

THE
PSYCHO

SOLDIERS OF ANARCHY

NIKKI J SUMMERS

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The Psycho

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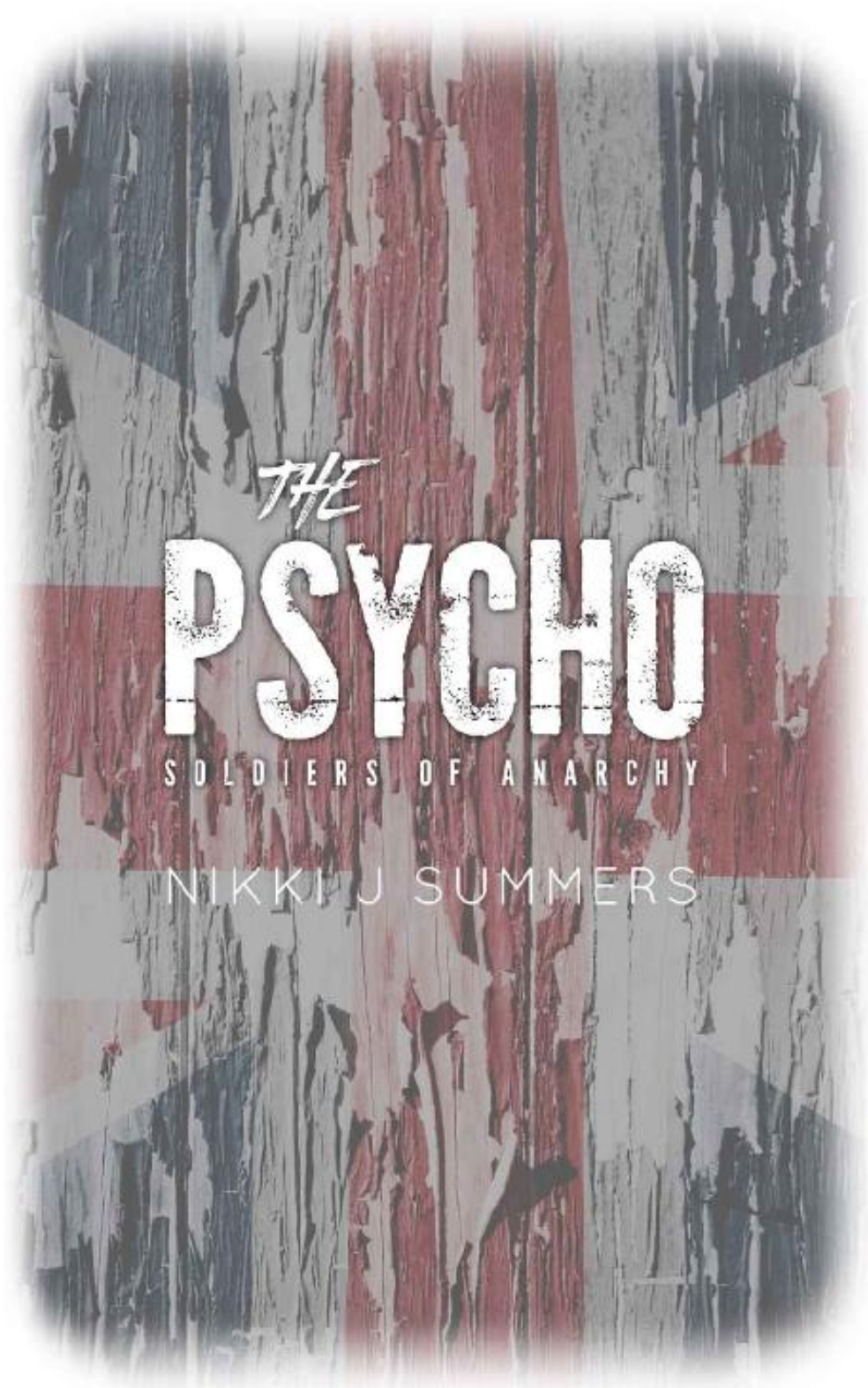
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THE
PSYCHO

SOLDIERS OF ANARCHY

NIKKI J SUMMERS

Other books by Nikki J Summers

Rebels of Sandland Series

Renegade Hearts

Tortured Souls

Fractured Minds

Stand-Alone

Luca

This Cruel Love

Hurt to Love

Joe and Ella Duet

Obsessively Yours

Forever Mine

All available on Amazon Kindle Unlimited.

Only suitable for 18+ due to adult content.

Playlist

Available to download on Spotify

<https://spoti.fi/2XAY0ed>

Psycho – Muse

Ill Manors – Plan B

Jekyll and Hyde – Five Finger Death Punch

Purple Lamborghini – Skrillex

Killing in the Name – Rage Against the Machine

I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor – Arctic Monkeys

Jungle – Professor Green. Ft. Maverick Sabre

You Don't Own Me – SAYGRACE. Ft. G-Eazy

Animals – Maroon 5

Therefore I am – Billie Eilish

Venom – Eminem

Mirrors – Arrested Youth

Paparazzi – Kim Dracula

Blood//Water (Tom Morello Remix) – Grandson

Fire Up The Night – New Medicine

Hangover Cure – Machine Gun Kelly

Yellow – Coldplay

RAMPAGE – Gravedgr

Bonkers – Dizzee Rascal

Papercut – Linkin Park

Run – Snow Patrol

Say Something – A Great Big World. Ft. Christina Aguilera

The Scientist – Coldplay

Paper Rings – Taylor Swift

THE
PSYCHO
SOLDIERS OF ANARCHY

Trigger Warning

A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

Welcome to Brinton Manor.

A place where villains get to be the hero. Where violence is their second language, and they control the justice system. Here, they make no apology for who they are. If you don't like it, then leave.

Brinton Manor isn't for everyone.

Do you think you've got what it takes?

If a morally grey hero with psychotic tendencies and a habit of stalking his leading lady turns you off, better stop reading. If a heroine who is confident in her sexuality, speaks her mind and knows what she wants scares you, this book is not for you.

This is an insta-obsessive love story with violence, bad language, and scenes of a sexual nature.

Still want to visit? Well, buckle up and enjoy the ride. And as they say in Brinton Manor, 'Prepare yourself,' because from this point on...

There's no going back...

'All who come here, abandon all fear.'

What do you get when you cross a mentally ill loner
with a society that abandons him and treats him like
trash!?

I'll tell you what you get...

YOU GET WHAT YOU FUCKING DESERVE

Joker (2019 Movie)



Prologue

ADAM'S MANIFESTO

When a society loses faith in its justice system, when the laws of the land are corrupt and only serve to feed the greed of those with money and power, the forgotten masses will eventually rise up and fight back. Those with nothing—who feel like nothing—have nothing to lose. The way I see it, everything has to matter, or nothing matters. And when nothing matters, that's when vigilantes like us step up.

They call us the soldiers of anarchy. Soldiers, because we will fight for what we believe in. And anarchy, because we don't give a flying fuck who we have to destroy to do it.

Life hasn't been kind to us, and we've learnt to adapt to our environment. In our urban jungle, we are the lions, the undisputed kings. We hunt in a pack, and we take no prisoners... well, not for long, anyway. We're under no illusions about the shit that goes on that others choose to ignore. The filth that lives amongst us. But unlike the rest of the community here in our town of Brinton Manor, the absent police force included, we don't bury our heads.

We stand up.

We call it out.

We are the justice that needs to be served.

A wise man once told me that we all have choices in life, and with those choices come consequences; always choose your path carefully. I liked that saying. It's one that I've lived

by, especially when it comes to our brutal but totally justified game of consequences with the unwilling participants we target in this fucked-up world. It's our chance to get back control of the streets. Payback for every wrong that needs to be addressed.

What does the game of consequences involve?

It's a game we started many years ago, when we all met as delinquent youths in the pupil referral unit they stuck us in to keep us away from the system that failed us. Away from the innocent, mind-controlled sheep they wanted to protect from our ugly truths. Those perfect little citizens that'd pay their taxes and smile as they got royally fucked by the powers that be. It's a game that we initiate with those elements of society that need to be taken out. The filth that no one wants to acknowledge, that often goes undetected and is allowed to fester below the surface of society, bubbling away unnoticed, not talked about until it slides into your life and destroys everything it touches. Only then do they seek us out, because we aren't afraid of getting our hands dirty. We aren't afraid of fighting for true justice.

Our 'challengers' are given tasks to complete for us, and if they do it to our satisfaction, they get rewarded. Fail, and we make damn sure they never have a chance to let us down again.

We like toying with our prey, but at the end of the day, we will stop at nothing to do what needs to be done.

We will fight for those that can't.

We will strike fear into anyone who oversteps the mark.

We are the soldiers of anarchy.

The voice of a forgotten generation.

We will be heard.

And you will fucking listen.

Chapter One



““T ick tock, Harvey. I’m waiting.” I tapped my watch and took a step closer to where he stood, balancing on the edge of the roof of Brinton Manor’s derelict community centre. His feet shuffled against the rubble and crumbling brickwork as he tried to gain a more secure footing on the ledge.

We could have dealt with this dirty peado scum anywhere, but it seemed fitting to bring him here tonight. It was a place that was supposed to encompass the spirit of our community. A service built for the people of Brinton, and in its current state, it stank of piss, shit, and was littered with used needles and other filthy crap. A bitter irony of a broken promise if ever there was one.

Community?

We made our own.

We never had anything handed to us on a plate. We learnt from an early age that if you wanted something, you had to take it, and right now, I wanted to take this motherfucker to hell. Break him into a million pieces on the ground below us, but not before he’d told us what we wanted to know.

Where were the others that’d helped him carry out his sick acts?

Who else did we need to take out?

Harvey’s time had come to an end. He’d lived on borrowed time for long enough. But we knew there were others out

there, and we'd never stop until we'd washed the streets of Brinton free from their filth.

"I'm losing my patience, Harvey." I cocked my head to the side and glared at him, hoping he could feel the sharpness of my stare penetrate through his eyeballs, spear into his brain, and yank what he knew out onto the floor to bleed at his feet. The fact that we all wore our signature balaclavas added to the overall effect. This was his own personal horror movie, playing out right in the heart of where he'd carried out his atrocities. Brinton Manor.

"I want names and addresses. You can tell me and make this easy on yourself, or... I'll get Devon here to work his magic and get you to squeal another way." I leant forward to whisper in his ear, turning my nose up at the stench of stale body odour and greasy, unwashed hair that blew my way as I got closer to him. "They don't call him the reaper for nothing. In fact, I call him the artist, because every kill he makes is a fucking masterpiece." I leant back and sniffed in disgust. "And from the smell of you, you need putting down like the filthy animal you are."

Grimacing, I took a step away from him to get some much-needed air into my lungs, repulsed at the thought of going near him again. But I enjoyed watching his reaction, revelling in the pain of his response. He knew he'd reached the end of his life of lies, but it never ceased to amaze me how men like him would cling onto their vile secrets until the very end. Men like him had no shame. In fact, he was no man. He was pure fucking vermin.

Harvey, the dirty nonce, sucked his breath in through his teeth and clenched his eyes shut. I guessed the involuntary shiver he gave had nothing to do with the biting cold wind whipping around us. No, that was triggered by the fact that he knew this was his day of reckoning. His time was up, and he was dreading what lay ahead for him in the afterlife. A coward to the end, that was Harvey. Even hell would be too good for this piece of shit.

His hands were tied behind his back, but he'd stopped struggling and trying to free himself. The dim light from the

nearby streetlamps bathed us all in an orange glow, like a solemn backdrop to the events taking place on this rooftop. The buzz we could hear from the town below reminded us why we were here.

This was our town.

We kept it clean.

And he was filth that didn't belong. Filth that needed taking care of.

For tonight, we were his judge, his jury, and his mother fucking executioners.

I had two of my fellow soldiers holding him up, keeping him steady on the ledge as I read him his rights.

His right to tell us whatever the fuck we wanted to know—where were the other sickos hiding out in this town?

His right to take a beating for being the lowest piece of peado scum to walk into Brinton.

And his right to meet a painful death after what he'd done to countless others out there. Others who had no voice, no power to fight back. Not like we did.

Poetic justice some might say. Only, our form of poetry wasn't written, it was performed.

Gripping his left arm and grinning like he couldn't wait for the grand finale stood Colton King, our very own fucked-up joker. He would take anyone out with a smile on his face. He'd cut your throat while laughing like it was nothing. And right now, he was chuckling to himself like a maniac as he glared at Harvey, no doubt picturing what was coming next. He loved the game. He lived for it. In our game of consequences, the part he enjoyed the most was the chase. For me, it was the fear in their eyes. That, and the fact that we controlled everything, even down to when they took their last breath.

"I'm so over this. It's fucking pointless," moaned Will, who had Harvey's right arm in a death-like grip, not because he was holding him steady, but because he was bracing himself to lift this motherfucker and send him straight to hell.

Will Stokes was a player, but the games he favoured were a whole different ball game. He liked the kudos that came from running in our gang, but he revelled in the additional perks more. He was a fuck boy and proud of it.

Standing either side of me were Devon—our very own reaper—and Tyler, who'd probably already emptied the guy's pockets, along with his life savings in the time it took for the rest of us to blink. We were all so different, and yet, we just seemed to fit. We all had our roles and we played them perfectly. An army of vigilantes that worked as a unit, lived and would probably die standing shoulder to shoulder.

So, what was my role?

I was the one with no moral compass.

I had no fucks left to give.

I didn't have a conscience and that made my job easy, because when decisions needed to be made, and shit needed to be done, I did it, no questions asked. I was the fixer, the hammer that'd put the final nail in your coffin without a second thought.

Which brought us to where we were now, holding Harvey—the hopeless piece of shit—over the edge of the building after giving him the beating of his life. He still hadn't given us the names of the other sick freaks though, the ones that could've colluded with him. We knew he was lying when he protested his innocence. We could smell bullshit a mile off, and right now, we were sick to our stomachs of smelling it on him. Not to mention, his mobile phone held all the evidence we needed to know that he was a worthless sack of shit. He'd hurt kids. Robbed them of their childhood. He didn't deserve a voice and he definitely didn't deserve to live.

“This is your last fucking chance, Harvey. Tell us who else we need to pay a visit to, and this will all be over. Speak. Now.” I tried to negotiate with some degree of conviction, but I could tell this was a pointless endeavour. Harvey had reached the point of no return. He wasn't going to give us what we wanted, and this was becoming a waste of our time. We needed to wrap things up.

Right on cue, Colton shook his arm and glared at the side of his face as he whisper-yelled in his ear, “We can do this the hard way or... Fuck it. What am I talking about? We only do things the hard way. Looks like today is your lucky day... *punk.*”

But Harvey shook his head frantically, still acting like a clueless fuck, and not doing a very good job of it either.

“I don’t know what you want from me. I don’t have any names. I already told you.” The way he kept shaking his head made him look like a pathetic fish, flapping about on the deck of a boat, thrashing as it took its final breath.

He looked at each one of us in turn with pitiful wide eyes that did nothing to cool our thirst for vengeance. Then, he settled his cowardly stare on me, taking a deep, shaky breath to prepare himself for what was about to happen. For a spilt second, something flickered in his eyes, and I could tell he still harboured some foolish hope that something, or someone, might save him at the eleventh hour. He really was a brainless sick excuse for a human being.

Did he think we’d let him go?

That we were useless punks?

This wasn’t our first rodeo; we did this for sport. We were damn good at it too. It was what we lived for. It was our calling.

The ripples of irritation grew stronger as they drifted through my body, and I felt something snap in my head. I was done with this. I didn’t usually give our victims this many chances, and this guy was playing on my last nerve. I’d given him every opportunity possible, and that pissed me off. I never showed weakness or leniency. That wasn’t what I was programmed to do. The time for talking was over. Now, it was show-time.

“You really don’t help yourself, do you, *mate?*” Colton laughed as he looked at me and then back at Harvey. He knew if they didn’t take him out now, I was about to launch myself on him and rip him apart with my bare hands. Colton smirked

with a devilish grin, and then he looked back over at me as I nodded to give them both the green light.

Do your worst, lads.

Instantly, Colton and Will kicked into gear, dragging him further over the edge as he started kicking and screaming, doing anything he could to halt his impending doom. Harvey's eyes bugged out of his head, and he pleaded for his life, offering us money, favours, begging for us to stop and listen. But we'd had enough of his stalling tactics. It was time for action.

I took a step forward and ripped my balaclava off. I wanted him to know exactly who it was that was sending him straight to the gates of hell. Then, I folded my arms over my chest, smiled and stared straight at him as they lifted him into the air and threw him off the building. Those few seconds, watching him fly through the air to the ground, was poetry in motion, literally. He didn't scream for long, and the impact of him landing impaled on the wrought iron fence below was the ultimate reward for our first job of the night.

The others took their balaclavas off, and I turned to see the smug smile on Devon's face. He'd got the artistic ending that he'd wanted. Harvey-the-fucker's guts were pouring out of his body like he was a piece of performance street art. Devon, the reaper, could add this as another triumph in his book of macabre fairy tales. The perfect happy ending, Devon-style.

We all stood at the edge of the roof, peering over at the filthy piece of crap lying below. His ending was fitting for a waste of oxygen like him. He looked like roadkill that needed scraping off the floor and feeding to the pigs.

"I wonder if his life flashed before his eyes as he went down?" Colton mused, raising his eyebrows at us and then giving us a sadistic grin as sick thoughts raced through his mind.

"I hope so. He lived a shitty life, and he deserves to go straight to hell with that imprinted on his brain," Tyler spat back, fishing the guy's wallet out of his own pocket and

thumbing through it, taking the cash out and throwing the rest down onto his corpse.

I couldn't agree more. Live in shit and die in shit. He'd got what was coming to him.

Colton shrugged and nodded over to Will. "Ready to work off some of that adrenaline?" He smirked and rubbed his hands together, falling easily into the joker side of his persona. The kill switch that he had in his head had become easier to activate. Psycho to sociable in less than a second. Colton had that down to a tee.

