone else, Jordan,” she whispers. “I’ve never wanted anyone else. When you let me go that night, I thought you didn’t feel the same way I did. It broke me.”

“That shit will haunt me for the rest of my life,” I admit. “It kills me that I hurt you.”

“I don’t want us to be sad about it anymore. I don’t want us to dwell on it anymore. Can we just... start over?” she asks, eyeing me hopefully.

“I have a better plan,” I murmur. “How about we simply continue like it never happened? The last six weeks were a pause, nothing more. All except finding out you’re pregnant, anyway. That definitely happened.”

“I’m glad it happened.” She licks her lips, staring at me. “Maybe I shouldn’t have been, but I was so freaking happy when that test was positive.”

“I’m pretty thrilled about it myself.” I dip my head, nibbling on her lips. “My baby girl is carrying my kid.”

“I am. You got me pregnant, Daddy.”

“Fuck,” I growl, pressing my erection against her belly. “Keep talking like that and Coby won’t be finishing this tattoo today.”

“What is it?”

I step back, turning so she can see my back.

“Jordan,” she gasps. “Is that...?”

“It’s you.” It’s her in a dress and mask, except she’s carrying my kid instead of a drink this time. “It’s always you, princess.”

She runs her fingers over the tattoo, sobbing quietly.

I turn back to her, pulling her into my arms. Once she's where I want her, I press my lips to her ear, speaking the only other truth as I know it. "It will always be you, Hollie. Every fucking day for as long as I live, it'll only ever be you."

Chapter 7

HOLLIE

IT'S BEEN A LONG DAY AT WORK, AND I'M SO READY FOR IT TO be over when the last player leaves the therapy room. Pregnancy isn't a walk in the park. My back already hurts after my shortened shifts, and I'm battling intense exhaustion that came out of nowhere.

Before the little peanut, I had boundless amounts of energy. Gabbi used to call me the energizer bunny. Well, this bunny's batteries are running low, and I have so many more months to go. At least the morning sickness only hits me between the time I wake up and noon.

Jordan rearranged my work schedule for me to work from one o'clock until eight every night, and I really appreciate it. I'm able to continue my job and deal with the discomforts of early pregnancy.

I'm walking through the therapy room, shutting off lights at the end of the night, when another side effect of pregnancy

hormones hits me. There's only one way to take care of this issue. Find my daddy.

At this time of the evening, the building is mostly empty. Only a few security guards and cleaning crew stay around after the athletes and coaches leave for the day.

I stick my head out the door and smile at the security guard standing right outside. "Could you wait to tell Jordan I'm finished for the day? I want to grab a quick shower and surprise him in his office." His eyebrows shoot up, and a blush moves over my face as I realize he knows exactly what I'm planning.

"Sure thing." His smirk tells me he isn't fooled in the least.

Jordan changed his schedule to match mine and hired a bodyguard to keep me safe. At first, I thought it was overkill, but I've come to appreciate knowing someone is watching out for me once the building empties.

Not giving myself time to chicken out, I lock my office suite door and quickly strip off my clothes. I have to work fast if I want to pull this off before Jordan comes looking for me or calls Cohen to see why I'm not ready. I hop in the shower and scrub the workday funk off of me. If I'm going to seduce my daddy, I'm going to be sweet-smelling.

I keep extra clothes in case of emergencies, and the intense sexual hunger flowing through me right now definitely qualifies. I pull on my black yoga pants and a long t-shirt, wishing I'd thought ahead and brought something sexy to work. Oh, well. Maybe next time.

My heart soars at the thought of having a next time with Jordan. After all the drama and miscommunication, I finally feel like we're on the same page. Mostly. He's still trying to

give me everything I could ever want. Since the only thing I need is him, I'm dealing with it.

Once I pull my hair back and spritz on a little perfume, I'm ready to head upstairs to the main offices and seduce my daddy. I take the stairs up to the top floor out of habit. I hate taking the elevator when the building is empty due to my irrational fear of getting stuck and staying there until the next morning. Silly, I know, but it is what it is.

Just as I thought, the executive floor is dark and empty. Yay. Now, let's see if I can pull this off. I walk down the long hallway and stop outside the last door. Taking a deep breath, I knock on the door.

"Yes." Jordan's deep voice sends my hormones skyrocketing.

I push the door open and step inside. He looks up from the papers spread across his massive wooden desk and blinks several times. "Why didn't Cohen call me?"

He pushes his chair back, but I stop him. "Wait." He follows my order and halts. "Stay right there." Okay, I'm winging it here.

I close the door behind me and turn the lock. His eyes follow my hand as I pull my t-shirt over my head and toss it aside. "Are you trying to give me a heart attack, princess?"

"No." I shake my head and unsnap my bra. "I'm trying to seduce you. Now, sit back and let me work."

His eyes widen as his nose flares. "I'm all yours."

I toss my bra onto the black leather chair in front of his desk, push my yoga pants down my legs, and kick off my tennis shoes. His rapid breathing and white-knuckled hold on the chair arm tell me he likes my little striptease. "Good. Cause I'm keeping you."

He throws his head back against the chair and groans my name as I slowly walk over and straddle his lap. I can feel his hard cock pressing against my sensitive pussy through his dress pants and my pink silky undies.

The armrest makes a popping noise as his grip tightens. I stare into his eyes and reach between us to slowly unbutton his starched, white dress shirt. I push the material aside, and his tattoo collection comes into view, reminding me how lucky I am to have this thoughtful, sweet, gorgeous man all to myself.

I lean over and run my lips across my initials over his heart, and he groans my name. I kiss my way over to his nipple and gently nip at it. One of his hands flies up to grip the back of my head while the other one wraps around my hip.

I continue exploring and kissing each of the tattoos until I reach the base of his neck. I close my lips around the skin and suck, hoping to add a little mark of my own to the collection. “Are you giving Daddy a hickey?” His cock jumps against me. “Yes.” I smile against his skin and suck a little harder. “I want everyone to see you belong to me, Daddy.”

“I love you, princess.” His words cause my pulse to jump as I kiss him. His warm lips open for my tongue, and I slip it inside his mouth to tangle with his.

A shiver runs through my body as his hand slowly slides up my side and around to close around my boob. He gently runs his thumb over my nipple, causing electricity to flow down my spine as wetness soaks my panties. His hand tightens against my head as he devours my mouth. I squirm on his lap, rubbing my sensitive core against his erection.

He pulls back and groans against my lips, “You want Daddy’s cock inside your tight little cunt, princess?”

“Yes.” But I have plans for him first. “After I taste you, Daddy.” I push back and he helps me slide off his lap. The soft, plush carpet cradles my knees as I unbutton his pants.

He pushes my hand away and hurries to pull his cock free of his pants. “I’ve been dreaming about you sucking my cock since the very first moment we met,” he admits, and I glance up into his eyes.

“That long, Daddy?” I wrap my hand around his shaft and slowly stroke up and down as he pulls the hairband from my hair and runs his hand through my hair.