"Do you even need to ask?" Will puffed his chest out and straightened his shirt, as if righting himself after a hard day's work. "I'm fired up and ready to rock some lucky girl's world."

"Girl or girls?" Colton waggled his eyebrows, but he knew as well as the rest of us that anything was possible where Will was concerned.

"Whatever happens, happens." Will shrugged nonchalantly. "You know me. I'm not fussy." Then he turned to smirk in my direction. "Not like this one."

I didn't react. My face gave nothing away and I wasn't in the mood to get into another debate about the fact that I was more particular than they were when it came to where I stuck my dick. I didn't see the appeal in the nameless, faceless pussy they drowned in every week. I had standards, a code that I lived by in all aspects of my life. I answered to no one. Lucky for them, they didn't push it. They knew better than to goad me into a reaction. They'd tried it once... It never happened again.

"Remember, tonight isn't all about you getting your dicks wet," I announced drily, trying and failing to hold in my irritation. "We still have other business to take care of."

They might be buzzing to party after what we'd just done, but I couldn't. We had a few more debts to settle before we could call it a night, and I had to stay focused. I had to be the leader they needed me to be.

“Just think,” Tyler added, as he sauntered past me towards the stairs that’d lead us out of here. “When we get our own club, we won’t have to chase the pussy, the pussy will come to us.”

If all the decisions were left to Tyler, we’d never get anything done. The guy thought with his dick, and like Will and Colton, he’d seen more action than an Avengers movie. Lucky for us, I had a lot more restraint in that respect. Someone had to take the reins.

“I don’t chase pussy.” Colton winked in response and then rolled his eyes. “It always comes crawling right to me.” He slapped my back as he strode past me and followed Tyler down the stairs. “Stick with me tonight, Ty. I’ll hook you up,” he called after him, cackling with laughter.

Tyler grumbled something about not needing his help and marched on ahead. I followed, leaving them to their dick measuring bullshit, and pulled my mobile out of my jeans. I fired off a message to our clean-up guy, Gaz, letting him know he needed to drop by the community centre and sort out the mess from the railings. Gaz and his team liked to think they were soldiers, but they needed to prove their worth, and doing our clean-up was one of those ways. A message came back instantly to let me know he was on his way, and it would be sorted. He knew better than to keep me hanging.

I pocketed my phone and kept my head held high, following the others as they laughed and joked about. They all seemed to find it easy to shut down from a kill and switch over to being themselves again, but I didn’t. I found it worked better for me to shut myself off from reality all together. Because the kill switch that I had in my head only went from psycho to simmering. There was no off switch.

I doubted there ever would be.

Chapter Two



So, it was on to our next assignment of the night. This was a big night for Brinton Manor. Not only because we'd cleared the streets of another dirty paedophile, but the infamous Renaissance men of Sandland—Finn Knowles and his golden boys—were hosting one of their parties in our town. Don't get me wrong, we weren't special to them, nor did we have an amazing choice of venues for their illegal events that they usually put on in their hometown. Oh no. This was payback. Blackmail at its finest.

Finn had been one of our game players not so long ago. He was a guy with a lot of secrets, and we used that to our advantage. We knew he'd do anything to keep his past buried, so we taunted him, blackmailed him, and made the knowledge we had about him and his sister work for us. We weren't stupid. We knew he was a once in a lifetime golden nugget that'd fallen right into our laps, and we'd manipulated him in every way possible. An opportunity like Finn Knowles didn't come along every day.

One of the tasks he'd been given during his game of consequences was to put on an event in our town. Tonight, we wanted him to put Brinton on the map, but we also had another more selfish reason for our decision to make him jump through this particular hoop. We wanted to get in on the cash cow that was Brandon Mathers and his bare-knuckle boxing matches.

He was a fighter that nobody could touch. No one even came close. And the money that we'd seen gambled on him was something we wanted a part of. We weren't planning on running the streets forever, we had ambitions of our own, and with the money we'd procured through our vigilante fund, we were pretty damn close to reaching our goal. Add in a little windfall, courtesy of Mr Mathers tonight, and we would be laughing. The soldiers were on their way up.

"So, how exactly are we gonna play this tonight?" Devon asked, referring to Finn Knowles as he kept in step besides me, walking down the dark, empty street. We were making our way towards the old plastics factory where the event was being held, but the spike in our adrenaline wasn't from the prospect of partying. We had other reasons to be fired up. It was always the same when we were going into battle. Strike first, strike hard, and get the job done.

The other three had gone on ahead, but Devon was more like me than the others. He wanted action of a different kind, and he knew that by staying by my side, he'd get what he was looking for. We were psyched up and ready to destroy anything that got in our way.

"I'm gonna send him his final task," I answered and took my mobile phone out to do just that. "He's gonna make Mathers throw the fight. We'll bet against him, and with the crazy odds they'll be offering, it'll be payday all round. A win-win for everybody."

Devon stared straight ahead and didn't speak, probably mulling over the logistics of what I'd just told him.

"A win-win for everyone except Mathers." Devon wasn't stupid. He knew there was a chance this could backfire for us. Brandon Mathers wasn't the most stable guy, and the fact we were banking on him choosing his friendship with Finn over his fighting career was a massive risk. But I liked risks. I never shied away from a challenge. I had a good feeling about tonight because no matter where the chips fell, we were going to be leaving with what we wanted. We were going to make damn sure everyone knew the soldiers were on top.

“He’ll do it. If he doesn’t, we’ll get creative with another way to raise the cash. Finn won’t want us leaking his little secret, and Finn’s girlfriend isn’t short of a few bob. I’ve seen where she lives.”

I had no qualms about taking that route. By any means necessary, we would win. I didn’t hurt women, but I wasn’t averse to using them to get what I wanted. Often the threat of violence was all the incentive you needed. I guessed that would be the case in this instance. Finn was one of those old-style gentlemen. He’d do anything to protect his girl, and that gave us another ace to play when it came to dealing with him and his conscience. She was his weakness.

“And after tonight, we walk away? That’s it for Finn Knowles?” Devon asked with a frown. He knew most of the plan, but he also knew I liked to keep a few cards close to my chest. Never show your full hand. Always keep them guessing.

“Maybe.”

Tomorrow, I’d share with them what I had planned to make our dreams of owning our own club become a reality, but tonight, I had to focus on making this last puzzle piece fall into place. We needed that cash, and Mathers losing face in front of his adoring crowd wouldn’t hurt either. It was always fun to watch the mighty fall. An extra cherry on top of our victory cake.

We turned the corner and saw the lines of people waiting to get into the factory. Girls shivering in the cold, wearing next to nothing and wrapping their arms around themselves in an effort to keep warm. Lads eyeing up the girls and swigging from bottles and cans of beer, giving themselves a head start on the night ahead. I had to hand it to them, the Renaissance men certainly knew how to pull in the crowds.

I could see Tyler, Will, and Colton sauntering on ahead, making their way to the front of the queue. When a few girls in the line caught their eye, they gestured to them, and like moths to a flame they left their places in line to join our boys. But unlike them, I kept my blinkers on, heading to where the

security were checking people in. I had no interest in anything other than business tonight.

“You need to wait in line like everyone else,” one of the doormen told us as we came to a halt at the entrance. Fucker must’ve had balls of steel to stop and question us. Either that, or he had no fucking clue who we were, and considering this was a party in Brinton, that was pretty fucking stupid in itself. This was our town, our people, our event. No one was going to tell us what to do.

“*We* don’t wait in line,” I bit back, and one of the men nudged the other and whispered something in his ear. I saw Devon reach into his pocket and run his hand over the knife he kept there. If they knew what was good for them, they’d cut the bullshit and let us through. This was, for all intents and purposes, our party after all.

The first guy clenched his jaw but wisely he kept his feelings to himself as he stood back to let us in. Devon withdrew his hand and the sigh he gave told me he was disappointed that they’d folded so easily. Just like me, Devon preferred to do things the hard way. It was more fun.

“Wise choice, mate,” Colton sneered, side-eyeing him as he pushed his way through the door with some brunette girl hanging off his arm.

“Like he had any other choice.” Will snorted, staring straight at the doorman, goading the prick into fighting back. He didn’t bite though. He knew better.

The girls giggled, over-exaggerating the sway of their hips as they tottered in with us on their ridiculous heels. Colton laughed and gave them a wink, but to me, the sound of their flirting was like nails down a chalkboard. There was nothing remotely attractive about it and their shrill cackles made me grit my teeth and head for the main hall, desperate to get some distance between myself and the vapid air that surrounded them. The lads could have their fun for now, but one word from me and the girls would be dumped. They were nothing special, and despite their actions, the others knew what the

priority was here. Soldiers stand united and fight together to the very end.

We made our way into the hall, where the music was blasting out. I checked my phone and saw that Knowles had read my text. He knew he had to make Mathers throw the fight or his nightmare game with us would never end.

Colton, Will, and Tyler were oblivious to the strings I was currently pulling behind the scenes, more focused on getting inside the girls' knickers. I watched as Colton slapped the brunette next to him on the ass and said, "I think we have time for a bit of fun before the real work starts."

I wasn't bothered.

I'd let them know when their help was needed.

Colton dragged her off, not that she put up much of a fight, and Tyler and Will followed suit with the other girls. Devon stayed with me, and we stood watching, scoping out the place. The golden boys of Sandland had thought of everything, and I noticed a bar area set up in the far corner.

"I need a beer," I stated, bypassing the crowds and heading over there. I could sense girls looking at me, but I only made eye contact with the guys that I passed, letting them know that I was here, I took no shit, and I was ready to show it. A warning stare. A 'try me and I will fuck your shit up' kind of glare. It worked. It always did, and as usual, they broke eye contact first, sipping their beer and turning away from me to mask their fear.

Fear.

It was something we worked hard to instil in anyone who knew us. We even had a reminder painted high up on the wall as you entered Brinton from the Sandland side of town.

'All who come here, abandon all fear.'

It was our motto and the first thing you saw when you came onto our manor. It wasn't that we wanted people to feel comfortable, on the contrary, they should be fucking scared. No, that message was one for the people of Brinton, the natives. They didn't need to fear what could happen, that was

our job. We chased the wolves from their doors because somebody needed to take responsibility. The police didn't care. They wouldn't come here after dark regardless of the crime. They barely showed up in the daytime. Years ago, we thought that was bullshit, but now, it worked in our favour.

All five of us had a story to tell, we all had our reasons for protecting what was ours. Five boys who bonded in a pupil referral unit that was set up for school kids that no school ever wanted to teach. The ones who were uncontrollable, but we had control, we just chose to use it in different ways. We controlled us, no one else had that power. We would never be told what to do. Our fate was ours alone.

I didn't need to get the barman's attention, he saw us and headed straight over, asking what we wanted to drink, and then poured out two beers. When he put them down in front of us, Devon opened his wallet, but he held up his hand to stop him.

"These are on the house," he said, stepping back and folding his arms. His face remained stoic but the flex in his jaw showed that he knew who we were, and he was wary. Our reputation preceded us.

"Nice one. Thanks," Devon replied, totally oblivious to any tension, lifting his drink in salute before taking his first sip.

I gave a grim nod and took my drink. I wasn't about to thank him. We owned this town, and this was our night. If we wanted a drink, we'd fucking have one.

"Do you think there'll be more of them?" Devon asked, referring to the issue we'd had with Harvey.

"They're vermin," I said in a low voice, keeping my head down so no one close-by could hear. "They've probably scuttled off back under the rock they came from, but they won't stay there for long. If they do come here again, we'll be ready for them."

"Next time, I want the kill," Devon hissed, and then changing the mood slightly, he added, "Have you placed our bets for the fight tonight?"

I frowned at him. Devon knew better than to question me. Of course I had it all under control. When had I ever not? I was just about to tell him that I wasn't a fucking amateur, when I felt a body brush up against me.

My skin went cold, and I turned to see who had the balls to invade my personal space, feeling instant irritation when I discovered exactly who it was.

Sarah fucking Pope.

Ironic that she shared a name with a holy guy when everything she did was fucking filth. I should've known she'd be here tonight. She was like a fly around shit whenever we were out. Just the scent of her desperation made me feel nauseous.

"Hi, Adam." She smiled then bit her lip suggestively, running her eyes up and down me like I was hers for the taking.

Did she think that would make me fall at her feet?

Not likely.

This girl did absolutely nothing for me. Her red hair was fake. Her long black nails were fake. Her whole fucking personality was fake, and I was getting tired of faking my patience for her crap. She needed to get the fucking message.

I didn't reply, just turned back to my pint, because that was more interesting than the car crash stood behind me. I didn't need to feign boredom where Sarah Pope was concerned, I was fucking bored.

"I was hoping you'd be here tonight," she carried on in that annoying shrill voice of hers, desperately clinging to any form of conversation she could to try and get my attention.

"Where else would I fucking be?" I snapped back, looking anywhere but in her direction in the hope that she'd give up like she usually did. Girl was like fucking Dory the fish, oblivious to the fact that I hated her. Only difference was, she was more piranha than blue tang. Nemo wouldn't have stood a chance in her pool.

She giggled to herself and nudged my arm with her shoulder. “I love the way you play hard to get.”

I frowned and narrowed my eyes, turning to stare down at her like I was ready to eviscerate her with the power of my glare. “Who says I’m fucking playing?” I growled, then jerked my arm away from her, grimacing at the fact that she was standing so close to me. She needed it spelt out plain and simple. She was getting nowhere with me tonight. She never had and she never would.

She didn’t take the hint though and gave another annoying giggle as she ran her long nails along my forearm.

“Don’t. Fucking. Touch me,” I hissed, pulling away from her in disgust. This bitch was walking a thin line. She was grating on my last nerve.

“Oh, come on...” She leant closer to me, and I could smell the alcohol on her breath. It’d obviously given her extra courage as she was a little more persistent tonight. “You know, I could make you feel really good. Take me home, and I’ll suck you and fuck you so hard you’ll never want to let me go.”

I laughed, and not because I thought she was funny. She was a bloody joke.

I dipped my head down to answer her, pushing my face to hers—even though it made my stomach roll. “So I hear from the rest of the lads. But they all let you go, didn’t they?” I smirked and cocked my head to the side, giving her a look I usually reserved for the shitheads I wanted to freak out. Colton called it the psycho stare. Right now, it was my get-Sarah-the-fuck-away-from-me stare. She didn’t like that, and her face instantly went from flirty to fuming.

“One day, you’ll realise what an asshole you’ve been to keep turning me down, Adam Noble,” she shouted a little too loudly, which earned her a ripple of snorts and muffled laughter from the people in our immediate vicinity. She glared around her as her face grew as red as her hair and then spat out, “Fuck you.” Then, she spun on her heels, whipping her hair into my face and causing me to reel back in repulsion.

“Never gonna happen, sweetheart,” I muttered into my pint, relieved that she’d left but still wincing from the aftereffects of her presence that hung heavy—like a demon that needed exorcizing.

“That one will never give up,” Devon said, knowing he needed to tread carefully where this subject was concerned. “You’ve made it a game for her. The more you push her away, the more she wants you.”

“Maybe I need to push harder.” I turned to face him and raised my eyebrow, keeping my face neutral so he knew I really didn’t give a fuck. “And make sure she’s close enough to the edge of the river for it to mean something.”

“She’d probably come back to haunt you anyway.” Devon chuckled as he threw back the last of his pint. That’s what I loved about Devon; he didn’t waste time on pointless bullshit.

“She wants a full house of soldiers in her bed,” I reminded him. “And that is never gonna happen. She should be happy with four out of five.” My forehead hurt from frowning so hard, but I couldn’t help it. I wasn’t here for anything other than making money and breaking dreams. I certainly wasn’t going to stroke Sarah Pope’s ego, or anything else of hers for that matter. Her pussy probably did come with claws. I couldn’t help smiling to myself at that thought, but when I looked across, Devon’s face was devoid of the humour it’d held a moment ago.

“Make that three,” he sneered in disgust. “I haven’t touched her, and I never would.” And he turned up his nose like he could smell her desperation too.

“She’s probably scared you’ll go overboard when you’re choking her and live up to your reaper nickname in the bedroom too.” I was full-on smirking now behind my pint glass, because we both knew what I said was true. Devon was a little too dark, even for Sarah Pope.

He didn’t deny it, only shrugged his shoulders and rocked back on his heels. “A man wants what he wants,” was what he said in response, and fair play to him. What he did in his own time was none of my business.

“Yep.” I nodded in agreement. “And what I want right now is to watch Brandon Mathers get knocked the fuck out in his own boxing ring in front of his adoring fans.”

Devon’s eyes twinkled like he’d been lit up from the inside. He knew as well as I did that nights like these were what it was all about. Nights when we reminded everyone who we fucking were and what we stood for.

Kings of chaos.

Soldiers of anarchy.

The mascots for a generation of reprobates, no marks, and fuckups.

“It is fucking on,” he said through the wide smile he couldn’t hold in. It wasn’t often Devon smiled, but when he did, you knew it meant something.

We pushed our way through the sweaty crowds as they danced to the thumping beat, jolting us as they got lost in the music that took them to another level of euphoria. Unlike them, our feet were firmly on the ground as we headed towards the hall next door. We’d already scoped out the building a few days ago to check on their preparations for the event, so we knew where the fights were being held, but even we were impressed when we walked into the room and saw the final result.

It was dark, but the random strobe lights that’d been set up in the corners of the room gave off just the right amount of light to give it that gritty, underground vibe that made it feel raw, real, electric. The roar of the crowd as they watched the warm-up fight taking place in the ring in the middle of the room drowned out the thumping bass coming from the main hall, and hearing it made the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end. I glanced around, taking in all the banners that were draped along the metal walkways that ran around the perimeter of the room. Granted, the slogans on them were a pile of shit.

Beat ‘em to the punch.

Show your killer instinct.

Total and utter crap if ever I saw it. But it did give the room that whole football stand feel. Brandon Mathers was an English man and proud of it, that much was clear. But Mathers loved himself too much, and if I had my way, I'd choke the fucker with one of his horse shit banners and show him what real killer instinct looked like. It didn't matter how much you tried, you couldn't polish a turd, but he thought his was solid fucking gold. It was going to be fun to see the mighty fall so hard.

"We've saved you the perfect spot to watch our victory," Colton came up behind us and yelled in our ears over the noise of the crowd. We both turned around and then looked up at the first level platform that he was gesturing to, where Will and Tyler stood, looking smug with their arms folded. Like us, they were ready for show-time. Ready to cash in and then witness the gold boys of Sandland crash and burn. This was one defeat we were going to enjoy gloating over.

Mathers was fighting Joe Hazel. We knew Hazel, and he knew how important this fight was to us. He was under strict instructions not to go down under any circumstances, but he didn't know we'd thrown the fight for him. The kid needed a confidence boost, and thinking he'd beaten the unbeatable Brandon Mathers would do that for anyone. So, we were going to keep that little gem on the downlow. We weren't all bad, after all. Call it our Brinton youth support and investment scheme. He'd think he was the dog's bollocks for a few weeks, and we'd have another puppet we could manipulate. See, always a win-win.

We took our places on the platform overlooking the ring. Two guys were finishing up their fight as the people chanted for Mathers. I scanned the heaving crowds below and spotted Finn Knowles, Ryan Hardy, and Zak Atwood standing to the side of the ring with faces like thunder. They didn't see us. Shame really. I wanted them to know we were here. I wanted our presence to unnerve them. They thought they were kings, but we were here to make sure they knew their thrones were about to be crushed. By tomorrow, their crowns would be mangled in the dirt, right where they belonged.

The spotlights suddenly dimmed and the energy from the crowd intensified, making my stomach turn over with anticipation. A wave of excitement ran around the room, and even I felt a ripple run through me—and I was a fucking cold-hearted bastard. I gripped onto the railings and braced myself. This was going to be even more fun than skewering Harvey the nonce.

The speakers boomed, sending shockwaves through our bodies as the strobe lights danced around. The sound of *Rage Against the Machine*, ‘*Killing in the Name*,’ filled the air and I could feel myself giving an internal eye roll at the tackiness of it all. Colton couldn’t contain his excitement and whooped next to me, leaning forward over the railings as he shouted the words to the song—along with the rest of the crowd. However, I stayed calm, letting the moment sink in. Mathers was giving us a message here. He wasn’t going to do what we told him. This song was his, ‘Fuck you,’ to us. It didn’t bother me in the slightest. If anything, I liked knowing that we’d gotten to him. He was so riled up he’d taken to using throwback nineties songs to try and argue with us. Just more proof that the guy had zero class.

“He’s not gonna throw this fight, is he?” Devon yelled into my ear.

I shrugged, showing that I didn’t care one way or the other. “It is what it is,” I replied.

I’d never make our success dependent on the actions of someone like Brandon Mathers. Whatever happened here tonight, we were going to leave with what was owed to us. We had a payday coming, end of.

“It’s fucking awesome is what it is,” Colton said, laughing as an over-confident Mathers emerged from the shadows, strutting towards the ring as Hazel trailed behind him.

Both men entered the fight zone and danced about as the crowd lapped it up. Then Mathers took control, launching into another one of his pompous pre-match performances. The guy was spouting bullshit like he was on a platform at speakers’ corner in Hyde Park. He needed to get over himself. Everyone

cheered and heckled as he used his verbal punches to try and unnerve Hazel. But his threats and bravado had the opposite effect on me. It made me smile, knowing that their hero was about to become the biggest mug here, and it was all because of us, the soldiers of anarchy.

The crowd ate it all up, of course, and even Colton shouted back like he was at a fucking pantomime. Mathers was the ultimate showman, I'd give him that, but every showman had their swan song. This was going to be his.

"Calm the fuck down," Tyler shouted over at Colton. "Anyone would think you wanted the fucker to win."

"I like the theatrics," Colton replied as he hung over the ledge and joined in the chanting.

"You'll like the fucking payday more when he hits the floor after a knock-out from Hazel," I snapped back, shutting them both up.

The two fighters circled each other, and after some gnarly stand-off and a few heated glares, the ref started the fight. It was no surprise to see Mathers outperform Hazel in every way in the ring. His punches were harder and more accurate. His foot work was flawless. The way he ducked and danced around the floor, making Hazel work for every damn hit, was an art-form in itself. He owned the fight, and if I had a heart, I'd feel bad about what we'd orchestrated here tonight, but I didn't. I couldn't give a flying fuck about his career.

The tension in the air was so highly charged it could've roused the dead from their graves. It made me stand tall and proud, listening to the crowds chanting his name, beyond confident that their boy Mathers had this in the bag, but I knew better.

Then suddenly, there was a shift in the air as Mathers dropped his arms by his sides and stared over to where the rest of his crew stood, and I felt my body stiffen in anticipation. This was it, the moment it all changed. Hazel swung his fist forward and smacked Mathers once, twice, and then boom, Mathers hit the ground and the whole hall erupted with

deafening jeers of anger and hatred at what they were witnessing.

“He did it,” Will said breathlessly, as if he couldn’t quite believe what he was seeing. “He really fucking did it.”

“Too right he did. He knew we had his mate Knowles by the balls, and he’s too thick to come up with a plan of his own,” I spat back, because in all honesty, in case it wasn’t crystal clear, I bloody hated Mathers. The guy thought he was all that. I’d happily go toe-to-toe with him myself. In fact, standing here, I wasn’t entirely sure why I never had done before. I guessed the fragile peace we’d kept between Sandland and Brinton Manor had been reason enough to stay away. But not anymore.

Colton had his hands over his mouth, gasping and laughing like a buffoon as he watched the pantomime he’d loved at the start turn into a Shakespearean tragedy. Tyler and Will were glancing from each other to the crowds below, and I half expected them to start high-fiving each other. But Devon and I remained stoic, unreadable. We were in a room filled with Mathers’ supporters, and as much as we wanted to shit all over his defeat, we weren’t stupid.

“Time to call in all bets, lads,” I said, pushing myself away from the railing and turning to make my way down the metal staircase that was packed tight with pissed off punters, ready to go nuclear over the money they’d lost on their bets tonight.

Me?

I was fucking ecstatic.

“They’re carrying him out. Should we go and see Archer about our winnings?” Tyler asked as he took the steps behind me and peered over the head of the revellers to watch what was happening in the ring. That English football theme Mathers had cultivated was taking on a more eighties-hooligan feel to it now, with the thugs spitting venom from their red, angry faces.

“Archer can wait,” I told them. “I wanna wrap up the whole Knowles bullshit. He might be a cowardly fucker, but

the kid came through for us tonight. As much as I hate his crew, I'm gonna pretend to be human for a change. Show him he's off the hook." I saw their eyes go wide as I said that. Sarcasm obviously wasn't my strong point.

"Human? Are you kidding?" Colton just stared at me with his mouth open, catching flies.

"Of course I fucking am." I frowned and narrowed my eyes at them. "Let's go and watch their misery, twist the knife even more. Fuck being human. Compassion is highly overrated."

Colton laughed and nodded in agreement. Devon huffed his approval. And the other two? Their minds had already shifted to what was happening next and what it meant for us all.

The soldiers were on the up.

Nothing could stop us now.

We nudged our way through the surging crowds that were trying to storm the ring in protest and headed towards the back area where the other Sandland lads had scuttled off to hide. They really were like rats from a sinking ship.

Once we reached the corridor, we spotted Emily Winters storming out of a door, gripping her mobile phone and looking like she was about to throw up. Emily was Ryan Hardy's girlfriend, and where Ryan—the first golden boy of Sandland—was, we knew we'd find Mathers and Knowles.

We reached the door, and I felt a wave of serenity flow through me. A feeling that always came over me prior to a showdown. My body was fortifying its armour, ready to do battle, and my brain was flipping that switch. I was locked and loaded. A human missile launcher, primed and ready to attack. I flung the door open hard and smiled when it smacked against the plaster of the wall. I liked making an entrance, and judging from the startled looks on all their faces, I'd done just that.

We didn't wait for them to speak, just strode right on in, letting them know we weren't here to give Mathers our condolences. We meant business.

Considering Mathers had just been stretchered out of the ring, he looked pretty unaffected, cocky even, and although he was the star of the show, his changing room was a complete and utter shithole. It was more like a store cupboard with plastic chairs and a few bottles of water scattered on the dirty concrete floor. Cigarette smoke hung thick in the air, and I guessed he'd probably needed the nicotine to calm his frayed nerves after what'd happened to him. I kept my stare solely on Mathers, grinning at him and hoping he knew the hand I'd played in his sad little demise. If not, I was going to enjoy letting him in on that secret. When he launched himself out of the cheap plastic chair he was slumped in and flew towards me, I knew the cat was out of the bag. He knew what I'd done, so I'd have to get my kicks elsewhere.

"You're a fucking dead man," he snarled, pointing at me as his boys, Zak Atwood and Ryan Hardy, held him back.

I wish they hadn't. I would've liked to feel Mathers' fists on me. The adrenaline from that alone would've spurred me on. I'd have probably laughed at him too. Crazy motherfucker was the perfect match for me.

I kept my demonic stare on Mathers as I spoke. "We knew you'd come through for us." And then I slowly turned to face Finn Knowles, who stood to the side, quivering and looking like a rabbit caught in the headlights.

We hadn't collected our winnings from Archer yet, but that didn't matter. I wanted them to know that their loss was our gain tonight, and I took a stack of cash out of my pocket to wave it at them. The way their faces paled was fucking priceless, it gave me goosebumps, and I wished I could bottle the feeling of superiority that I experienced in that moment. We were unbeatable. "Your little stunt earned us a fuck load of money tonight," I added, as smugly as I could. "Thanks for that."

I noticed the tick in Brandon's neck as he tried to calm the inner beast that was begging to break free and rip us all apart.

"It wasn't a fucking stunt," he barked, like he had any authority in here. "You've been blackmailing him." He

gestured over to where Finn stood like a lost kid in a shopping mall and then swung his filthy gaze back to me. “And tonight, I put a stop to it. Do you hear me? This ends now.”

I couldn't help but laugh at the fake balls of steel he had on him. Here was a guy who'd just thrown a fight, damn well thrown his livelihood away too, and he thought he was in a position to make threats? To tell us what was going to happen? He didn't have a clue what he was dealing with. His naivety was so comical that I threw my head back and let it all out. I laughed so loudly it was catching, and my four soldiers howled along with me as the rest of the room stood staring at us like we were the fucking freaks.

“You should've made a few bets yourself. The odds on Hazel winning were ridiculous.” I smirked and looked over to where Ryan Hardy stood, grinding his teeth down to his gums.

“Is that what all this is about? Money?” Hardy spoke like he couldn't quite believe that men like us would be interested in something so basic. He needed to fucking wake up and smell the coffee. The whole bloody world revolved around money. Wasn't that what we all wanted on this god forsaken planet? Wasn't that what gave you the ultimate power? Without it, people like us were nothing. Nobodies.

I glared at Mathers, starting to lose my patience with this shitty showdown. They thought they were so much better than us.

“Isn't everything about money?” I said, stating the bloody obvious. “Don't pretend you're better than us. You get blood on your hands and get paid for it. The only difference is, we're smarter. We don't get our heads kicked in for a payday.” He knew I was right. Our way was the smarter way, the better way. They could take a leaf out of our book, if they had the balls to.

“No,” Mathers sneered. “You just do the kicking, you fucking psycho freak.” Mathers was losing it, and the fact he'd taken to weak shit like name-calling proved it.

He launched himself forward again, trying to force his way past his dumbass friends to get to me. I laughed back at him.

He probably thought a face-off like this would rile me up, but he'd be wrong, I wanted more. I wanted him so fired up, raging like a goddamn bull, that all the world couldn't hold him back, and then maybe, just maybe, I'd get what I wanted, a fair crack at taking him on in the way I'd always wanted to. I was hungrier for it than he would ever be, and what made me shiver with pride was knowing we were getting to him. I was calm, my head was clear. He was snorting and jumping around like an idiot. He was the only freak in here.

I stood tall, feeling superior to all of these fuckers as I stated, "I think you'll find we kept our end of the bargain. We are men of our word, after all." I made sure Mathers knew that the statement I'd just made was partly for his benefit, that we did have some honour, despite what he liked to think. Then slowly, for dramatic effect, I turned to face Finn Knowles and gave him a pointed, evil stare to let him know he was in on that statement too. He'd played our game of consequences, and now that he'd succeeded, the game was over. "Check your phone. I think you'll like what you find on there," I informed Knowles with pride. "We might be sadistic fuckers, but we step up when we're needed." That was what it meant to be a soldier of Brinton Manor. You step up and stand up. I swung my gaze back to Mathers, who was frothing at the mouth, and I smirked as I added, "Unlike some."

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?" the rabid boxer spat out with as much venom as a new born viper. He needed reminding that he was playing in the big leagues now. "Your word doesn't mean shit..."

Mathers started to spout more bullshit, but I just grinned at his ridiculous effort to look tough, and blanked him out. His fake display of power obviously went some way to help repair his ego that'd taken a battering out in the ring tonight, judging by the way he puffed his chest out and flexed his muscles. But when it came to strength, my brain outsmarted his every damn time.

"I did what you couldn't," I stated, growing tired of this back and forth. "I cleaned up your mess."

I knew it'd piss Mathers off even more, knowing that his best mate had had a problem and we sorted it out. We used our game of consequences to rid Finn of his sadistic uncle that'd plagued his life, but we'd got plenty out of it in return. An eye for an eye and all that. The truth hurts, and it was clear that it was stinging these motherfuckers like a bitch, because Knowles actually left his safe little corner and scuttled across the room to join his brothers standing in front of us. Seeing him raise his chin up with such defiance made something inside me snap, and I went over to stand right up in his face, ready to remind him who he really was. A coward and a puppet. A fucking good one at that.

"You think you're a big man now you've got these three next to you?" I narrowed my eyes at him, willing him to stand up to me. Grow a pair of balls and take us on.

"I'm not scared of you." He spoke the words, but his eyes didn't agree with what he was saying. He looked like he was about to shit his pants, and me being me, I couldn't help but tip him over the edge. I pressed my face further into his and I tilted my head like I was contemplating what fucked up way I was going to kill him, grinning from ear to ear to give that extra dose of psycho magic.

"Like I said before," I hissed. "You should be scared of me. In fact, you should be thanking me. After what your Uncle Fuckface spilled to us about you when we gutted him like a fish, you should thank your lucky stars we took care of him. Filth like him doesn't belong in Brinton." And we'd done our job. Now it was payday *and* payback. Plus, seeing the Renaissance men of Sandland die a death was the ultimate reward for all the years they'd shat on our town.

Ryan screwed his face up as he spat out, "But filth like you do?" I turned to glare at him. He needed to check himself. We might be motherfuckers, but we were motherfuckers with a code. We never hurt women or children. Not like the sewer rats we put down on a daily basis.

"We look after our own," Colton spoke up for all of us and put himself directly in front of Ryan, ready to get in the first hit. "You should take notes. You might learn something."

“We don’t need to learn shit from you,” Ryan spat back, looking Colton up and down like he was shit from the bottom of his overpriced trainers.

I’d have enough.

I was seconds away from either starting a fucking riot or opening the damn door and letting the angry punters outside do the job for me. These men were in no position to lord anything over us. They weren’t even our equals. Far from it.

“Just shut the fuck up and let us finish this,” I snarled over at Ryan. The demons were coming out to play, and I needed to reel them in for just a moment longer. So, I took a deep breath to calm myself down and let the voices in my head go from a rabid screech to a dull whisper. Then, once the control was back in place, I smiled with my eyes wide and a demonic, psychotic grin that I really didn’t need to make any effort with, it had always come naturally, especially in situations like this. I looked deep into Knowles’s eyes, feeding off his fear, and then I told him, “It’s over.”

His shoulders sank as if the weight of the world had been lifted from them and a silent but low breath left his body. A sign of pure relief on his part.

A better man would’ve left it at that. Given him the freedom he craved and walked away. But I wasn’t a good man.

“Just so you know,” I added, twisting that metaphorical knife one last time. “He was dead before we’d even sent you your first task to complete.”

I couldn’t help myself. I fed off his pain, knowing he’d played our games and lived with the threats from us when he didn’t need to. A sick fucking joke, but one that made me laugh. I loved it, the stab of that imaginary knife. An almighty twist for our pleasure.

“You fucking bastards.” Brandon tried once again to barrel into us, but his boys held him back, trying to calm the beast of Brandon.

“Yeah, Mathers. Pipe down. We did the job you couldn’t. Get over it. It’s done,” Colton said, smiling and folding his

arms to show he wasn't scared of Mathers or anyone else in here. He didn't need to stand to attention, ready for an attack, and the way he stood calmly, rocking back on his heels showed it.

I sighed. This party had been fun, but I was ready for it to be over. I'd had enough, and I wanted to head home on the off chance that my demons would allow me at least a couple of hours of sleep before they recommenced the war in my brain.

"Enjoy watching the video, Knowles. Colton gets a little carried away at the end, but I think that added to the overall effect. Who'd have thought a neck would spurt so much blood? I thought the films were exaggerating. Poetic justice for a man who brought so much pain to your life. Now you get to relive his agony over and over again." I was giving Mathers a run for his money in the dramatic, show-stopping, crowd-pleasing speeches tonight, and it made me smile.

But we were done here.

Time to move on.

These lads had served their purpose, and now we had bigger and better things to focus our attention on, like setting the wheels in motion to secure the building I'd chosen to open our first club.

"I think you've overstayed your welcome," Hardy had the balls to announce, trying to get the last word in. I didn't like that, so I folded my arms too and stood my ground.

Petty?

Maybe.

But I wasn't going to do anything they told me to do. I'd leave when I was good and ready and not before.