“It’s been torture, dreaming about you every goddamn night while praying you didn’t find some other man,” he groans as I lean forward and run my tongue across the tip. “I already had plans for where to hide this imaginary man’s motherfucking body if he dared to touch you.”

“No need to resort to murder.” I lick the vein running down the underside of his cock and gently cradle his balls in my hand. “I’m all yours.”

“Thank God,” he growls and stares into my eyes as I close my lips around his erection. I’m new to this, but it doesn’t take me long to find a rhythm of sucking him as deep as possible while stroking the rest of his cock.

“Daddy isn’t going to last,” he warns me as tremors run through his muscular legs, “and I want to come deep inside your sweet pussy.”

He tries to pull back, but I double down on my efforts. I’m not going to stop until I see this through and make him come. Hard. My eyes meet his, and I hold his gaze as I whisper against his sensitive flesh, “Come for me, Daddy.”

His hand tenses on the back of my head. “That’s my line, princess.” Then he groans as his cock erupts and his cum hits the back of my tongue. I swallow him down and keep sucking until he slumps back in the chair. The sound of his heavy breathing fills the air around us as I kiss my way up his chest, stopping to place a little nip on each tattoo.

“We can share the line,” I tease as I crawl into his lap.

He slowly rubs my back and places light kisses on the side of my neck, nearly lulling me to sleep.

I’m so relaxed, I barely notice when he hops up and sits me on the edge of his desk. I gasp as he pushes all the papers off the side and points at the glossy dark wood surface. “Lie back, princess, and let Daddy play.”

I lean back on my elbows to watch him rip away his clothes. I’m amazed to see his already rock-hard cock bounce against his stomach. I point at his erection. “How did you do that so fast?” I’ve always heard men aren’t good for more than one time a night.

“I live in a perpetual state of locked and loaded any time you’re around.” He leans over me and closes his lips around one of my sensitive nipples. My daddy knows just the right amount of pressure to pleasure me without causing pain.

I groan his name as he kisses his way to the other side and shows it the same treatment while sliding two fingers into my wet core. He slowly presses them deep and curls his fingers, rubbing them against my inner walls.

His hard cock thumps against my belly, and I reach between our bodies to stroke it. “Fuck,” he growls against my skin. “I’m about to come again.” He pulls out of my grasp and lines

his cock up with my wet opening. “I need to feel this sweet pussy hugging my cock tight.”

“Please.” I want that so bad. I dig my nails into his back as he slowly presses forward until he bottoms out. The hard desk beneath me and my legs hanging over the side make it hard to meet his thrusts, so I wrap one of my legs around his hips, changing the angle of his penetration.

The new position allows his cock to slide a little deeper, and I breathe deep, willing my inner muscles to relax their stranglehold on his cock.

He wraps his arms under my knees and pulls my legs over his shoulders. I reach up and grasp his upper arms to hold on, so I don’t go flying right off the side of the desk.

He furiously pounds into me until a sudden climax rips through me without warning. I cry out, “I love you, Daddy,” and his thrusts grow frantic.

He slams into me one last time and throws back his head to moan my name. Warm wetness fills my pussy and runs out onto the desk below me. He releases my legs and helps me to sit up, wrapping both hands around my face as he stares into my eyes. “Thank you for giving me the world.”

“I should be the one saying that.” Darn it. Tears fill my eyes and slowly roll down my cheeks.

“Why are you crying, princess?” He uses his thumbs to wipe away my tears.

“Because I’m so freaking happy, and these pregnancy hormones are turning me into a blubbering, sex-crazed maniac.”

“Yet another reason I plan to keep you knocked up for the foreseeable future.” He winks at me as humor fills his dark

brown eyes.

“The blubbering?” I can’t resist teasing him.

“No.” He laughs. “I can do without the tears, but I’m completely wild about my sex-crazed, curvy little maniac.”

“And I’m hooked on my slightly clueless, handsome, caveman Daddy.” I hug him close, too tired to even worry about sitting naked on the side of his desk.

“Then we should get married so I can keep you forever, princess.”

I pull back and tilt my head to the side while staring into his eyes. Responses whiz around my mind as I search for the right one. “Yes.” That’s perfect.

Epilogue

HOLLIE

5 YEARS LATER

I'M RUSHING AROUND PICKING UP TOYS BEFORE THE automatic vacuum starts its scheduled run through the first floor of the house. I bend down to grab a naked Barbie doll and stand up a little too fast, causing the room to spin around me.

I stumble back to the sofa and drop down before I pass out. Jordan would have a stroke if he knew I was feeling lightheaded. My very protective caveman would wrap me in cotton and keep me under lock and key if I let him.

“Are you okay?” Gabbi walks in and asks. I forgot she was dropping by today while all the girls are at Mother’s Day out.

I sit up quickly, see dark stars flashing around the corners of my vision, and instantly fall back. “No,” I grumble. “Your brother and his robo-sperm struck again.” I just did the test this morning after I woke up feeling like heck warmed over. My entire vocabulary changed with the birth of our little girls.

My best friend-slash-sister-in-law comes over and sits next to me. She pats my knee and laughs. “It seems the condition is contagious.”

“Really?” I sit up slowly this time. “The second trip to the woods?” When Gabbi and Atlas first met, they got lost in the woods for several days. During this time, they fell for each other, and she took a little present home with her. Her little surprise is now four going on sixteen.

“Yep,” she confirms. “Atlas is going to be so happy. Hopefully, he doesn’t go overboard this time.” She already knows he will. It’s in his genes. All the men in town seem to have been born with the caveman gene.

“At least he didn’t shut the entire town the day you gave birth.” Like my husband did.

Sienna came three weeks early, and we weren’t at all prepared. Jordan was at a stockholders’ meeting in Houston, and our little one wasn’t going to hold off for anything or anyone. Totally unrelated, the President was in Silver Spoon Falls for a fundraiser.

My caveman lost his freaking mind and forgot all about this when he chartered a helicopter and paid the pilot thousands extra to land on the hospital roof, without prior permission, which caused all hell to break loose. The local cops, state police, SWAT team, and secret service all descended on the hospital before they discovered it was a wealthy, clueless caveman and not a threat to security.

Gabbi snorts. “You have to admit that was pretty epic. Not every child can say the President sent them a gift basket for their birth.” That’s true. Once the authorities discovered the reason Jordan acted like a madman, they were fairly

understanding. Of course, the large donation we made to the President didn't hurt either.

"Then he refused to leave my side the last three months of my pregnancy with Mae." And of course, our second daughter decided she liked the accommodations and refused to come. The doctors finally took mercy on me and induced my labor six days after her due date.

"Don't lie to me," Gabbi grumbles. "You didn't mind at all." She's not wrong. I loved spending every day with my husband and daughter. In fact, it was during the last few weeks of my pregnancy when I decided to quit working for the team and stay home with the kids and Jordan. My husband also cut back on his hours, which leads to a lot of togetherness.

"I don't mind at all," I admit. "But it would be nice for us to have one more girls' night out before we let the cavemen in on our little secret."

Gabbi instantly agrees. "I'll call Raven to see if she's free tonight. You call The Broadway Steakhouse and check if our regular table is available."