I heard the crack of the door behind us as it burst open, smacking into the plaster and damaging the wall in the exact same place that we'd damaged it earlier. Expecting the Sandland boys to have called in back-up, I braced myself, ready for an onslaught. What I wasn't prepared for was Ryan's missus, Emily, and some other girl to come bounding into the room like they were the cavalry. I gave an evil smirk as I

glared over at Emily, raking my eyes up and down her body to piss Ryan off. She didn't care though, she barely noticed me and barked something about Mathers needing to call his woman, something to do with pains and labour. To be honest, I'd switched off. This meeting was grating on me, and I wanted to leave, but not before taking a parting shot that'd seer its mark onto all of them.

Brandon Mathers growled something about needing to leave and then darted across the room, only backing up for a second to tell us, "This ain't over. I'm fucking coming for you." And then he was gone, and all eyes were on me as I drew mine up and down Emily Winter's tight little body.

Ryan went all caveman and pulled her closer to him, and I laughed. If I wanted to take his woman, I could. If I wanted anything, I'd get it. His show of dominance was pathetic. He had about as much power as a wet firework. Full of promise and anticipation and then nothing but disappointment when you tried to light the fuse. That was the problem with these so-called Renaissance men. Their women were their weakness. I filed that one away for the future and then, feeling bored out of my brains, I turned to leave.

And that's when I caught sight of a flash of red moving out of the corner of my eye.

I turned to where Knowles's little girlfriend stood, and something twisted in my chest.

That was new.

I didn't even know I had anything inside the empty cavity that I called a chest most of the time, let alone felt it do something like that.

Who the hell was the girl stood next to Finn Knowles girlfriend, with the long blonde hair and the tight red dress?

Chapter Three



I didn't want to lose my shit, didn't want to show that anything had affected my steel reinforced body armour. But fuck me, this girl was stunning. I'd never seen her before.

Why had I never seen her before?

I had no idea who she was, but I wanted to know. I wanted to know everything about her, and I had every intention of finding out. I found myself walking over to her, even though I had no recollection of telling my fucking legs to move. Was she some kind of siren? Because she was pulling me forward like a damn magnet, and that had never happened before, not with any girl. I didn't know what was going on, but either way, I wasn't fighting it. I didn't know how to. How the fuck was I supposed to control something I couldn't understand?

It fascinated me that a girl who'd never even spoken a word to me could make me feel this way, and I stared at her, lost to the hypnotic pull she had over me. Looking into her eyes, I felt a familiarity trickle through me, like I'd seen those eyes somewhere before. Then I felt a thump resonate through my whole body as I realised that her eyes were so familiar because they were like mine, full of defiance, challenging me, mocking me.

The way she put me on high alert, sparking every nerve to stand to attention, made me desperate for more. I wanted to get closer to her. Push her against the wall, bury my face into her neck and smell her, taste her, know what it felt like to be

buried deep inside of her. I couldn't care less that we were standing in this room full of sly fuckers. Since she'd appeared, they'd faded away. Funny, I'd thought my night was over, but it looked like the fun was just about to start.

I didn't stop to think about what I'd say, I had no time for pointless bullshit, so I said to her, "Come outside," making it crystal clear exactly what I wanted from her tonight. But she didn't react. Didn't even bother to look at me.

So, I moved a step closer to see what she'd do, test her resolve as I leant forward to smell her poker straight blonde hair. Would she gasp? Groan maybe? Would my being so close to her have the same effect on her body as it was having on mine? Did she feel like she'd been jolted to life by an electrical current to rival the strongest bolt of lightning?

The rest of the room was silent, and for all I cared, they'd left us alone and fucked off somewhere. It certainly felt like we were the only ones in the room. I closed my eyes for a split second to savour what the smell of her did to me. Sweet like cherries, or some shit that seemed to calm me down. I wanted this girl. I wanted her badly. But she wasn't responding. No sound. No moan. Not even a flinch or movement to pull away from me. She was tempting me, goading me into ripping myself open even more to get her to play nice, and that didn't sit right with me. I made the rules here. No one else.

"I said, outside. Now." My voice had become strained, and it made me grit my teeth at how weak and desperate I sounded in my own mind. This girl needed to comply really fucking quickly before I lost all reason and my kill switch took over.

Why wasn't she reacting?

Why was she just standing there like she'd been struck dumb?

I took a deep breath, ready to repeat myself, but I didn't need to. In that instance, she jerked away from me as if the lightning I was feeling had only just hit her, and in the delay, she was only now feeling the after-effects.

So I did affect her.

Nice to know.

But when I looked into her face, I didn't see wonder, or desire... Only disgust.

Her mouth twisted and her eyes pierced me as she spat back, "Like I'd go anywhere with you, you freak." She spoke with more venom than most men who'd crossed my path, and I fucking loved it. The hatred she painted on her beautiful face only made me want to piss her off even more. Fury had always looked attractive to me on women, but on this girl, it was pure fucking fire.

I smiled to myself as I thought about all the fun I was going to have taming this one.

Game on, princess. Fight me all you want. I love it. I love the chase, but you'll soon come to realise that I always win. It'll make things interesting to know you won't make it easy for me though. But when is anything worth having ever easy?

"Liv, don't," Finn's girlfriend whispered across to her in warning, and I frowned.

Liv.

It didn't suit her. I didn't like it. But in my mind, I played the name over and over again like a riddle I was trying to solve. Liv, Livy, Livia, Olivia.

Olivia.

Now, that I liked.

"Don't what?" Olivia laughed back, folding her arms over her chest, making her tits almost pop out of her dress. I had to stop myself from growling like a possessive caveman. "He's a fucking creep." She glared at me, and I glared right back. Seems I needed to teach this girl a lesson in manners.

"Liv," I said, but right away, I knew that name would never cross my lips again. She could be Liv to them, but she wasn't to me. My mind went into overdrive, playing out all the ways I could destroy their Liv. Make her crawl on her knees to me and then fuck that name right out of her. There'd be nothing left of their *Liv* once I'd finished with her. They all stood

there, gawping at us like a bunch of idiots, and I couldn't help but laugh. Olivia had been the only one in this room who'd genuinely stood up to me tonight. I was going to enjoy ruining her for any other guy.

"You're not fucking funny," she snarled at me. "I don't know why you're laughing."

I'm laughing because you have no idea who you're playing with, but I'll enjoy showing you.

I kept the wicked grin on my face and stared her down.

"I don't think you understood me," I stated with conviction, slowly folding my arms over my chest. I couldn't stop myself from huffing out a laugh when I noticed her split-second glance at the muscles in my arms before she looked away, blushing like she wasn't affected. This night had taken an interesting and unexpected turn, and I was here for it. I loved playing games, and she was the ultimate pawn. "It wasn't a question; it was a statement." I spoke calmly, even though my heart was racing and the tension inside me was reaching fever pitch. If I didn't get this girl alone soon to teach her a lesson, I was going to explode. "I want you to come—"

"I heard what you said and the answer's still no." She leant forward, putting her face so close to mine that I could taste the sweet cherry promise of her kiss. I had to stop myself from closing that last inch, wrapping my hand around the back of her neck and yanking her forward to take what I wanted. Not to mention, it made me as hard as hell to be on the receiving end of a move that was usually done by me. She was all up in my face, and it turned me the fuck on, having her mimic me like this, standing with her eyes glaring into mine. It made me realise that no one else was going to touch this girl. Not now. Not until I'd taken what I wanted.

She was mine.

"Do lines like that work on girls in Brinton? Because they don't with me, so jog on. Cunt."

Her response was straight from the Adam Noble line of comebacks. I wanted to respond that I didn't know or fucking

care if they worked on girls in Brinton, I'd never tried them, and I never would. Hell, I'd avoided most of the girls in our town for the sheer fact that they didn't spark an ounce of interest in me. But her? She made all sorts of emotions fire off inside of me, and the fact that she was trying to push me away, made it all the more interesting. Nobody had ever done what she was doing. She was making me feel. Granted, I felt pissed off as well as turned on right now, but it was a feeling all the same.

I hadn't realised I was in a daze until a snigger from across the room yanked me out of it. And so, I stepped back, trying to break the spell this girl had put me under and claw back some semblance of control. The last thing I'd ever want was to look like a pussy in front of anyone. I was nobody's fool.

Zak Atwood, one of the Sandland clowns, made a feeble attempt to look hard, puffing his chest out and telling me to, "Do one," because according to him, she wasn't interested.

He may as well have poked me with a sharp stick while he was at it to see how I'd react, because right at that moment, my fury couldn't burn any stronger. Who the fuck did he think he was getting into my business and laying down the law?

"Who asked you, Atwood?" I snapped, stalking across the two-metre distance like my life depended on it, totally focused on throat punching the fucker for even daring to breathe around me, let alone question me. "Are you growing some fucking balls there, huh?" I sneered at him, begging him to stand up to me so I'd have a legitimate reason to vent some of my anger.

I took deep breaths, envisioning pummelling his face into the concrete floor, but also mentally talking myself down and back into a calmer state of mind. He was playing a dangerous game, toying with a beast that had no off switch. My brain didn't work like theirs and he needed to remember that.

As if sensing the change in atmosphere, Ryan Hardy piped up again. "Just fuck off out of here."

I took a second to think about it, trying to decide if it was worth pushing it further with her, to see if she'd break. But she

wasn't a pushover, and I knew this wasn't going to be the last time I saw her. This was only the beginning. I'd just found myself a new plaything, a focus away from all the soldier shit we had going on and something to kill the noise that pierced through my skull every damn day. She was going to be my new distraction. Everyone needed something, right? Something to dull the ache. She'd be it for me. I was going to enjoy thinking up new ways to torment her. Tease her. Break her down until she realised that she had no choice. She was going to do what I wanted.

"You got what you came for, now fuck off," Hardy snapped, and I narrowed my eyes at him then glanced over at Olivia, who stood tall and proud with her chin up and her head held high.

"What I want just did a one-eighty. But she'll keep," I replied, and Olivia laughed. She fucking laughed at me. Jesus, this was going to be the most fun I'd had in ages. I grinned over at her as I gave my parting shot. "I'll be seeing you around... Olivia."

"Oh, fuck off," she spat back, but it was laced with something that made me ripple with excitement and laugh as I walked out of that room. It was laced with challenge.

Her game of consequences was just about to begin.

Tick tock, Olivia. Your time is up.

Chapter Four



Three Days Later

We stood in our usual spot underneath the underpass that led to the main street of Brinton Manor. It had always been our place because we could see anyone coming from both sides of town before they saw us. Also, there was the added bonus that it was undercover, so on those days when it was pouring down, we had somewhere to shelter. But most importantly, we felt like gatekeepers, guardians of the manor, protecting what was ours from whoever wanted to take a chance and come onto our territory.

But I'll be honest, it was a shithole. You wouldn't want to spend a night around here unless you had to. Most of the streetlights didn't work. The pavements were broken and cracked, as if hell was preparing itself to open up and swallow this town whole. What little shops were left open had metal bars fitted at the doors to protect the staff and their stock, anything to try and stop the thieving bastards from having a pop at what didn't belong to them. In reality, this wasn't a town, it was a jungle, and we were the hunters, praying on anything that moved.

For the kids who lived here, they didn't know any better, and the majority of adults had just plain given up on striving to make a better future for themselves, ground down by the realities of life. But not us. I'd worked hard to make sure that never happened. I was thankful that we'd finally secured the

means to purchase the lease on the building we'd be using to set up our business and create an empire we could be proud of. Our days of standing on street corners were coming to an end. We'd rule from a more advantageous throne from now on.

Sandland Asylum.

That thought made me bristle with pride. We were doing something no one else in Brinton had done. We were breaking the chains of hopelessness, crawling our way out of the misery that'd tied every other fucker in Brinton down. Don't get me wrong, Brinton Manor was in our blood, our bones, our very souls—that would never change—but it wasn't going to hold us back from achieving everything we wanted. In a twisted way, we loved this town, but we were destined for better things.

From where we stood, you could see the surrounding derelict buildings and high-rise blocks of flats with half the windows boarded up, looming over the town. Eyesores trapping you into this urban prison. The people that were housed there knew to stay quiet about whatever they saw going on down below. They weren't stupid. Some nights it got noisy, a little rowdy you might say, but they knew having us here was better than the alternative. Brinton without the soldiers' influence and protection didn't bear thinking about as far as they were concerned. We brought a form of peace to their otherwise chaotic lives. But the soldiers without Brinton? That was the start of a whole new era.

It was dark, cold, and the dim light from the one lone functioning streetlamp nearby was the only thing that could possibly give away our position here. I liked that we were shadows in the night; demons ready to strike. We heard the cackle of laughter a few feet away and looked up as a group of young mums scuttled across the street, pushing their prams. It was way too late for them to be out. Those kids needed their beds, but we didn't make a fuss. To each their own. That's how it was around here. What they did was none of our business.

I was scrolling through my phone, looking at the messages on our soldiers' email account, when I heard Tyler gasp. "No fucking way."

I yanked on my Rottweiler Tyson's lead, making sure he was ready, and I stood tall, turning around and keeping the hood of my jacket low to make sure whoever was coming would see the build of my body but not my face. Shoulders back, face covered, body tense and ready to strike. Someone had some fucking balls to come down here and start something tonight.

It was the sound of heels clacking against the pavement that I heard first, followed by a low whistle from Colton who stood a few feet ahead of me. When I stepped farther out to position myself under the streetlight and get a better look, I almost couldn't believe what I was seeing. Blonde hair tied back, and yet, it was swishing around her shoulders like she was on some shampoo commercial. Tight jeans, an even tighter little black top that didn't cover her stomach, and a face like thunder that made my dick stir and my heart twist.

It'd been three days since I'd first laid eyes on Olivia Cooper. Three days that she'd dominated every thought I'd had, both awake and asleep. Three days when all I'd done was think of ways to get to her. And now here she was, strolling right into Brinton like she owned the fucking place. Head high, shoulders back, confidence oozing from every one of her perfect pores. What the fuck was she thinking coming here? And alone too? The streets of Brinton Manor were no place for a girl like her.

"Well, well, well," Colton said in his sing-song voice. "If it isn't Sandland's very own Black Widow."

Olivia didn't break her stride, just sneered at him as she reached up to rub the pendant that hung around her neck and said, "I prefer Harley Quinn, but whatever floats your boat, soldier boy." And then she stopped right in front of me and glared. It was one of those *I-wish-you'd-drop-dead* stares, but it made me smirk. I loved that she had so much fight in her. She was stupid, coming here in the dead of night, and I would call her out on it, but damn, the girl had a fire inside her that drove me crazy.

"You shouldn't be here," I said, leaning down to look her in the eyes, but she wasn't nervous or unnerved by my actions.

She didn't even move a muscle, just shrugged and said, "I'll do whatever the fuck I want to do."

I grinned and shook my head. "A nice girl like you doesn't belong here." I gestured around me—with my arms—to the shithole we were currently stood in, like she needed reminding. Dorothy was a long way from Kansas now.

But she jabbed her finger forward into my chest and snarled, "I decide where I belong..." and then she backed up a step and smiled back at me. "And who said I'm a nice girl?"

The others gave low sniggers, and I did a shit job of hiding my own smile, shaking my head at her bare-faced cheek. "Its two o'clock in the morning... Olivia."

I leant forward again to say her name. I wanted her to know that despite what she said, I was the one calling the shots. I liked that she tried to stay on top though. I loved her argumentative side. It would certainly make things interesting when I eventually broke her.

I tried to keep eye contact, but I couldn't stop myself from glancing down, where a silver shell pendant hung between her perfect tits. When she reached for it again, I lifted my gaze to stare at her.

"Two a.m. is the perfect time to come outside and chase down the rats of the street. When else was I supposed to come and find you?" She crossed her arms over her chest, then lifted her hand up to bite down suggestively on her fingernail. She certainly had the Harley Quinn gestures down to a tee, which was something I approved of very much.

"*Rats?*" Colton piped up, holding his arms out in question. "We like to think of ourselves more as foxes, prowling the night, looking for our next feed. We're foxy." He nodded proudly to himself and looked to Tyler and Will for a reaction. Their grins seemed to satisfy him, but Devon and I were still focused on Olivia and why the hell she'd put her life in her hands to come here. I mean, it was making me feel all sorts of angry, confused, and aroused to have her stood in front of me, but still, if I had the choice, she'd be as far away from the streets of Brinton as I could get her. These streets weren't safe,

and I wanted her. She was mine. If someone else were to touch her before I did... That thought had me gritting my teeth and a fire raging inside of me.

“Whatever,” Olivia huffed. “Foxes are vermin too. You definitely fit that criteria.” Then she turned her attention back to me.

“You could’ve been hurt,” I said in a low, menacing tone, stepping into her space. “Anyone could’ve attacked you.”

“But they didn’t,” she hissed back, keeping her eyes fixed on mine. “I’m not a helpless little woman, you know.”

“Oh yeah?” Colton piped back up again. “Where’s your weapon? Because from the tightness of those jeans, I can’t see anything other than—”

“Shut your fucking mouth,” I snapped. I really didn’t want him to finish that sentence, for his sake. A soldier versus a soldier never had a good outcome. But if he carried on looking at her in that way, I would take him out, no questions asked.

“My weapon,” Olivia responded, twirling her hair around her finger. “If you must know is six inches of Louboutin.”

“Come again?” Colton answered, bending over and covering his mouth to stifle his laugh. “Who’s Lou Bootan? And why is his dick only six inches? That’s nothing to boast about, sweetheart.”

“She meant her heels, you idiot,” Devon spat back, probably giving the same eye roll that I was.

“Just cut the bullshit,” I said, addressing Colton and Olivia. “Tell me why you’re here. Did you miss me?” I gave her a wink and she groaned, giving her own eye roll.

“I came to tell you to back off. My friends mean more to me than any family, and you have fucking destroyed everything. You’re animals. They think I don’t know what’s going on, but I heard the video Finn listened to that you sent him. I know what you did. And the fire? What the fuck are you lot on? You’re sick. All of you. But I’m here to tell you, it stops. Now. Because if I find out you’ve done anything else to

hurt my friends, I will rip all of your balls off and feed them to your rabid dog.”

Colton leant down to cover Tyson’s ears, and joked, “Hey don’t listen to her.” Then he looked up at Olivia and said with a smirk, “Our boy isn’t rabid and he’s very sensitive.”

“Whatever. I haven’t worked so hard behind the scenes for you bunch of twat heads to come along and ruin everything.” Olivia stood defiant as she spoke, and Devon said what was on the tip of my tongue.

“What makes you think we’re still messing with your friends?”

I stared at her, studying her closely, and for the first time, I saw a chink in her armour. She faltered slightly and took a deep breath, rubbing the pendant around her neck before answering. “They’re hurting. They’re going through hell, and I blame you. I blame you for all of it. We know you started the fire at the plastics factory that night. Zak Atwood almost died because of you.”

“We didn’t start anything,” I snapped back angrily. “That’s not our M.O. We heard about the fire, but that wasn’t us. We don’t hurt innocent people.”

The fire at the plastics factory had been the talk of the town since it’d happened, but we couldn’t give a shit. That was Sandland’s problem, not ours. Whatever had happened there that night was on the Renaissance men’s heads. If they wanted to find out who was responsible, they needed to look a bit closer to home. But it wasn’t us. That wasn’t how we operated.

“You don’t hurt innocent people?” she scoffed, bypassing the fire issue. “What about Finn?”

“We might’ve done some shit for Knowles—” I said, but she cut me off.

“Did shit *to him* more like. He didn’t deserve that. None of them do.” She spoke with such compassion I almost felt sorry for Knowles and his situation. Almost. The kid had also got a

win out of us. We took care of his little problem... His sicko uncle.

Seems the Renaissance men really needed to start getting their shit together. Their crew were falling apart at the seams. Not that we cared.

“We told Knowles that it was over the night we came to see the fight. We said we’d back off and we have. If there’s other shit going on with your friends, it’s nothing to do with us. We meant what we said. We are men of our word,” I told her, keeping my own stance strong.

“You could’ve fooled me.” She huffed. “Just... back off. Leave them alone. Leave me alone. And if you ever tell anyone that I came here, well... Louboutin’s will be the least of your worries.”

“You mean, no one knows you came here?” I could feel the anger bubbling up inside me at that realisation. “Some fucking friends they are, letting you fight their battles.”

“They aren’t letting me fight their battles. They’d kill me if they even knew I’d come here. But then, they don’t know about half the stuff I’ve done over the years to help them. You see, unlike you, I don’t feel the need to shout about what I do. I don’t do anything for recognition or some ridiculous kudos. I’m not a scene stealer. I’m a fixer. Only, the things I fix, I keep on the down-low.”

She had me intrigued with that little speech. I couldn’t lie, I needed to know more.

“How so? How are you a fixer?”

“Not that it’s any of your business, but Emily and Ryan would’ve never gotten their act together if I hadn’t used what I know to get us into their parties. I even set up fake dates for Emily to make him jealous. As for Effy and Finn, I spent ages setting them up, making sure they’d bump into each other at the park or wherever the fuck they were. It was exhausting. And don’t even get me started on Brandon bloody Mathers. That man pushed me to my limits when it came to helping him out.” She gritted her teeth together then took a breath and

carried on. “Zak Atwood isn’t the only one who can use a computer in Sandland. I bloody wished I’d chosen a better username for the chatroom though. But I tell you one thing.” She jabbed her finger at me again. “I’ll be damned if I let all my hard work go to shit because of you five knob heads and some Lucifer-complex you’ve all got.”

I stood there, and for the first time ever, I was speechless. She was a fixer, so was I. I’d thought I found this girl beyond attractive before, but that had just skyrocketed to something way more dangerous. I felt like I’d found my fucking soulmate. Standing here and seeing her all fired up and angry, it was like looking in the mirror, seeing the other half of me. So instead of focusing on the way she was making me feel, or how totally amazing I thought it was that she’d come here to say all that, I went for the slightly less obvious avenue in my response.

“For fuck’s sake, Olivia. Has no one taught you anything? You don’t come out late at night on your own, especially not in a neighbourhood like this, and if you are out, you tell someone where you are.” I needed to start keeping very close tabs on her. This wasn’t going to happen again.

“Why do you care?” she replied, shaking her head and looking tired and ready to turn and walk away.

“He likes to protect what’s his,” Colton said without a hint of humour in his voice. He might be a joker, but he knew when to turn it off. He also knew that this wasn’t just any girl stood in front of us. She was something else entirely.

“I’m not his,” Olivia spoke softly, and it surprised me that she didn’t shout it with more venom. Everything else she’d said tonight had been delivered with maximum impact.

“You will be,” Colton whispered under his breath, but I’m not sure she heard him.

“Ugh. I’m done.” She sighed. “I’ve said my piece. Now maybe prove that you are *men of your word* and leave my friends alone. They’ve been through enough.”

She spun on her heels to leave, and I stepped forward to follow her, pulling Tyson along with me and growling at the others to stay put.

“What are you doing?” she said over her shoulder, scrunching her nose up in disgust at me as I fell in step behind her.

“I’m walking you home.”

“No, you’re not.” Her eyes went wide, but I just stared straight ahead and kept walking. This was one fight she wasn’t going to win.

“Okay,” I decided to compromise. “I’m following you home. But either way, you’re not going back on your own. Not at this time of night.”

“Do you think you’re some kind of gentleman?” I could hear the sneer in her voice, but it didn’t bother me. The sooner she found out who I was and what I stood for, the better for both of us.

“Nope. Not a gentleman. Never claimed to be and never will. But I refuse to let you walk away from me into the dark and whatever’s lurking out here at this hour.”

“You’d know all about what’s lurking,” she whispered.

“If you got to know me, you might like what you find.” I knew that’d push one of her buttons. Thing was, I liked pushing her buttons.

“I highly doubt that.” She laughed to herself. “There’s algae in our pond that holds more attraction than you do.”

I let her ramble on about all the ways she could think of to describe how much she despised me, and all the while I couldn’t keep my eyes off her ridiculous heels that were way too high for walking these uneven streets, but fuck did they make her legs look incredible. And don’t even get me started on her tight ass in those jeans, and how much I wanted to throw her over my shoulder, smack that ass and then bite it to shut her up. Then there was her hair. The perfect blonde ponytail swishing in the wind, begging to be grabbed and have me wrap my fist around it as I showed her exactly what it

meant to be owned by a soldier. Which she was. She could argue all she wanted, but I was marking this girl as mine. I wanted her. And I'd make damn sure no one else had her.

“Why didn't you drive?” I questioned her.

“Why don't you mind your goddamn business?” she snapped back, and I laughed. Sparring with Olivia was opening up new avenues of fun for me. I'd always thought violence was the only thrill I had. Now I had another one to add to the very short list of positives in my life.

“See, Ty,” I said, tugging on Tyson's lead. “This is what a real woman looks like. Take a good look, boy. You need to protect this one for me.”

“I feel sorry for the dog.” She turned to look at Tyson and then gave me another one of her glares before turning back to face the way she was walking. “It must be hard work being dragged around with you losers all night. I should call animal protection. Mind you, they might get confused about which animals to take into custody.” She laughed, thinking she was funny.

“One night, I might show you how much of an animal I really am,” I growled back and that seemed to shut her up for a few minutes.

We walked through the deserted streets of Brinton, right into Sandland, and then I kept pace with her as the condition of the pavements improved, and small townhouses turned into neat little box-like homes with immaculate gardens. Eventually, we made it to the richer side of her town, where the homes were either hidden behind gates or set so far back from the road it was like they were trying to distance themselves from the filth of the streets in front of them.

Olivia stopped outside a huge white house with pillars outside and enough green space that it'd take Tyson a year to piss over it all and mark his territory.

“You can go now. I'm home.” She turned and faced me, folding her arms over her chest as she did and tapping her foot on the floor.

“I’ll go when I see you walk through that door and not before,” I answered back.

She took a few steps towards me, then bent down and started to pet Tyson, scratching his head with her nails and making him whine in appreciation. He didn’t like many people, but he’d certainly taken a shining to her.

“He likes you.” I smiled down at her, feeling a strange warm sensation spread through me from watching her fuss over my dog.

“He’s gorgeous,” she replied. “I guess you have one thing going for you. Your dog is cute.”

Cute? Tyson had been called many things. But cute? My gnarly Rottweiler? I loved him but he wasn’t cute. Maybe there was hope for me after all, if that was what she found attractive. And suddenly, I desperately wanted to know what she found attractive. I wanted to know everything. I had to know.

“I would say I’ll see you around, but I really hope I don’t.” She kissed Tyson on the head then stood up and walked off towards her front door without giving me a backwards glance.

“Oh, you’ll be seeing me, Olivia,” I said to nothing but the air around me. “You can count on that.”

Three days ago, I met a girl I thought would be a welcome distraction from life. I knew she’d be a challenge. But now, I felt like I’d just been run over by a ten-tonne truck. She wasn’t a distraction, and to call her one was an insult. She was everything, and she would be my everything, whether she liked it or not. My interest in Olivia Cooper had just moved to a whole other level. She was my new obsession. She was mine, and I couldn’t wait to claim her.

Chapter Five



Three Months Later

I stood on the corner of the street, right opposite the crowded bar where she'd chosen to spend her night. She couldn't see me. No one could. I had my hood down and I'd become pretty good at blending into the background. Saturday night partygoers were streaming past me, laughing as they headed to the next bar, but no one gave me a second glance. To be a vigilante soldier, you had to learn to hide in plain sight, and I was the best.

I watched as she threw her head back and laughed at something one of her friends said. I loved watching her being so carefree, not knowing whether I was following her tonight. She sipped her drink and looked around the bar, and that was when I noticed a shift in her demeanour. There was an air of apprehension about the way she held herself. In all the months that I'd been following Olivia Cooper, I'd come to know some of her signature traits, and right now, she wasn't comfortable. I saw it in the way she played with her hair, like she was nervous and needed something to do with her hands. The way she sipped her drink too often as a distraction from her racing thoughts. How her body stiffened, and one leg slid forward as she dropped her hip to the side, making her look like she was at ease, but she was anything but.

Was she looking for me?

Could she sense that I was here, watching?

Was I the one making her nervous?

It had been three months since our first encounter at the Mathers fight. Three months since her game of consequences had begun, and the more I'd shadowed her, the further she'd crawled under my skin. I didn't just like her, it went way beyond that. I was fascinated, intrigued, beguiled. In short, I was fucking obsessed with her. Even on the rare occasion when we were doing a job and I needed to be focused and channel my inner demons, it didn't take long for all my thoughts to return to her. I had to know where she was twenty-four-seven, what she was doing and who she was with. Not knowing wasn't an option. I didn't care what that looked like to the outside world. I'd never given a fuck about anyone else's feelings anyway, but with her, she came above all else, even myself.

I took my phone out of my pocket and typed out a text. I wanted her to know she wasn't alone. Give her the reassurance that I was here if anything happened. But most of all, I needed her to understand that, as always, there were consequences to her actions. Consequences that were controlled by me. There'd better not be any trouble tonight, because I was in the mood to fuck shit up if some chancer tried his luck with her.

Me: Where are you?

As soon as I'd pressed send, she looked down at her own mobile and her forehead wrinkled in thought as she began to type back.

Olivia: Why are you asking? You're probably here too, you fucking psycho stalker.

She knew me so well, and it made me smile that she still had that fire inside her. After all this time trailing her, studying her, I wanted to know exactly what made her tick. But she hadn't done what most girls would've. She never went to the police or blocked my calls. No. She enjoyed the chase as much as I did. She loved to goad me, and she always replied to my messages right away. She surprised me every day and no one had ever done that.

Me: What are you wearing?

I messaged back, toying with her some more.

The way she grinned, I could tell she'd just huffed out a laugh, and she put her drink down to give me her full attention, tapping away on her screen like she was composing a best-selling, novel-worthy response back to me.

Olivia: Again, why are you asking me that when you're probably looking at me right now? I would call you a creep but coward fits better. You prefer to hide in the shadows and torment me rather than face me and get shot down in real life. But then, I guess rejection is hard for some guys to take. Especially when they have no balls and a tiny dick.

She was trying to piss me off, but it didn't work. We both knew she'd never reject me when the time came. She was strong, but she wasn't that strong.

Me: Maybe I prefer to watch.

I knew her well enough to know that she'd like that response. My girl was a bad girl, that much I was sure of. She'd grown to like that I watched too, that's why she'd started leaving her bedroom curtains open at night. I wasn't stupid. I was also fucking grateful. It'd certainly made things a hell of a lot more interesting lately.

Olivia: Let's cut the crap. I know it's you... Adam. Stop following me. Stop texting me. Get a fucking life, you bloody psycho.

And here was the thing. She did know it was me, but on the rare occasion, like tonight—that she acknowledged that—it kind of spoiled the fun. I preferred to be her shadow. Elusive. No identity. A fantasy. I liked it when we messaged as if we were strangers.

I stared at my phone for a few seconds, wondering whether to reply, but I gave up. She wasn't playing ball tonight and when she was in one of those moods, it wasn't as much fun. So, I shut my phone off, put it back into the pocket of my jeans and I crossed my arms over my chest, waiting. Waiting and watching. I didn't know what my next move would be and that's what made this so interesting. I let her set the pace. I

took my cues from her, and whatever tonight was going to bring, it was all down to what would happen in that bar.

After finding out I was here, would she push me further and talk to another guy? For his sake, I fucking hoped not. But Olivia was no fool. She knew exactly what I was capable of. So, when I saw her leave and get into an Uber only moments later, it didn't surprise me.

Wise move, princess.

I grabbed my phone again and opened the tracker app to make sure she was indeed making wise choices and not heading to another bar to try and shake me off. My boys could be very resourceful when they needed to be and setting up a tracker on Olivia's phone had been one of those ways. I kept the app open but pocketed my phone, then I pulled my hood off, pushed my helmet over my head and straddled my bike. It roared to life underneath me, and I pulled into the traffic and headed in the direction of her house. I didn't even trust the Uber at this point. I was taking no chances with her safety.

When I stopped at a red light, I took my phone out to check her position, and I smiled when I saw that she was heading home for the night. That little red dot that was moving through the streets of Sandland, close to where she lived, made me feel slightly less tense. I wouldn't be happy though, not until I'd seen her safely home, and with my own eyes, not through a screen.

Once I made it to her house, where the little red dot from the app had since stopped moving, I parked around the back of the property and shut my engine off. I kicked out the stand with my foot, hung my helmet off the handlebar, and left my bike in a secluded path—away from prying eyes. I put my hood up, just in case the CCTV caught me, and I jumped onto the wall and put my leg across to scale the fence at the back of her house.

I landed in my usual spot where the soil was soft and the fir trees kept my presence well hidden. Stepping carefully, I walked the side of the property until I could get a clear view of her house, and that's when I saw the gentle glow from her

bedroom. She was sitting in front of her mirror, taking her make up off, and she looked truly stunning. I stood watching her, feeling a calm wash over me that I'd rarely felt before I met her. She was safe, and yet I wanted to crawl out from the shadows and take her. Dirty her up and make her mine. She was the light to my dark. The angel to my devil. But she was my special angel, one that talked back and had attitude by the bucket load. An angel made just for me.

She stood up and walked over to her window, gazing out at the garden below, and I saw what I thought was a gentle smile creep across her face. But then she turned her back on me and within a few seconds, the lights went off and darkness was all I could see.

I pulled my phone out of my pocket and stood back into the undergrowth, so the light from my screen would remain undetected.

**Me: Good girl. You did the right thing. Sweet dreams,
Olivia.**

Those dots to show she was responding started to dance around on my screen and I laughed out loud when I read her reply.

Olivia: Kiss my ass, you fucking freak.

My business for the night had just taken a turn. Playtime with Olivia was over, for now, and I pushed myself off the outer fence that I was leaning up against to head back to my bike and then to the place we all now called home.

Sandland Asylum.

To most people, the idea of living in an old asylum would probably seem fucked up, but not to us. I'd had my eye on it ever since it'd come onto the market a few months ago, and when we got the necessary cash together to make an offer, along with the backing of some silent partners, we made our move. Now, the Sandland Asylum was ours, and despite it being outside Brinton Manor, we didn't care. Brinton would always come first, and any locals who wanted to experience what we were building there were more than welcome through

our doors. You see, we didn't just live in the asylum, we were creating a business to rival the shitty little events Sandland's Renaissance men put on. What had previously been known as Sandland Asylum had been renamed The Sanctuary, and we were hosting club nights unlike anything these towns had ever seen before. We were making a killing in more ways than one.

I drove through the dark streets of Sandland, weaving through the traffic as if I were in a video game. I loved this bike, and the fact that I could get where I wanted without the bullshit of waiting for other road users to get the fuck out of my way was an added bonus. I didn't like to waste time. Plus, the roar of the engine and the buzz it gave me, along with my uncontrollable thoughts of Olivia, helped to dull the voices that'd plagued my life. Not eradicate exactly, but dull was better than what I'd lived with before.

When I rounded the corner into the road where the asylum was, I could see the crowds already lined up out the front of our gothic, dark, and eerie haven, ready for a night they would never forget. I swerved the bike around, deciding to bypass the front doors, and instead, I opted for the side entrance, our private entrance. A way to avoid any unwanted attention. I parked up and then fished my keys from my pocket, and when I looked up, I saw Devon standing in the doorway having a cigarette.

"Good night?" I asked, nodding behind him towards the sounds of revellers lost to the music and other... pursuits we had on offer.

"There's a decent crowd," he replied on a shrug, looking over his shoulder. "But it'll be a damn sight better once the chapel is up and running."

We were still in the process of getting the Asylum chapel into a workable state for what we wanted to use it for. When we'd drafted in some builders we knew, they'd told us that the structure wasn't stable. Add in the fact that the local church diocese were riding our asses about it being sacred land and hitting us with a shitload of petitions and bullshit we couldn't be bothered with, we'd put the work on hold. Besides, we had plenty of other rooms we could use for the guests. The way I

saw it, the chapel was special, but it wasn't that special. Unfortunately, Devon didn't share my sentiment and it'd become his personal crusade to try and outwit the church as best he could. A fight against good versus evil, you might say, but which side was truly evil? Only time would tell.