"It sounds like a plan." We both know Raven will jump at the chance to have a girls' night and catch up, and The Broadway Steakhouse always makes sure we can get our table on short notice.

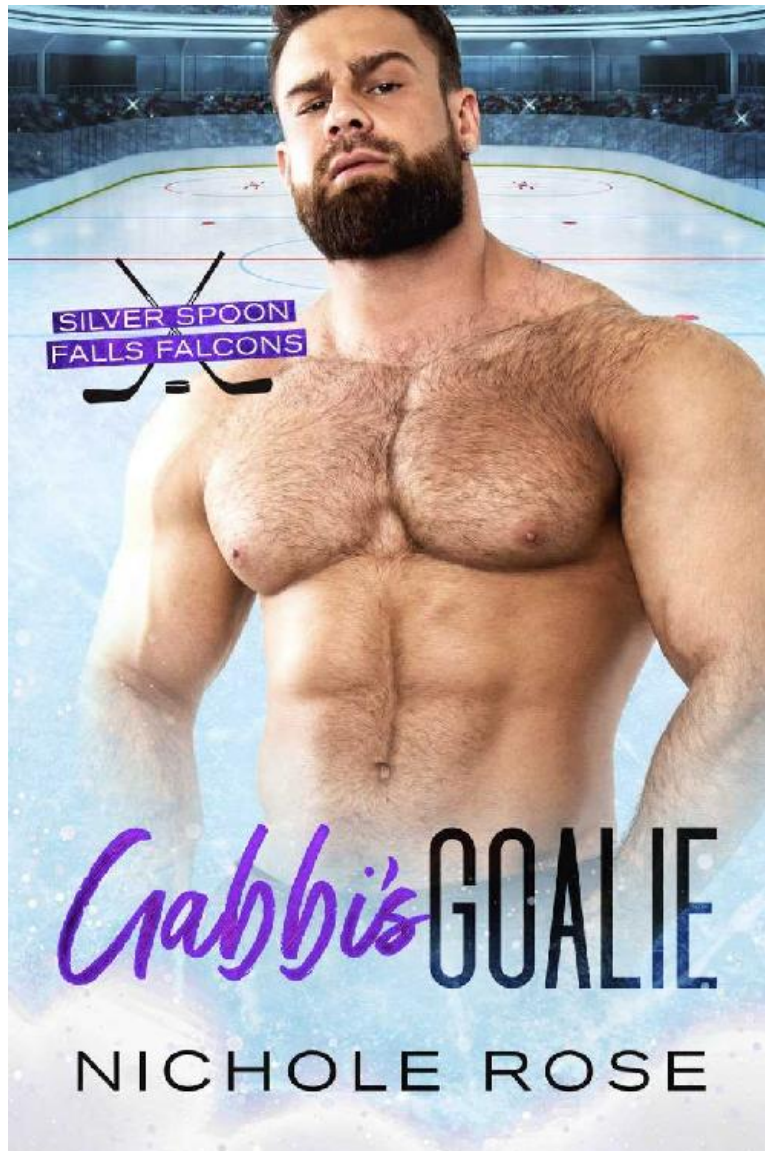
Another given is the three insanely possessive cavemen who will be sitting at their regular table across the restaurant, making sure no one bothers us.

THE END OF *the Daddy*
CLAUS

THANK YOU FOR READING THE DADDY CLAUS. WE HOPE YOU loved the story and will consider leaving a review.

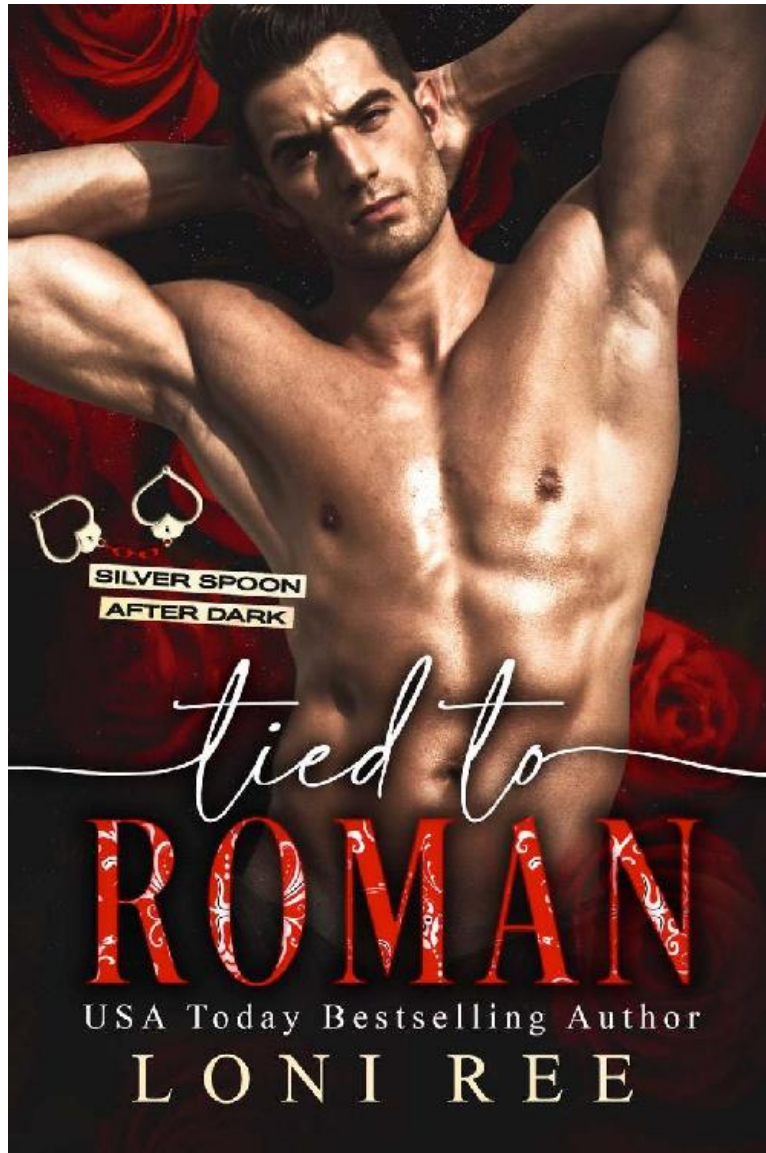
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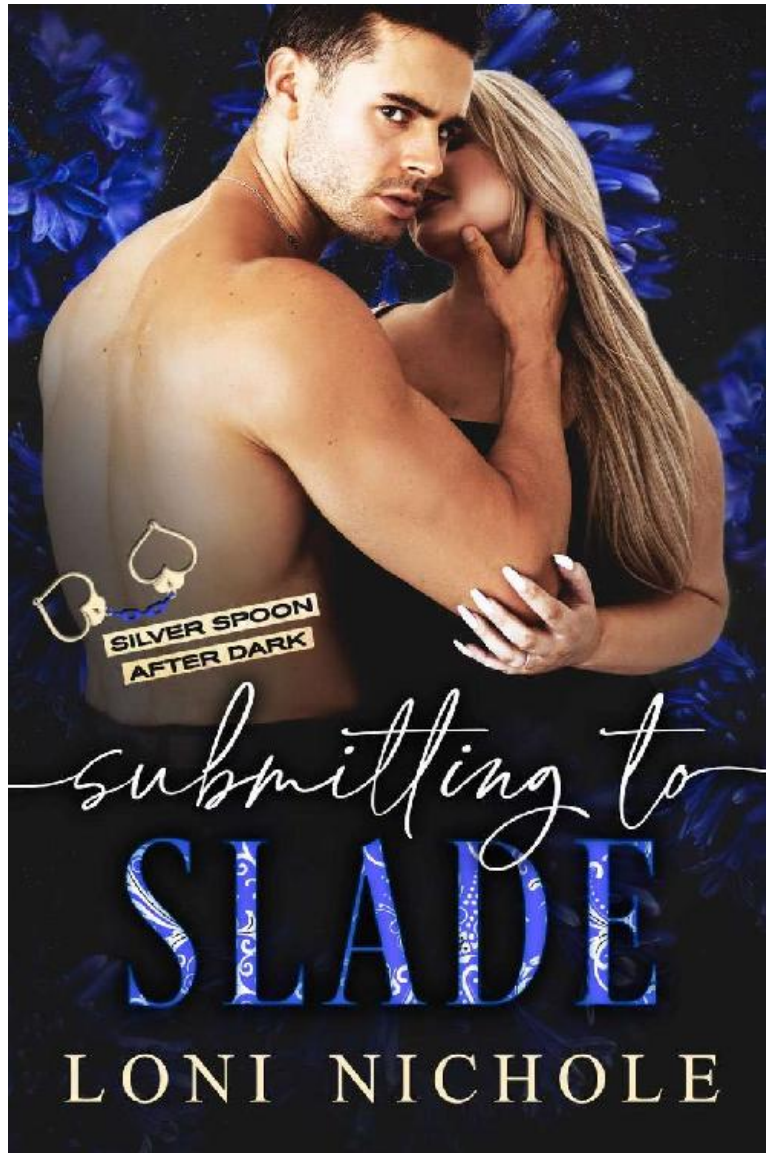