I stood next to Devon and took a deep breath in, savouring the cool night air. We'd really landed on our feet since the Brandon Mathers' fight night and securing the lease on this place. The Asylum was a rabbit warren of wonder. A real devil's playground. A darkness full of delights for the heathens of a forgotten generation.

We used the open-plan ground floor for partying, music, and dancing. The kind of stuff we weren't afraid of the police seeing, if they ever dared to show their faces. The next floor was for more acquired tastes, catering to the hardcore members of The Sanctuary, who came to our nights to get something they couldn't get anywhere else. Each room held something unique, an experience tailored for any and all needs. We'd promoted Gaz—our clean-up guy—to security, and he spent most of his time making sure the ground floor didn't mix with the first. Not unless they had an invitation, that is. What happened on the first floor stayed on the first floor.

Then there was the top floor. That was our living quarters. To be fair, what went on there wasn't much different to the first floor, but it was ours. Our own sanctuary, and very few people got invited up there. If they did, they didn't stay for very long. They'd know when they'd overstayed their welcome.

“You're back early,” Devon said, narrowing his eyes at me as if he was waiting for me to give him a reason why while he sucked on the dregs of his cigarette, then threw it down and ground it out with his foot.

“Let's just say the avenue I was wandering down was a dead end... for now.”

Devon smiled to himself and nodded like he had a clue what I was on about. Then he put his fingers into his mouth and whistled over the beat of the music coming from inside.

“Tyson, get over here,” he shouted, and our trusty Rottweiler came bounding over from the dark corner he’d been hiding in.

He ran straight to me, and I petted him, roughly stroking his head the way he liked. Devon pulled his lead out from his back pocket and secured it to his collar. We wouldn’t normally bother with stuff like that, but leading him through the club with all the people and noise, it was better to have him leashed. He was an honorary soldier after all, and if anyone stepped a foot out of line, looked at him the wrong way, or he just didn’t like them, they’d know about it.

“It’s time for you to go down for the night, mate.” Devon pulled on his lead and Tyson followed him but stayed close to me as best he could.

We kept his bed in our games room, but sometimes, I let him sleep in with me. Having him there helped me to get a better night’s rest. I guess it was the company that settled my raging mind. Although Tyson was our pet, he felt like mine. I was the one who found him as a puppy, abandoned under a bridge near the canal. We figured his siblings had probably been drowned, but somehow, Tyson had escaped and survived. He was a fighter, just like we were. That’s why we called him Tyson. And like us, he’d been left to fend for himself. So, I took him, trained him, nurtured him, and now, he was the most loyal and trustworthy friend I had, next to my brothers of course.

“He can come to my room tonight,” I said, scratching his head again as we walked into the main club area. “You’re gonna come and guard the top floor with me, aren’t you, Ty?” Devon smirked and passed the lead over to me.

“I’ll leave him with you then,” he shouted over the noise of the music. “I have some... business to take care of.”

I didn’t bother asking Devon what his business was. One, it probably involved a woman, and two, it was none of my fucking business anyway what he got up to. I really didn’t want to know.

I led Tyson through the crowds of people that were packed into our dance area. Some girls went to touch him as we walked past, putting their hands down to skim his head and coo over what they thought was a sweet dog being led through a club. But one glare from me and then a look at Tyson with his fangs snarling at them and they soon changed their minds. Tyson wasn't a dog you messed about with, much like his owners. He didn't trust strangers and he wouldn't let just anyone pet him.

When we got to the main stairs, Tyson bounded on ahead, yanking on the leash, eager to get to where he wanted to go. I saw Gaz loitering around the top of the stairs, and he gave me a nod in recognition.

“It's a wild one tonight.” He chuckled over the music, and the glint in his eyes told me he probably wanted to clock off and join in. But I just shrugged. I couldn't give a fuck whether it was wild or whether there were a bevy of nuns sat round drinking tea and doing crochet, as long as the money kept rolling in.

I pushed my way past him, not even stopping to give him a reply, and made my way up to the second floor, our floor. There was a reason I left the first floor fuckery to Will, Colton, and Tyler. It was their baby, and it held zero interest for me right now. The only thing I was interested in, apart from violence and threats, was lying in a pretty pink bed somewhere in Sandland, hopefully thinking about me too. Maybe one day, I'd have use for the first floor, but if I did, it'd be with her. No one else.

The rooms there could be booked out for couples. There were themed rooms too. The lads loved the communal rooms, but their absolute favourite was the dark room. That was an idea they'd had well before we even opened up the club. Going into the dark room meant giving up total control to whoever was assigned to join you there, although we insisted on signed waivers before they even entered and guests who used it had to have all manner of checks before they were allowed to reach that level of membership to The Sanctuary. To give the boys their dues, they'd done an amazing job. I'd

seen what they'd created, but it wasn't something I partook in, and I definitely wasn't in the mood to hear about it tonight.

Once I climbed the last few steps to our floor, I let Tyson off his lead and instantly he bounded down to where my room was, sitting outside the door, waiting for me to open it. I had the largest room at the front of the building. Years ago, this would probably have been the staffroom, but now, it was all mine.

I unlocked the door and flicked on the lights. Tyson plodded in slowly, making his way over to his bed in the corner to lay down and settle himself in for the night. I locked the door behind me then threw my keys down onto the table by the door. My room didn't have much. A large king-size bed sat at the far side, dominating the room, but it only had basic white sheets on it. I didn't go for all the fancy shit that Colton liked to have on his. There were tables either side of it and a rug in the middle of the wooden floor that Tyson had started shredding. I couldn't give a fuck. Who else was going to see it?

Keeping with the minimalist, couldn't-give-a-shit theme, I kept my clothes on a rail at the far side of the room, right by the door that led to my bathroom. The noise from the club was only a distant buzz up here, but once I put some music on or turned on the T.V—which was the only thing I had on my wall—you could drown out the sound pretty easily. This was my space, and nobody—apart from the soldiers—had ever stepped foot in here.

I kicked off my Nikes and lay back on the bed, staring up at the ceiling. Tonight had been a total washout and I didn't feel like I'd gotten my full fix of Olivia. Perhaps coming straight home had been the wrong choice. Maybe I should have taken the opportunity to go that little bit further tonight and gone into her house. But sometimes, I couldn't think straight where she was concerned. My head was a fucking nightmare at the best of times, but when it came to Olivia, I couldn't even second guess myself.

I took my mobile out and fired off another message, hoping she wouldn't keep me hanging until morning if she'd

fallen asleep.

Me: Are you ready to play? Your game of consequences hasn't finished tonight, Olivia.

I hit the send button and held the phone up, staring at the screen to see if she'd reply. And then my heart threatened to jump out of my chest as I saw those three dots dance around in front of me. She never let me down.

Olivia: Unless it involves sleep, I'm not interested. Fuck off. Don't you think you've ruined enough of my night?

Now that was just an invitation to think of new methods to worm my way under her skin.

Me: How have I ruined your night? Talking to me must be the highlight of your whole fucking day.

She sent me an emoji of two fingers pinching together and then...

Olivia: I'm this close to blocking your ass, Noble.

It was a weak come back. There was no way she could ever block me out. If I wanted to be heard, I would.

Me: Try it. See what happens.

I smiled to myself, knowing she'd be rolling her eyes and agreeing with me. It was fucking pointless.

Olivia: I know exactly what'll happen. You'll find some other way to stalk me.

Stalk, admire... It was all one and the same.

Me: You're learning fast. Now. Task. Are you ready for it?

I wouldn't give her anything too taxing this late at night. Just enough to let her know I was in control.

Olivia: Ugh! Out of sheer boredom and curiosity, I'll bite. What do you want?

That was more like it.

Me: I want you to send me a photo.

I knew she'd come back with a 'fuck off' and I was right.

Olivia: Fuck off. I'm not sending you nudes.

Did she really think I was that predictable?

Me: Did I say that was what I wanted?

Yeah, I wanted to see her, but not through a photo. When that happened, I wanted the real thing.

Olivia: You're a guy. A pretty fucking messed up one at that. Of course that's what you want.

She still had a lot to learn about me.

Me: I wouldn't say no, but that's not the task. I want you to send me a photo of something that means something to you.

I thought I was being pretty poetic, cryptic even, asking her to think about all the things she cared about in her world. I wanted to gain insight into what made her tick. Maybe it'd be a photo of her family, or her friends, or that necklace she always wore with the shell on it. What I got moments later had me choking on my can of Coke.

Olivia: Here's Ronaldo, or Ronnie for short. I call him that 'cos he hits the spot every time.

She'd sent me a picture of a huge fucking black vibrator, and it pissed me right off.

Me: Do you think you're funny?

I replied, stabbing the letters out on my screen as I tried not to throw my phone against the wall. How could this girl make me go from horny to fucking fuming within seconds? No one got to me like she did.

Olivia: I'm fucking hysterical. And yes, this does mean something to me. It gets me off but doesn't make me feel like shit in the morning. Ronnie would never cheat on me, and he doesn't bring a shitload of baggage with him. Now, are we finished here? Because Ronnie and I were busy before you so rudely interrupted us.

Fuck me. She was actually using that damn thing when I texted her? And now, I was back to being horny, what with her

leaving me with that mental image to go to bed with. Well, let's be honest, sleep was the last thing I was going to be doing once this conversation ended.

Me: I wanna watch.

Again, I knew what her answer would be, but I couldn't help myself. I was a red-blooded male, after all.

Olivia: I bet you do. But tough shit, I'm drawing my curtains and having some 'me time.' Get your kicks elsewhere, psycho.

Did she think I was outside? If I was honest with myself, I wished I was, because one thing was certain, I wouldn't stand there in the dark and just watch. I was all for audience participation.

Me: You know, the sooner you realise that this is going to happen, the better it'll be for everyone. And just so you know, Ronnie might hit the spot, but I'll fucking annihilate it.

Olivia: Promises, promises.

Not a promise. A fact.

Me: I have one more request.

I asked, not giving two fucks that I was pushing my luck. She'd already given me enough to keep me going tonight.

Olivia: And I'm getting tired of your shit.

She replied with all the sass I'd come to expect from her.

Me: I want a photo. Of you. Of your face.

The response didn't come through right away. Part of me assumed that she'd thrown her phone somewhere and wasn't going to engage anymore tonight. But then she popped up on my screen and that's when I lost my shit.

She'd sent a photograph of her face, but her eyes were closed, her mouth slightly open and the look of lust, like she was right on the edge, made my dick strain hard in my jeans.

I didn't know what to write back. I couldn't take my eyes off her or bring myself back down from whatever orbit her face had sent me into.

Olivia: Now fuck off and leave me in peace.

She eventually replied.

Me: Think of me.

I typed back, feeling like a fucking teenage dirt-bag loser. She'd better fucking think of me, because if I found out there was anyone else...

Olivia: Never.

She replied, and I smiled. She was a shit liar. But I knew one thing, I'd be thinking of her when I jerked off tonight.

I sat for a moment, staring at the ceiling, but thoughts of her wouldn't leave my mind. They never did. So, I did the only thing any man could in my position... I got up and headed for the shower, my phone in hand, ready to make use of what she'd sent me.

I reached my arm through the shower curtain to turn the water on and let it run until it was the right temperature. Old buildings like this didn't have the best plumbing and it took some time for the hot water to make its way up here. While waiting, I pulled my T-shirt over my head and threw it into the laundry basket in the corner. Then I popped the buttons on my jeans and pulled them down, kicking them off my legs and then standing before my mirror in just my boxers. I lifted my phone up from the counter I'd left it on and clicked back onto her picture that I'd saved in my camera reel. Fuck me, the photo did things to me that I didn't think were possible. My dick was rock hard in my boxers, so I peeled them down and then, committing her face to my memory, I left my phone on the side and stepped into the shower.

The steaming hot water was beating down on my skin, but all I could focus on was her. I put one hand on the ceramic tiles and leant forward, dropping my head down and closing my eyes. With my other hand, I fisted my cock and clenched

my jaw as I began stroking myself and thinking about her, thinking about all the things I wanted to do to her.

I'd have her in front of me, standing in the shower in just her underwear, and she'd let me unclip her bra and drop it to the floor as I kissed her, trailing my lips down to her neck and then taking each of her perfect pink little nipples into my mouth to suck. I'd lick her and bite her until she moaned and grabbed my hair, running her nails over my scalp, and then I'd get on my knees. She'd be the only girl that I'd ever get on my knees for. I'd bite and suck her through her knickers, teasing her until she couldn't stand it any longer and she'd beg. She would plead for me to use my mouth to give her what she wanted. I'd peel her knickers down her legs, oh-so-slowly, tantalising and teasing her until she couldn't stand it anymore and she'd want me. She'd want me where she needed me to take care of her, to soothe the ache between her legs in a way that only I could.

I started to pump my fist harder as I imagined leaning forward, putting my tongue on her clit, licking and sucking her into a frenzy that'd make her hitch her leg up over my shoulder and ride my face. She'd grab me, force my head forward, begging for more, and I'd show her how well I could take care of her with my mouth. Then she'd shudder and cry out my name as she came on my tongue. In that moment, I couldn't stop myself from groaning, imagining how good she'd taste and how fucking turned on she always made me.

I closed my eyes, feeling the sensation building, my balls tightening as I imagined standing up, holding her quivering body, and then spinning her around and telling her to hold on tight as I bent her forward, both of her tiny hands splayed on the tiles as she opened herself up to me. I'd watch as my cock slid into her tight pussy and we'd both moan and cry out at how good it'd feel. I'd fuck her hard and fast, holding her hips to keep her steady as our bodies slapped together under the stream of water.

I bit my lip as every emotion inside of me broke free, and I growled as I came in hot, thick spurts in my shower, wishing that every drop was inside of her. My breath was laboured, and

I hung my head, gasping, trying to get back some semblance of control. I didn't know how much longer I could go on just imagining but never actually tasting. Dreaming without feeling what I desperately wanted to feel.

Her.

With me.

Time was ticking and my resolve was dwindling fast. I needed to up my game where Olivia Cooper was concerned, because if I didn't have her soon, I was going to fucking explode.

Chapter Six



“**L**ast night was mental.” Colton sat back in one of the gamer’s chairs in our living area as he kept his focus solely on the T.V. playing against Will on the X-Box, but his comment was directed at me as I strolled through the door to join them all the following morning. “You should’ve stayed and joined in, Ad. You never know, the dark room might be your thing after all.”

They’d all used the dark room, but I never had. I got my kicks elsewhere, usually from a certain blonde who liked to tease me at every opportunity. Tease me and drive me crazy.

“I think I’ll leave that pleasure to you... for now.” I smirked, because never say never, right?

Will chuckled to himself and Colton gave his own sneer as he blew up some shit on the game he was playing and then told Will to suck a dick. Tyler was sat in the corner, tapping away on his phone, and Devon came in carrying Tyson’s bowl, with Tyson padding along not far behind him.

“Might wanna check out the soldiers email account,” Tyler suddenly announced, frowning down at his phone. “Seems we have a new target.”

“Good.” I smiled back, feeling that surge of adrenaline at the thought of taking on a new ‘client.’ “It’s been quiet since Harvey. I hope it’s a juicy one. We could do with some fresh meat. Keep us focused and on our toes.”

Colton huffed, like he didn't like my insinuation that some of us were getting too comfortable, and dare I say it, lazy. But the truth was, since opening the club, the soldier work had started to dry up. I didn't like it. That was the job I loved the most and I needed those hits to remind me that I was still alive. That I had a fucking purpose.

"Let's hope it is a good one. Maybe Father Johnson has been caught doing something he shouldn't have, and we can kill two birds with one stone," Devon said, and he meant it.

Father Johnson was the main guy behind all the petitions and other crap being thrown our way about our use of the Asylum Chapel. We'd deal with him eventually, but for now, we were leaving that bombshell to tick away in the background. We had enough rooms to keep our punters happy. But when we wanted to use the chapel, we would, and the bloody church diocese could do one. We bowed down to nobody.

"No such luck," Tyler responded, shooting Devon's dreams down, or rather, putting them on ice for the time being. "But I think we're gonna enjoy this one."

I sat myself down on one of the empty sofa chairs and pulled my phone out of the front pocket of my jeans. I tapped the screen and pulled up the email account we'd opened especially for jobs like this. Most people in Brinton knew, if they needed help from the soldiers of anarchy, they could hit us up on there and we would get shit done.

The email had been sent from a guy called Michael Felton, and when I read through the message he'd sent, it became pretty clear that he was a father, just not the kind that Devon was hoping for.

To: soldiersofanarchy@gmail.com

From: MichaelFelton@express.com

Message: We need your help.

I've never written to you before, and if I'm being totally honest with myself, I still don't know if I'm doing the right thing, but my family can't go on like this, and as a husband and father, I need to do something to stop it.

Three years ago, my fourteen-year-old daughter was raped on her way home from school. It hurts me to type out that sentence, but you need to know exactly what you're dealing with. The individual who committed the act was found, arrested, and put away, but it wasn't for long enough. Life wouldn't be enough for that disgusting piece of shit. He destroyed my daughter's life. She can't go out on her own, still has flashbacks and nightmares. She struggles to form any kind of relationships, and this affects us all.

We lost our baby that afternoon. He took everything from us, and when he went down, we thought that would help. That my little girl could take the time to heal, get counselling, and find some peace after living through such a harrowing ordeal. I can't even bear to imagine it.

But no.

He still taunted us from inside prison. He managed to get hold of a mobile phone and sent us sick text messages telling us what he was going to do once he got out. When we blocked his number, or changed ours, he still found us. There were emails too. We told the police, but they did nothing. It would go quiet for a week or two, but then it'd start back up again. He ruined my daughter's life, but he couldn't let go. He wanted to destroy us all.

So, you can imagine how we all felt when we found out that he's being released soon. My whole family is petrified. My daughter has gone back in her healing and it's like she's reliving the trauma all over again. I want to walk up to that prison myself and put a bullet in his head, but I have two other daughters and a wife to think about. Plus, I'm not getting any younger. A

friend told me that this was something you could help me with, no questions asked.

I'm willing to pay whatever it takes to have this individual taken off the streets of Brinton and sent to the hell that he deserves. All I ask is that it is done as swiftly as possible, that he doesn't get the chance to come anywhere near my family, especially my daughter. And that I get proof that he's gone.

I've used an alias for this email, and I will delete all responses from yourself. If you need any further information from me, please let me know. I can have the money transferred within a day to confirm the contract, and I will pay in advance, and in full.

The man you are being asked to target is Karl Cheslin, and his release date is 17th March from HMP Belbroughton.

Regards,

Michael.

This was the perfect hit. Just what we were programmed to do. A dirty rapist who targeted underage girls and then thought he had the fucking right to taunt her from prison. Make her feel like her nightmare would never end. I couldn't fucking wait to get him to our warehouse and show him how we took care of the streets of Brinton, and what we did to men like him.

"Message him back," I told Tyler, pocketing my phone and putting my hand out for Tyson to come over. "Tell him we'll do it. Usual terms."

"Do you want me to do any digging into the case?" Tyler asked, already busy tapping away on his screen.

"He's a piece of shit, that much we already know," I replied. "But yeah, dig up whatever you can on his background, family, anything that could help us." I was already envisioning all the ways I was going to enjoy torturing this sick fuck. I'd lost count of the ways I'd found to kill a

man, but there were always new ways, and I'd enjoy testing them out on him.

“Game on, brothers,” Colton said, whooping at the kill he'd made on his game, but no doubt visualising the kill he'd be making in real life.

“This one needs putting down as soon as possible,” I stated—just to make sure we were all on the same page.

“But we can still play with him when he's at the warehouse?” Devon asked, hopeful of the opportunity to test out some of his new ideas.

Devon's favourite part was the torture, and finding unique and creative ways to make them suffer.

“You can play all you want. The longer he suffers, the better.” And I meant it.

We weren't good men, but we had a code. We stood for what we believed in. If you didn't stand for something, you'd fall for anything, and we were no fools.

“Let's enjoy this one,” I added. “He took a girl's innocence and fucked with her and the family. I think we'll enjoy fucking him right back. Tyler? See if you can get hold of one of our contacts inside Belbroughton. If we can get hold of his mobile phone number, we can start our game of consequences and fuck him up before he even steps foot out of those gates.”

“Nice one,” Tyler replied. “I'll get it. By the time we've finished with him, he won't ever want to be released.”

“But he will,” I added. “Because justice needs to be served, and we're gonna be the ones to do it.”

Chapter Seven



“So, he finally pulled his head out of his ass and asked you?” I acted like I couldn’t give a toss, but really, I was over the moon that my best friend, Emily, was engaged. Ryan had taken her to the park where they had their first date and had gotten down on one knee. And now, here she was, in our local coffee shop, beaming from ear-to-ear and holding out her left hand to show us the rock that we’d all noticed the minute she drifted into the place on her little cloud of happiness. It wasn’t exactly small, but in true Emily style, it was classy.

“It was so romantic.” She sighed. “The picnic, the flowers, just being together, remembering that first time.” Emily glazed over for a second as she got lost in her world of perfection.

“He proposed to you in the same place he took your virginity?” I smirked and then felt myself heat up at how crass that sounded. Like my mum always reminded me, I needed to engage my brain before I spoke sometimes.

Shit. Would Emily think I was being jealous and catty? I really hoped not.

“No!” she shot back, blushing, and I sniggered to hide my own embarrassment at what I’d said to her. “I meant the first time we were together on a date, not that.”

“But you did christen the park, or the bench at least?” I asked, because why not? They were in love. Isn’t that what being in love meant?

“Maybe. But that’s beside the point. It’s all about the wedding, and the love, and—”

“And decent sex helps too.” I shrugged and took a bite of my muffin.

“Well, yeah. Of course.” Emily’s cheeks glowed even redder, and she lifted her cup to blow on her latte before taking a sip. “You have sex on the brain, Liv.”

There are worse things to have on the brain.

“Not all the time, but if he wasn’t meeting my best friends needs, I would be having words.”

“I don’t think those are the kind of words he’d want to hear coming from you,” Effy piped up. My other best friend was usually quiet, but since finding love herself, she’d become more outspoken. It suited her. I liked that my best friends were happy and finding their voices. I wanted them to feel empowered.

“I’ll have you know I’m somewhat of an expert,” I stated proudly, and they both raised their eyebrows at me. “I might be shit at finding love, but I know sex.”

“You know sex?” Emily laughed. “Please say that a little louder, I don’t think the old guy at the back of the café heard you.”

I twisted in my chair, ready to do exactly that, but Emily’s hand clamped over my mouth, stopping me.

“Will you rein it in for one second? They’ll be throwing us out next for being too rowdy and upsetting the locals.” Emily was trying to chastise me, but the twinkle in her eyes gave her away. She loved my rebellious side, and I was never going to change. Why should I? Life was for living and I wanted to have fun. Lord knows there was enough darkness in the world.

We sat together and enjoyed chatting some more about what Emily had planned for the wedding. We were both going to be her bridesmaids, which was a relief. I really didn’t want to have to think up ways to persuade—a.k.a. blackmail—her. She told us where she wanted to have the ceremony... a nice traditional church service in Sandland. But the conversation

soon turned to the usual subject of my non-existent love-life. A subject that was way more fascinating to my two friends than it was to me. What was their obsession with finding me a man? I'd given up that ghost ages ago. I didn't need a man to make me happy.

"What do you mean there's no one?" Emily asked. "Do you really expect us to believe that?" She twirled her engagement ring absent-mindedly as she spoke. She was one of the lucky ones. Not everyone found their prince charming in this life. Most of us settled for the understudy.

"Why would I lie?" I said, sitting back in my chair. "It's slim pickings out there in Sandland, ladies. Be thankful you snapped up the good ones." They really had no idea. They'd both fallen on their feet pretty damn fast if you asked me.

"Maybe you need to look further afield?" Effy added. "Or what about that Gavin guy from the pizza place? He always gives you extra wedges when we order, and he knows it's for you."

"Oh my God, Effy! Gavin? Are you serious? You want to pimp me out to the guy who smells of cheese every day? Thanks, but no thanks. I'd rather take my chances with the dregs left in Sandland, or worse yet, branch out into Brinton Manor. I hear the standards are pretty low over there." My heart lurched in my chest saying the name of his town out loud. Why was that?

"Don't put yourself down!" Effy snapped. "A guy would need to have really high standards to be good enough for you." Then she giggled to herself and added, "But maybe not Gavin. You'd eat him alive." She couldn't keep the smirk off her face, and I guessed she was probably picturing Gavin the nerd, cowering in a corner somewhere, while I turned into a she-devil and destroyed him. Can't say I'd have it any other way. He was so far from my type he was currently drowning somewhere off the Atlantic Ocean. There might be plenty of fish in the sea, but if he bit down on my line, I'd be throwing him right back to where he came from. I never did like scrawny seafood.

“I would agree, but the idea of eating him makes me want to throw up.” I made a face that told her exactly how I felt about his wedges with benefits, and she snickered. “Honestly, there’s worms in my garden with more backbone than he has.”

Just at that moment, my phone pinged with an incoming message and both of my best friends glanced down at it sitting innocently on the table in front of us.

Speaking of backbones, I also knew of someone with way too much.

“Please tell me that isn’t who I think it is?” Emily narrowed her eyes at me, but I shrugged. I had nothing to be ashamed of. So I liked playing cat and mouse with my stalker. Granted, I wasn’t always sure who was the cat and who was the mouse, but wasn’t that what made it exciting?

“Maybe it is, maybe it isn’t.” I pretended to look unaffected, even though my heart rate had just spiked. “I won’t know until I look, will I?” I knew exactly who it was. But I had to play along to save face.

“You should have blocked his ass months ago,” Emily chastised. But she didn’t get it. No one did. There wasn’t a lot to get excited about these days, since they’d all coupled up. This was my main source of entertainment. So shoot me because I got a kick out of responding to him and seeing how far I could push the boundaries. How bad could he really be? I mean, when it came down to it, he wouldn’t hurt *me*. Right?

“You should’ve told the police,” Effy added. “Stalking is a crime, and he’s one nasty criminal.”

Effy did have a point. Adam Noble hadn’t exactly played nice with Effy’s boyfriend, Finn, a few months ago. But I’d tried to block that out after my run-in with the soldiers in the underpass. Whatever had happened to Finn, it was over. They might call him the psycho because of what he did on the streets, but in a way, it was different for me. I was in control of this game we were playing, not Adam.

“You don’t have to worry about me,” I reassured them. “Have you ever thought that maybe I like teasing him?” I

picked up my phone but gave them both a pointed stare. “He might think he’s in the driving seat, but I’m no pushover.”

They both made a rubbish effort at looking like they believed me, but I didn’t care. Their blank expressions and nonchalant glances in any direction but my phone only seemed to spur me on even more. I liked having a secret of my own. I didn’t have much else going on in my life right now.

I picked up my phone and tapped out my code to unlock the screen, and sure enough, there was his name lighting up my inbox.

Psycho: I think you’re avoiding me.

It’d been less than twelve hours since I’d sent him the photo of Ronnie. A thought that made me smirk to myself at the ace that I’d played last night. Point to Liv. Shoot your next shot, Noble. Game on with your fucked-up game of consequences, because the chips can fall any way I want them to. He needed to learn about losing, and I’d bet my ass he was a shit loser too.

Me: I’m a little busy right now, but I’d love the chance to ignore you some other time.

I smiled as I typed out my response, wondering if he could see me. I could hear the girls chattering away next to me, but I wasn’t paying attention. I was too focused on what he’d come back with.

Psycho: I don’t like being ignored. You should know that by now.

That was a standard Noble response. Playing the big man. He probably thought it scared me, but it didn’t. I was getting used to his way with words. All it did was show me that I could get to him. His closed-off answers left him wide open for my ridicule. This shit was too easy.

Me: I’ll tell you what I do know. You’re annoying. Go play freakshow somewhere else.

I knew he wouldn’t. That my response would only pull him in even further. Like a fly to my spider’s web, he just couldn’t resist crawling right in.

Psycho: Well, now I'm offended.

Nothing offended this guy. I swear I could call him all the names under the sun, do whatever the fuck I wanted, and he'd still be blowing up my inbox the next day.

Me: Oh no! You're offended by the stuff I say? Imagine what I hold back. ;-)

I couldn't stop myself from adding the wink emoji. Childish, but who really cared?

Psycho: I know I won't hold back. Not when I've got you where I want you.

I huffed out a laugh at that, and Effy asked me what he'd said, but I wasn't about to show them what we messaged. As fucked up as it sounded, I wanted to keep that for myself.

Me: And where exactly do you want me? Because from what I can see, you're all talk.

I knew he wasn't, but I liked goading him. Seeing what he'd come back with.

Psycho: I wouldn't push me if I were you, Olivia.

But pushing him was my new favourite pastime. It was like telling a kid not to eat the sweets you put in front of them.

Me: Pushing you is what I live for.

I replied, biting my lip and waiting as the dots danced out his response.

Psycho: And breaking you is mine.

I laughed out loud, and Emily tried to crane her neck over my shoulder and get a look at what was on my phone screen.

Me: Good luck with that.

I tilted my phone so no one else could see what we were sharing. I'm glad I did, as he changed direction like he always did and started on with his game of consequences bullshit. That was something I really didn't want anyone else to find out about.

Psycho: I have today's game of consequences for you, otherwise known as truth or dare. So, what'll it be, Olivia? Will you tell me a truth today, or are you ready for a dare?

I smiled, because as twisted as it sounded, I liked this.

Me: Let's go for a dare today.

I grinned, feeling a warmth spread through me.

Psycho: Okay. I dare you to tell me your deepest secret.

I knew, in his little fucked-up, psychotic mind, he thought I'd share something of myself. But he really didn't know me at all. I was a pro at answering questions like this. I'd been deflecting all my life so that no one could really scratch under the surface. I didn't trust many people enough to truly let them in.

Me: Isn't that just a truth tied up in a dare?

He'd hate that I was questioning him, but I wasn't bothered. I could meet his challenge and piss all over it.

Psycho: Answer the question, Olivia.

Patience was a virtue he didn't have. In fact, I doubted he had any virtues to speak of.

Me: Fine. I see dead people.

I responded, feeling like Haley Joel Osment in *The Sixth Sense*.

Psycho: Really?

Did he think I was being serious?

Me: No, but I keep seeing some loser in a hoodie everywhere I go. I mean, seriously, dude. Do you think you look inconspicuous? It's beyond creepy and it's really starting to piss me off.

I looked up from my phone and out of the window, scanning the street outside, and moments later, I saw him, sat at a bus stop like he was meant to be there. And yet, he stood out like a sore thumb. I'd taken a lucky guess with my response, and sure enough, it'd paid off. He was watching me.

Me: Catching the bus to anywhere exciting? Hell, I hope.

His hood lifted slightly after reading my last message, but I couldn't see his face, so I had to imagine the scowl that'd probably be there. I was one step ahead of him and he wouldn't like that.

Psycho: I think you like me watching you.

He responded, and in the back of my brain a quiet voice said, "At least someone cares." It wasn't that I was neglected or came from a shit family, but sometimes it was hard to get noticed. I didn't have Emily's classic beauty, or Effy's perfect grace and goodness. I was just the mouthy one who most people avoided. I was told I could be too much sometimes, and a little over-bearing. But occasionally that excuse got old, and I just wanted someone to notice me. Well, someone had now, and it might not be in the conventional way, but it was attention all the same.

Me: I can't wait for this little pearl of wisdom. Come on then. Why do I like it?

Psycho: Because you crave the attention. You want me to want you. And I do.

I couldn't deny that his message did something to me. What he'd said made my stomach roll with nerves and excitement. This weird relationship we had going on had become a bit of an obsession for me too. I would never admit it, but I waited for his messages like a love-sick schoolgirl who sits by her phone. I bit my lip, not knowing what to say back to that. He had hit the nail on the head, but his admission that he wanted me was having an effect on me that I didn't know how to handle. So, I decided to turn the tables.

Me: I want to know one of your deep dark secrets. I think it's only fair. I've shown you mine, you show me yours.

Perfect deflection tactics. I'd become good at that growing up. I loved the limelight, but only when it didn't put me in an uncomfortable position. The girls went to the counter for a coffee refill and left me to stare at my screen in anticipation.

When his answer came back, I swallowed and took a deep breath.

Psycho: You haven't shown me anything, and your answer was shit. But I'll play. Those dead people you see? I killed them.

I knew there were things about Adam Noble that my brain tended to skim over, and I knew he was telling the truth. He'd killed people. He wasn't a good guy. But what did that make me? Because in all honesty, the thought of what he could have done didn't frighten me. It intrigued me, but it didn't scare me off.

Me: Do you expect me to be impressed with that response?

I went for the vague, 'I don't believe you,' angle.

Psycho: I expect you to know I'm not fucking joking, Olivia. Everything I say is the truth. I don't do bullshit.

He didn't.

Me: Neither do I.

I answered with a calmness that came from unexpected sources in my brain. I was tapping into a lot of things in my mind that I didn't know existed lately. He made me question everything.

Psycho: That's why I like you. You're the same as me.

Was I? Did he think I was psychotic like him? I might be aloof sometimes, or laugh at inappropriate moments, making light of things other people saw as a tragedy. But a psychopath? I was nothing like him.

Was I?

Me: You're mistaking apathy for psychopathy. I am nothing like you.

Psycho: If you're nothing like me, then you'll have no problem telling the guy sitting at the table behind you to fuck off. I've been watching him eye-fuck you for the last half hour, and if he doesn't stop, I'll be coming in there to

rip his eyes right out of his sockets and shove them up his ass.

I glanced over my shoulder and my whole body tensed with revulsion when I saw Chase Lockwood sitting behind me, grinning like the motherfucker he was and then drawing his eyes up and down my body. Fuck this. If Emily saw him, she'd lose her shit. She had history with Lockwood that wasn't great. There weren't many people in Sandland who still gave the twat the time of day. But fuck, if I did something, it'd look like I was playing into Adam Noble's hands.

I had two choices here.

I could piss Adam off and go and sit with Chase, make it look like I was flirting with him. But then that'd make Lockwood's day, upset my friends and make me out to be a total bitch.

So, plan B it was. With a choice between pissing off Adam and my friends or pissing off Chase Lockwood, Lockwood would win out every day of the week. I just had to think of a way to make sure Adam knew this was nothing to do with him.

I stood up and gave the Tiffany shell necklace my gran had bought me a rub for good luck, then I picked up my coffee cup and spun around. My latte had gone cold, what with me talking so much and then typing away, but it was still almost full. I sauntered over to Chase's table and seductively sat down on the chair opposite him, skimming one bare leg over the other in a sexy way that I knew would get his attention as I crossed my legs. Casually, I glanced over at the counter, and Emily and Effy were oblivious to what was going on, engrossed in ordering fresh drinks and chatting to the barista. I leant forward, resting my elbows on the table and ran my finger over my lips.

"Hey, Liv." Chase leant forward and leered at me, his eyes flickering from my mouth to my tits and then back again. "I didn't think you'd want to sit with me. But then I guess we're more alike than we realise."

“How so?” I cocked my head to the side, giving him my innocent, doe-eyed look, but I knew what he was getting at. I just needed him to say it out loud to give me an excuse to react.

“Well, we’re both outcasts. No one really likes us. They might pretend they do, but come on, even a girl like you knows the score.” His filthy gaze landed back on my chest, and it took every fibre of my being to keep myself in check.

“Outcasts? Is that right?” I narrowed my eyes at him, keeping the fury I felt just bubbling under the surface for a moment longer. Playfully, I ran my finger around the rim of my coffee cup, half expecting an irate Adam to storm the café and throw the table up into the air before knocking Chase the fuck out.