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SILVER SPOON FALLS FALCONS

Check out the Silver Spoon Falls Falcons!

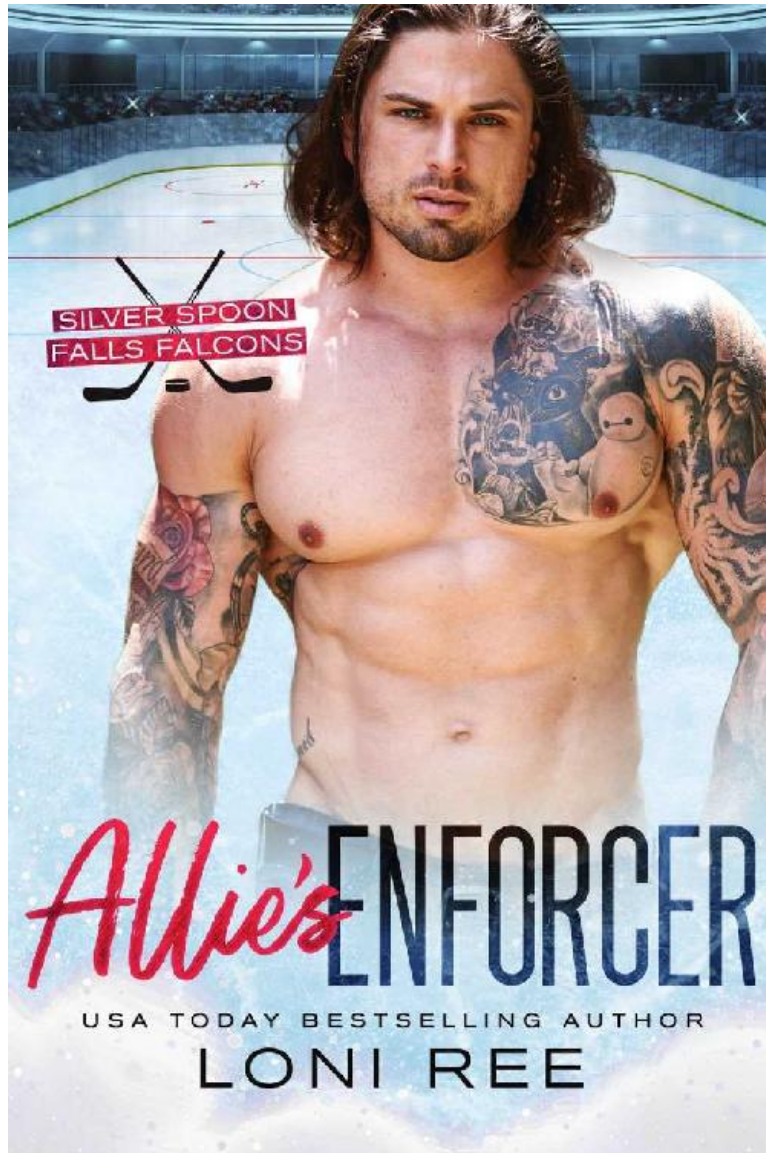
What we wanted: professional athletes.

What we got: stick-wielding madmen who look good in TEAM COLORS, play hard, and love harder.

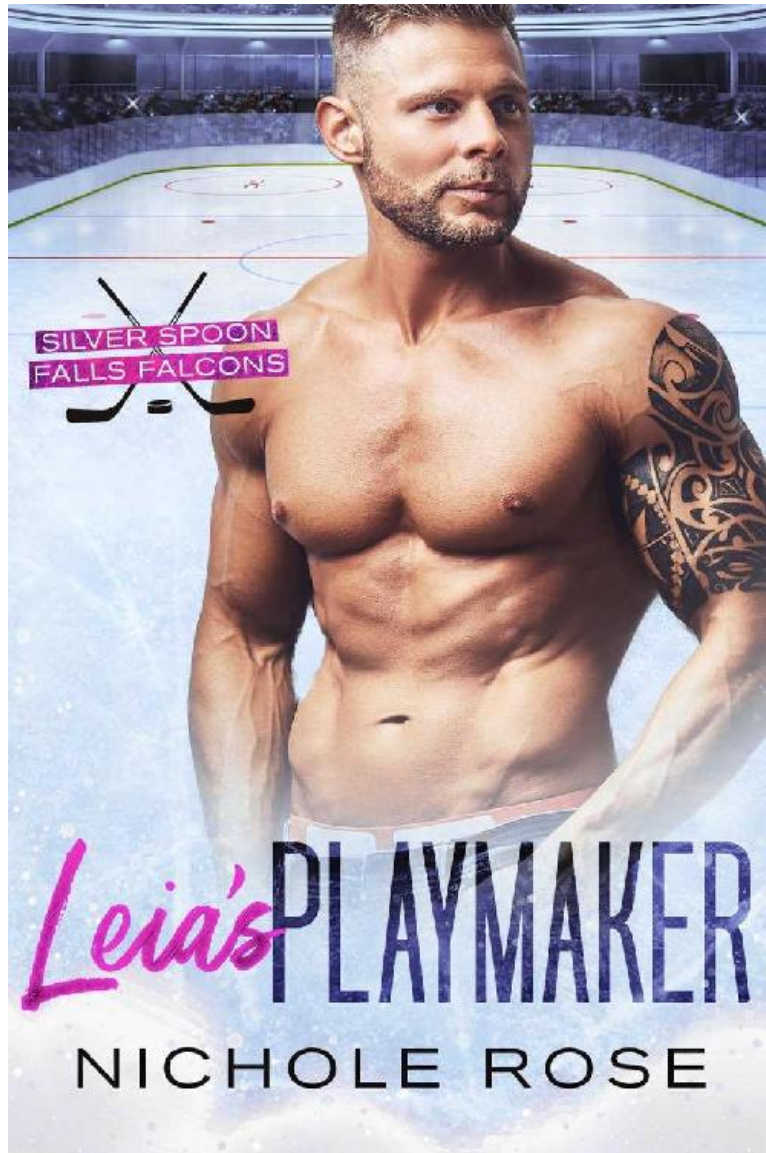
It's a good thing this is Silver Spoon Falls because these hunky hockey players fit right in.

Welcome the Falcons to the roster! These over-the-top athletes are about to play the most important game of all: the game of love. And the sassy, curvy women of Silver Spoon Falls have no intention of going down without a fight. Let the games begin!

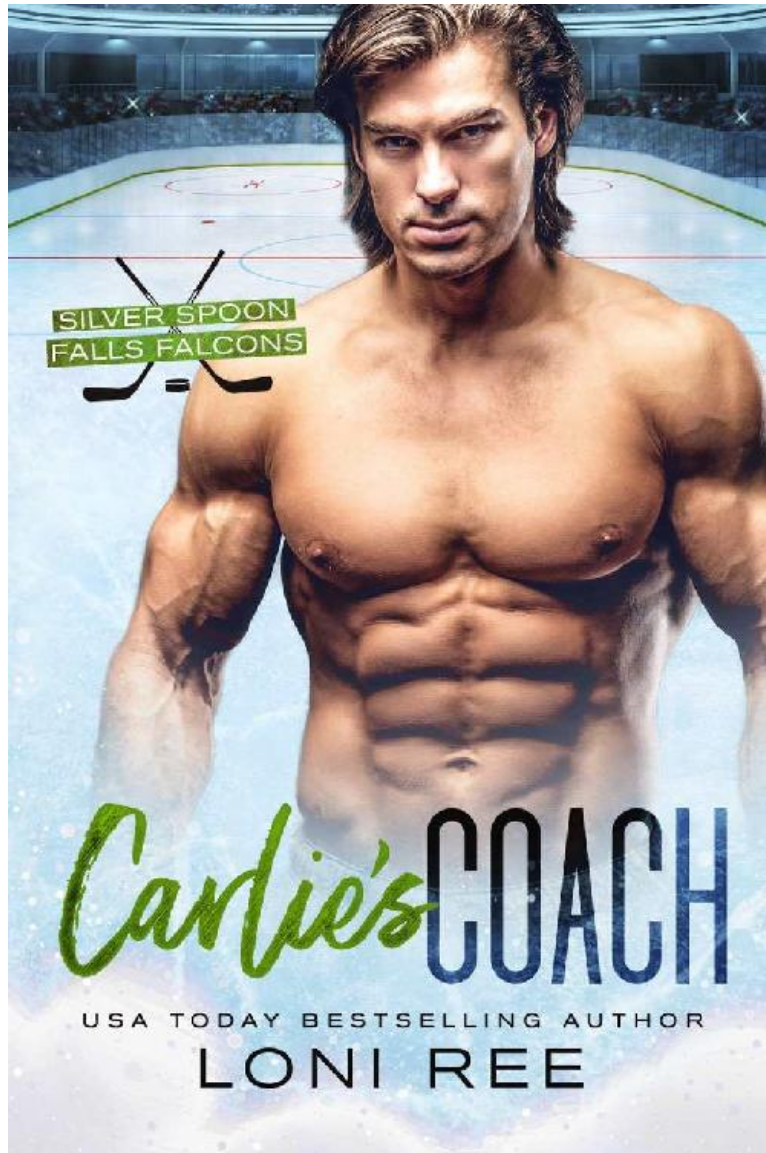




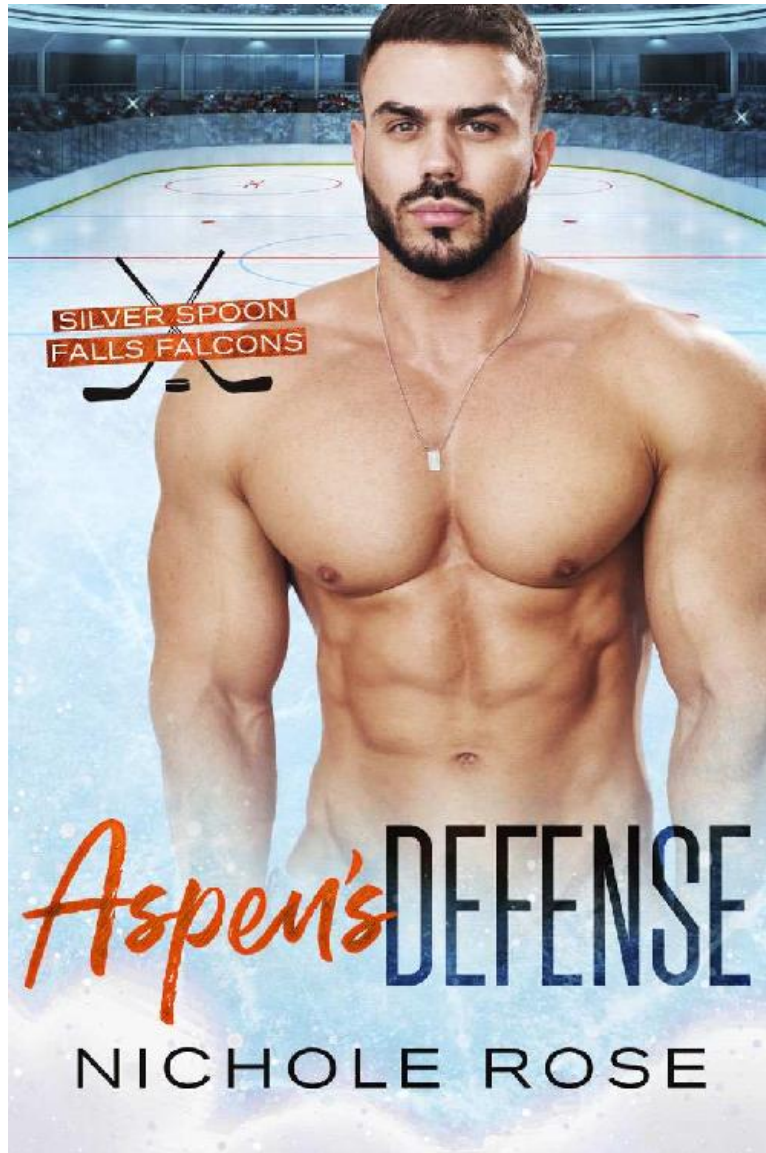
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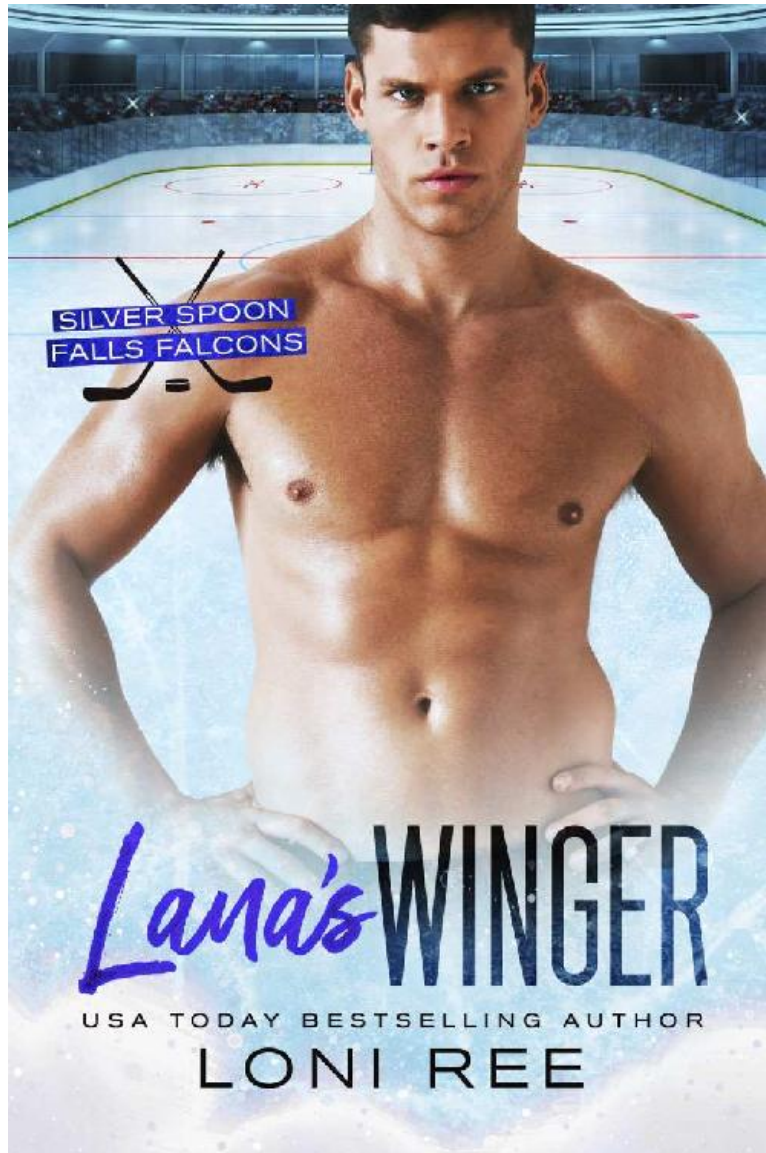
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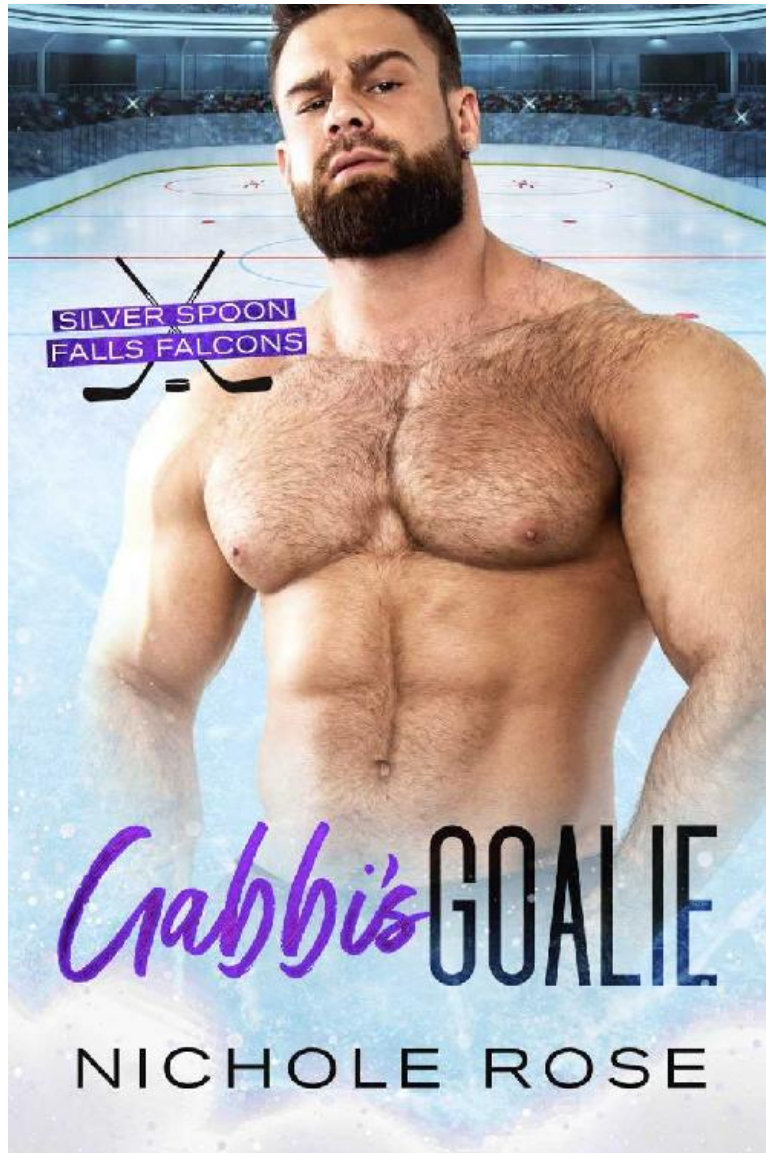
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LONI NICHOLE



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Razor's Flame
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- ✓ STEAMY TO LOVE

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- ✓ OVER THE TOP
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- ✓ CURVY HEROINE
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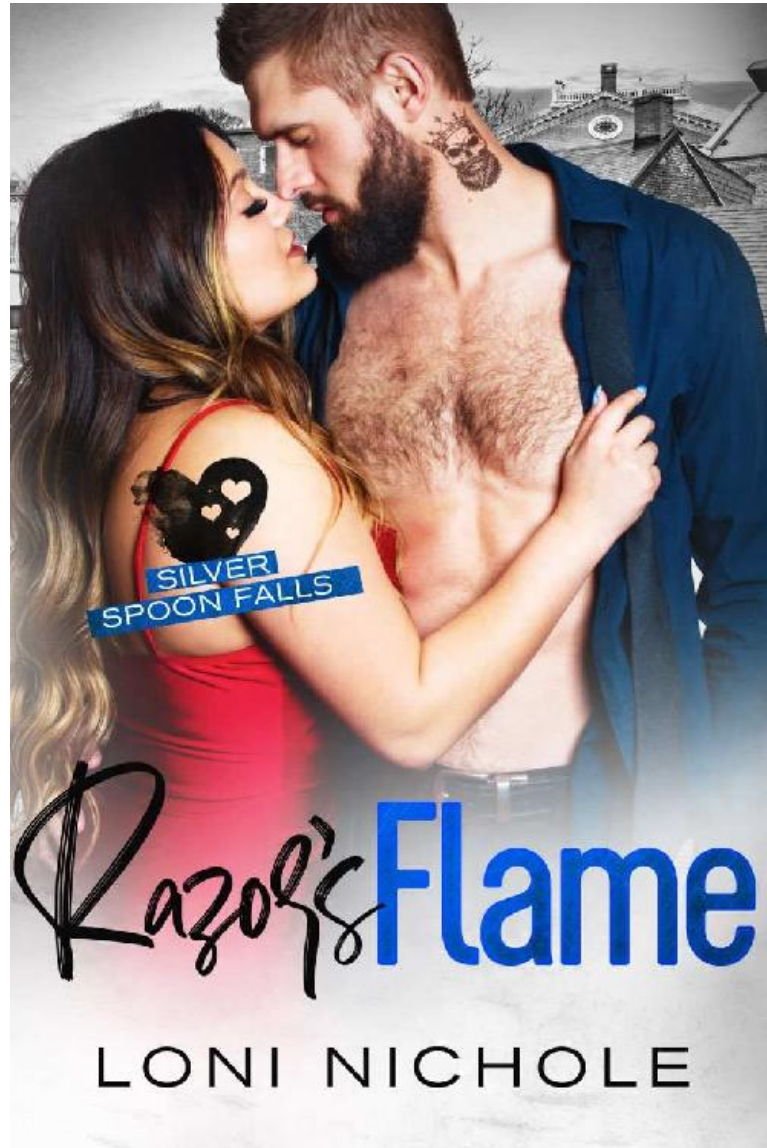
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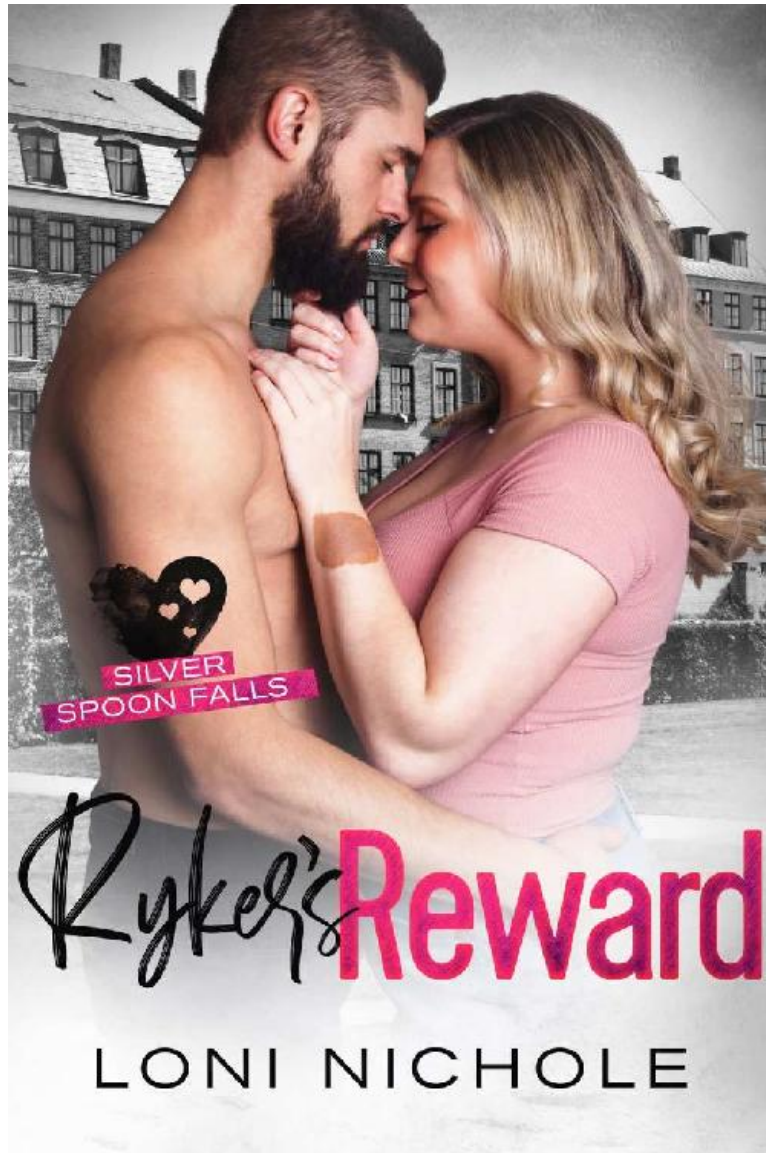
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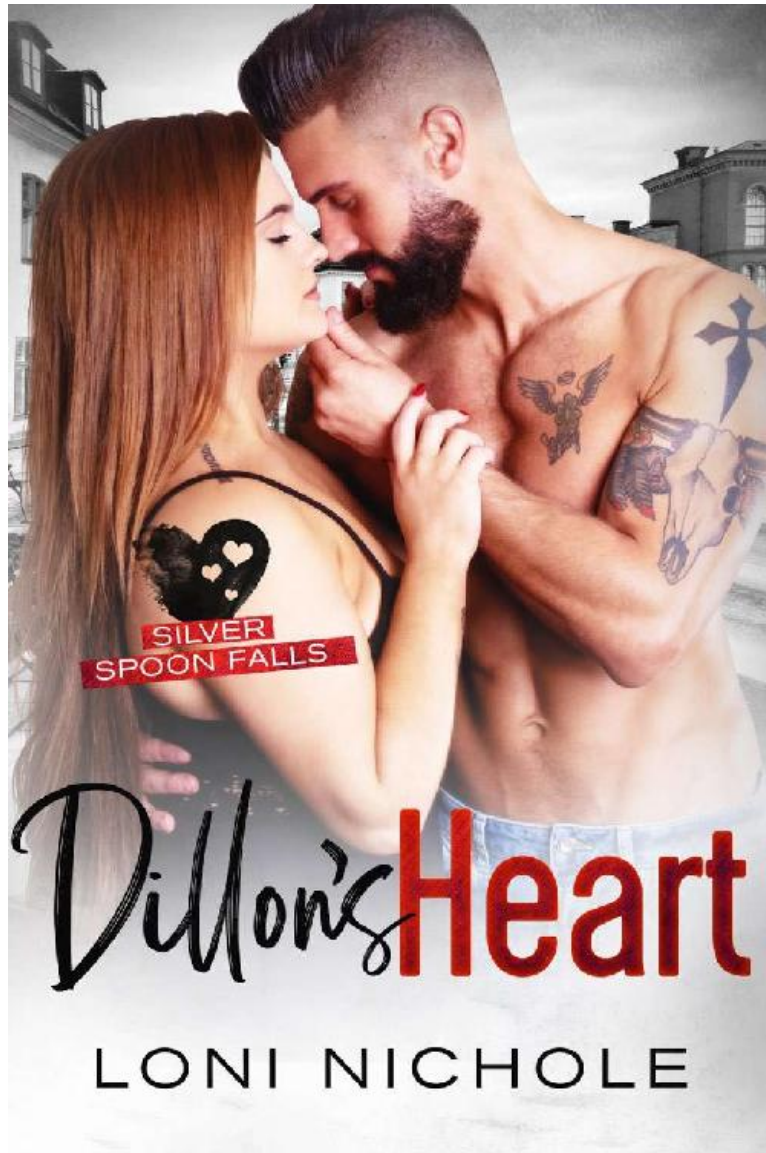
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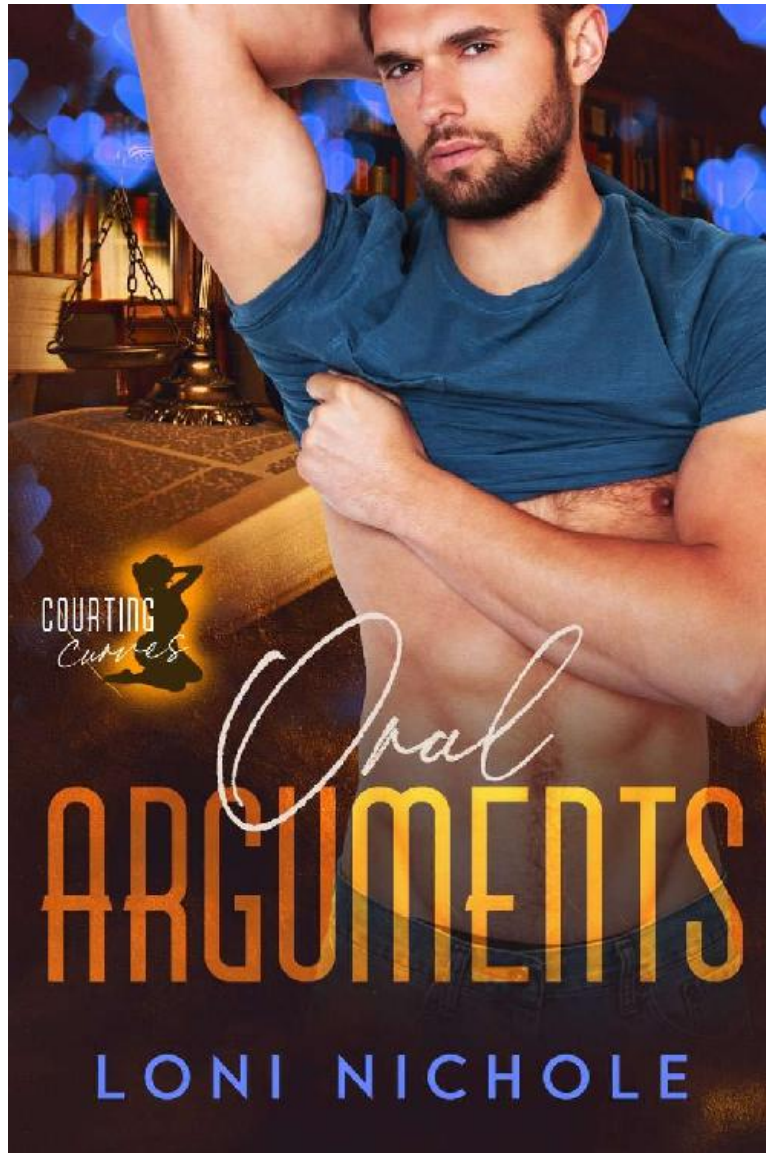
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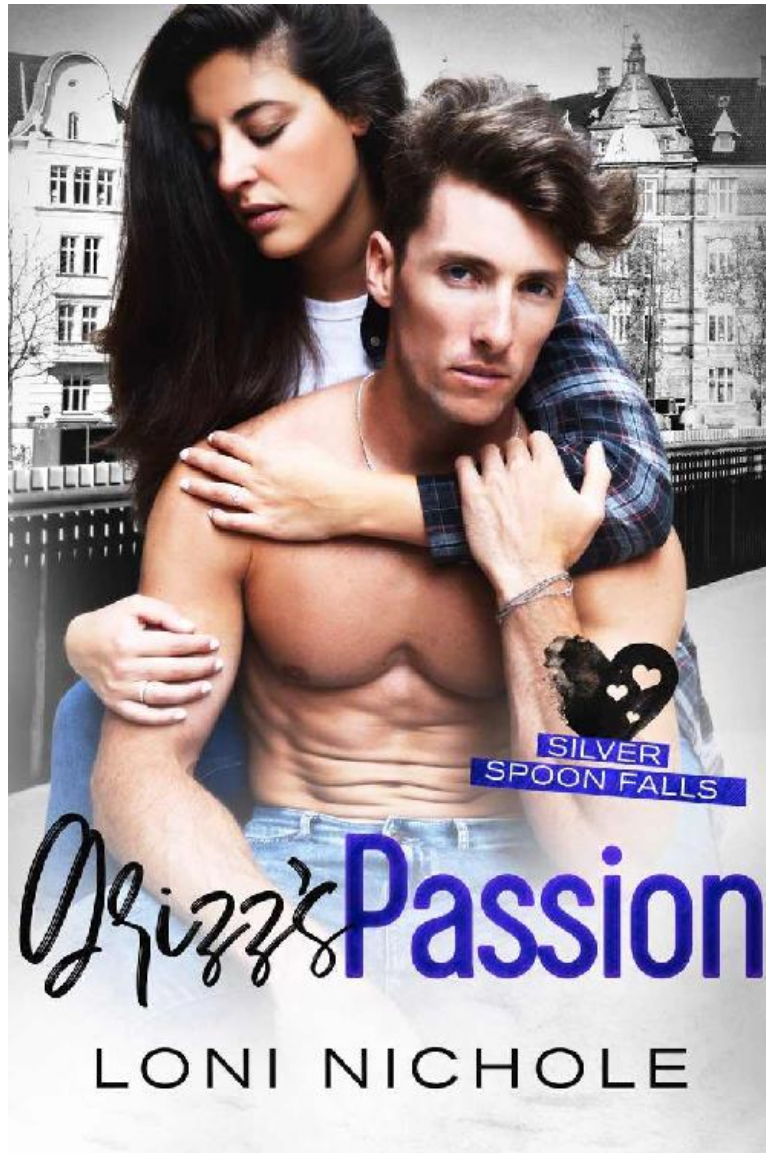
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Writing partners-in-crime [Loni Ree](#) and [Nichole Rose](#) have teamed up under the Loni Nichole penname to bring you sugary sweet and steamy full-length instalove romance featuring the sassy, curvy heroines who love taming the OTT alpha heroes that make you swoon.

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