“You’re a tease, Liv. The girl everyone loves to fool around with. But no one will ever settle down with you. You’re the girl they fuck, not the girl they take home to their mother.” I gritted my teeth and tried to stay calm, but he leant forward and added, “Years from now, you’ll be warming some rich wanker’s bed, fucking him and sucking him off before he goes home to his loving wife and kids. You’re not a keeper, Liv. You’re trash. Dispensable. A good time but not for a long time.” He sat back, resting his arms across the top of the seat, and I snapped.

“That’s where you’re wrong, *Chase*. I might look like the dispensable type—like trash, as you put it—but I have more class and dignity in my little finger than you have in your whole body. And speaking about being dispensable, I think you should’ve ordered your coffee to go.” I picked up my cup and threw the whole milky mess right into his face. “If anything is dispensable here, it’s your company.”

He shot up out of his chair, gasping and spluttering, but I stood up and faced him off, putting my hands on my hips and standing tall.

“If you ever speak to me like that again, I’ll make sure the coffee is boiling hot, you arrogant prick.” And I turned on my

heels, stalking out of the coffee shop as Emily and Effy called out my name and chased after me.

As soon as I got outside, I pulled my phone from the pocket of my jeans, ready to message Adam and let him know that I did what I did because I wanted to. And all the time, my legs were carrying me to that bus stop, to where he'd stood watching it all play out. But when I got there, he was nowhere to be seen.

I glanced back down at my phone and saw his response, and even though I should've been repulsed, what he said made me bristle with something else.

Psycho: That man is a dead man walking. No one speaks to you like that and gets away with it.

He'd been there.

He'd heard.

And now Chase Lockwood had more than the Sandland crew to worry about. He'd poked the Brinton nest of vipers and the deadliest one of all was about to make his mark.

I should've been scared, disgusted, worried even, but I wasn't. I felt... weirdly proud. But fuming all the same.

What was that about?

Chapter Eight



I don't know how I stopped myself from raining down hell in that coffee shop. It wasn't like me to hold back, but there were voices in my head telling me to let her have her moment. I'd take care of him, but I wouldn't do it in front of her. She deserved to have her time in the spotlight. She needed it.

My reaction still shocked me though.

Who knew?

Maybe I did have restraint after all?

At least when it came to her, anyway.

I was ready though, if he ever made the wrong move or touched her. I would be there to step in, take him out, and put him down like the mongrel he was. Nobody spoke to her like that and got away with it.

She didn't see me standing off in the corner, and I watched as she threw her coffee over him, feeling a ripple of pride that she'd done that. Her two friends followed her, but I stayed behind and sat at a table in the corner, watching him brush himself down with a napkin that had absolutely no effect on the ridiculous brown stain down his white polo shirt and chinos. I mean, who the fuck was this kid? Who dressed like that these days?

He glanced around nervously, and when he saw the salty looks being thrown his way, he stood up, threw money down onto the table and strode out like he was a fucking king and he

hadn't just been made to look like a complete mug by my girl in front of everyone.

I kept my head low as he drifted nonchalantly past where I was and headed out of the door. Then, I stood up and followed him. As I got outside, I glanced down the road and saw Olivia standing at the bus stop, and from the way her arms were flaying around, I could tell she was mouthing off to her friends.

She'd keep.

She was safe.

Lucky for me, the chino asshole was heading in the opposite direction. Wise move on his part.

I kept in step with him, close enough to track him, but far enough away that he didn't know he was being watched. When he turned into an alleyway that led to a small carpark at the back of the shops, I broke into a sprint and ducked down into the alley after him. He turned to see whose footsteps were following him, and before he had chance to see me, I grabbed the back of his collar, slammed him into the fence and wrapped one hand around his throat as I took my knife out of my jeans with the other hand.

His eyes bugged out of his head, and he gasped. "You can have my wallet, keys, whatever you want, just don't hurt me. Please."

I gave an evil laugh and pushed my face forward, my nose touching his as I moved the knife from behind my back and pressed it into his Adam's apple.

"I don't want your money," I sneered, and his panting became stronger, more laboured as I applied extra pressure to the blade at his neck.

"So... what... what do you want?" He was sweating like a pig. Rivulets dripping down his face like he'd just come out of the shower, and I smiled. I'd missed this.

"I want you to learn some manners." My knife was positioned just to the side of his neck now, and I pressed it in, laughing drily as a drip of red appeared and trickled down his

neck, staining the collar of his white shirt. The way he clenched his eyes shut and started to whimper sent a wave of satisfaction through my veins. If he thought this was the worst of it, he was in for a nasty surprise.

“Whatever you want to say, just... say it,” he whispered, his throat bobbing, swallowing in fear at the thought of what my blade would do next.

I gritted my teeth and glared at him, my eyes burning with the hatred that I felt in that moment.

“You don’t get to make the rules around here,” I snapped, pushing my knife into the same spot again and earning another trickle of blood to follow the track that the last one had left behind.

“Okay,” he spluttered out breathlessly. “Okay.”

I grinned and took a step back. The fact that he leant forward slightly and tried to regulate his breathing, putting his hands on his thighs, amused me, and a small, ironic smile curled at the corner of my mouth. This was going to be fun.

“So what is this about?” He gasped. “My dad? Did he piss your family off?” He stood back up, rubbing his clammy hands on his trousers and touching his neck before pulling his fingers away to assess the damage. When he saw the blood, he winced and held his hand against the minuscule wound that he had there. This guy was an absolute pussy.

“I couldn’t give a shit about your dad,” I growled in a low, menacing voice. “If he’s anything like you, then I’m guessing he’s an arrogant twat who needs a bullet in him just like you do.”

His eyes bugged out of his head again for the second time, and he quickly scanned my body, looking for a firearm before he whipped his head up and down the alleyway—looking for a get-out.

“I haven’t got a gun,” I said, stepping back towards him. “I don’t take the easy road. If a job’s worth doing, it’s worth doing well, and a cunt like you calls for the best job possible.”

I didn't stop to think as my kill switch clicked into gear. I grabbed his left hand, slamming it up against the fence and then stabbed my knife right through the palm of his hand, pinning him in place.

"What the fuck?" he screamed as he started to pant, and when he turned to see his hand stuck to the fence, he started to cry like the pussy he really was. "Shit. Please. No. Stop this. I've got a brand-new Range Rover parked a few feet away. It's right over there. You want it? It's yours. Just please. Leave me alone. Don't kill me."

"I don't want your shitty car," I snarled, and I held the handle of the knife, twisting it so he could feel all the pain I wanted to inflict on him. "You need to learn to keep your hands to yourself." I grinned, twisting further and further. "Because if you don't... I'll cut them both off and shove them up your ass."

He was spluttering and crying, snot mixing with his tears. He was one of the most cowardly fuckers I'd ever dealt with.

"Please stop. I can't... cope." He sobbed but his feeble attempt to try and save himself meant nothing to me.

With a slow grunt, so as to prolong the agony, I pulled the knife out and he howled, grabbing his blood-soaked hand in the other and almost sinking to the floor as he whimpered like a little girl. I wouldn't let him fall though. This wasn't over yet. I still hadn't made my point.

I yanked him back up the fence by his collar and held my knife to his mouth.

"If I ever hear you talk to Olivia like that again, I'll cut your tongue out. Do you hear me?"

He nodded but he didn't dare open his mouth. He knew not to tempt me.

"And if you go anywhere near her"—I added, whispering in his ear—"I'll cut your dick off and sew it in place of your tongue." I pushed my forehead to his and looked deep into his eyes so he knew I meant what I said. "She's mine. I protect

what's mine. And you overstepped the mark today. Do you know how far you've pushed me?"

Again, he nodded, and the way he grimaced, I was pretty sure he'd shit his pants.

"You're lucky." I smiled, stepping back and taking my knife, wiping the blood from the blade onto his chest. "I won't kill you today." He let out a gasp, but his relief was short lived when I added, "Oh, I will kill you. But for now, you can run back to all your little friends in Sandland and tell them, no one fucks with Olivia Cooper. She's property of the Soldiers."

He stood, staring at me, like he couldn't quite believe what was happening, and I grinned back at him, backing further away and pocketing my knife. When I turned and strolled away—back towards the street—I chuckled as I heard him scampering away like a rat. He'd keep. I wouldn't let him get away with disrespecting her. But he had his uses. He looked like a pig, and pigs squeal. By tonight, everyone would know to stay away from her. His fuck-up had worked in my favour. Now, I had a messenger to spread the word and I had a new target to play with. His cards were marked. He was a dead man.

Chapter Nine



“**H**e said what?”

We were sitting in Ryan and Emily’s new apartment after my run-in with Chase earlier. I had attempted to get a showdown with Adam too, right after I’d doused Lockwood in the finest Italian blend you could find in Sandland, but he’d done his usual Houdini act. Typical, right when I needed to let him know that my reaction in the coffee shop had nothing to do with him and his bullshit games—and everything to do with Chase Lockwood thinking that I was a pushover—he’d vanished.

Chase had always been a loser, but it annoyed me that he thought he could treat me like trash. I’d had enough of being seen as the joke of the group. The easy target. Emily was smart. Effy had compassion by the bucket load.

But me?

I was the one everyone thought they could take the piss out of because I always took the piss out of myself. I’d set a rod for my own back. I never wanted to be seen as the fixer that I was. The silent assassin, waiting in the wings. With that sort of role came expectation, and I was tired of trying to live up to those in every other aspect of my life. With my friends, I just wanted to be different. I kept things shallow for a reason. I never let anyone below the surface, because why would I? I’d been hurt enough in the past to know that was a mug’s game. Protect yourself first. No one else is going to do that job. And yes, I spoke my mind, but it didn’t mean I had no feelings.

Never let them know they're getting to you. I was the master at letting things fly over my head and rising above, but not anymore. I was no doormat, and it was time I stood up and showed everyone that.

I'd assumed Adam had left the scene because he'd gotten what he came for, but no. I'd underestimated him. Again. He had plans of his own, and now that I was getting the gossip from Emily—courtesy of her friend at the hospital—I was starting to realise how deep his issues went. I had to re-exert my control over this situation before it got out of hand. I always knew he was unhinged, but until now, I'd never truly grasped how dark his demons went.

“Apparently, according to one of the nurses at the hospital that treated the wound on his hand, he said you were theirs. Property of the soldiers,” Emily said as she set cans of coke down on the table in front of us and sat back on her new cream leather sofa.

Hearing what Adam had said made me want to dig my nails into the leather in frustration. He didn't own me. No one did. I'd thought our little game of texting, truth and dare, and all the other stuff was a tease. It gave me a thrill. But I wasn't about to be claimed like some prize cow. That wasn't how this was supposed to go.

Shit.

What had I gotten myself into?

“He is having a fucking laugh if he thinks he can get away with going around and saying things like that. What is he on?” I knew even before I'd said it that Adam Noble wasn't on anything. He didn't need drugs or alcohol to enhance his psychopathic tendencies, they were firmly set in place in that brain of his. This was who he was. It was what he did. And I thought I could deal with that... until now.

“He doesn't need to be on anything. He's insane,” Emily replied, shaking her head.

“Clearly,” I snapped back, feeling irritated with myself for not stopping this from happening, because I always knew in

the back of my mind that he was capable of bad things. I hated Lockwood as much as the next person, but I wouldn't want to shank the guy. I'd thought a lap full of coffee was a bad idea until I'd heard this. Adam had taken things to a whole other level.

"Are you sure about all this?" Effy asked. "I mean, it is Chase Lockwood we're talking about here. He's not exactly known for his honesty."

She was always trying to see the best in people, and considering the history Adam had with her boyfriend, Finn, it was beyond thoughtful of her to try and find a positive spin on it. But I was a realist. She was a dreamer. The devil existed, and he was blowing up my DMs on a nightly basis. Only thing was, I was a she-devil that took no shit. He needed another reminder that he had met his match in me.

"I like your optimism, Effy." I smiled at her, reaching over to rub her knee. It was a bullshit move meant to take the focus off me. I was feeling embarrassed about everything that I was hearing, and so I'd resorted to belittling my friend with knee rubs. I needed to have a fucking word with myself. "But Eff, it's not lies. He said it. This is classic Adam." I took my hand away and sat back into the sofa, my eyes darting up to the ceiling like I was hoping for divine intervention.

"It was my friend, Holly, who overheard him talking to his brother, Jensen, about it," Emily added. "Even Jensen told him to stay out of it. According to him, the soldiers are a different breed, and he should steer well clear." Emily's eyes bugged as she spoke, and she gave me a look that said I needed to wake up and smell the coffee. Coffee, bullshit, I could smell it all. But it was a mess I would clear up myself. He started this and I'd finish it.

"Well, I suppose that's one positive to come out of it. No more dealing with the Lockwood's crap. What's not to love about that?" I grinned, trying to divert the dark cloud hanging over us and bring some light to the conversation. That was what I was good at doing, after all. Bringing light relief to the group.

“You don’t look very happy,” Effy answered with a grim expression. Her eyes were downcast, and a hint of apprehension was held within, as if she expected me to freak out at any minute. She’d have been right there too, holding me up if I ever fell. My best friends were my rocks. They put up with me no matter what, because sometimes, the family you create bonds closer than the family you were born into.

“Would you be happy if some freak was going around telling everyone you’re off the market? I mean, who’s gonna want to talk to me now if they think he’ll be lurking round the corner, ready to strike? I’m never going to get lucky ever again.” I was joking. I couldn’t give a toss about getting lucky right now. All my energy was taken up with Adam and dealing with him. Men were the last thing on my mind. Well, other men.

He just seemed to consume me. Since he’d come onto the scene, there hadn’t been room in my life or my mind for anyone else. It was like nothing else mattered, and I didn’t want that to sound as flippant or as uncaring as it did, but it was the truth. Adam Noble had a way of worming his way into my thoughts, manipulating my brain, and warping my whole world until everything was a kaleidoscope that confused me.

I should hate him, but he intrigued me.

I should be scared of him, but he fascinated me.

I should want to stay away, but I couldn’t.

I was drawn to him, and despite what had happened today, I couldn’t just switch it off. But I needed to do something. This had to stop. My obsession with him and this game needed to stop.

“Liv, let’s be honest here. You’ve been chatting to him for quite a while. Don’t deny it, because we’re not stupid. We know the truth.” Emily gave me a direct, pointed stare, and something inside of me snapped. My actions weren’t up for discussion. What I did or didn’t do was no one else’s business. I knew they meant well, but at the end of the day, they went home to their perfect boyfriends and perfect lives. Their happy futures and sweet little dreams. I had nothing. I was left alone.

Okay, so my house was huge, and my parents gave me whatever I wanted, but things couldn't replace the love and affection I craved. I just wanted someone for me. I wanted attention. I wanted to be loved. Surely everyone deserved that? Even me.

"So?" I snapped back, tilting my head in question.

"So... you must've known something like this would happen. You've pulled him in and pushed him away, and he's not the kind of guy you play games with. This was always going to end in tears," Emily said gravely.

"Not mine. Anyway, why can't I be allowed to tease him? He messaged me first, and I'm not stupid. If it went too far, I'd stop it."

"And you don't think sticking a knife through someone's hand and threatening them isn't too far? I think it's time to pull the plug." Emily had a point, but I would pull the plug on my own terms. I knew exactly what I had to do.

"What if I don't want to?" I was playing devil's advocate, all to try and prove a point... I wouldn't be told what to do.

"Then you take a long hard think about what exactly it is that you do want," Emily replied with a calmness to her voice.

"I want a bit of fun. It's okay for you two. You've found your happy ever after. Mine usually disappears in a puff of smoke about five minutes after he's shot his load and he wants to get out of the house and out of my life. I'm done with being played. I want to do some of the playing for a change."

"He's not the one you should be playing though." Effy said "This... it's dangerous, Liv. I'm worried about you." She was right. What'd happened today wasn't fun, it was creepy and wrong on so many levels. But she didn't need to worry. I could look after myself. I always did.

"Don't worry about me, Eff. I'm in control. I know what I'm doing. When I'm finished, Adam Noble will wish he'd never met me."

"I really hope you're right." Effy smiled and then added, "You once told me that a true friend is one that stands up and

tells you when a guy is making a mug of you, remember? That time at the hospital after Finn got hurt by his uncle, you told me that I deserved respect. I deserved better. Well, so do you.”

I couldn't help but smile and melt a little inside at what Effy was saying, that she'd remembered my words in that awful time in her life. Most people barely paid attention to what I said or did.

“Yeah, I did say that.” I hung my head, biting my lip as I thought back to that time we shared our heart-to-heart in the carpark of the local hospital as her Finn lay beaten and broken in a hospital bed. “But then someone else told me that life isn't always black and white. Sometimes you have to deal with the grey areas too.”

“I don't think there are grey areas where he's concerned. It's all dark,” Effy replied.

“Good job I have enough light to lead my way then, isn't it?” I stood up and grabbed my bag from the floor, ready to head off and get a grip on the tornado that was my life. “Now, if you'll excuse me, I think it's time I paid that little fucker a visit. Let him know that I'm not gonna put up with his bullshit anymore.”

“Be careful,” Emily called out as I headed for the door. “Call us if you need us.”

“No need. I've got this.”

Chapter Ten



“**H**e’s a shady fucker. I can feel it in my balls. I say we take him out right at the prison gates. Don’t give the slimy git a chance to dodge us.” Colton was still lounging in his gamer’s chair like he’d been dropped from the ceiling and landed in that position. He grinned at us as he scanned the games room where we were all gathered and took another drag from his rolled-up cigarette. “What do you say, Dev? One single shot to the head. Is that gonna quench your thirst for blood?”

Devon grimaced back at him then turned away and started rolling his own cigarette, frowning as he did, but the concentration on his face wasn’t linked to the roll-up, Devon had something else on his mind.

“Sounds like an easy way out to me,” he said in a dull, quiet tone. “It goes against our whole ethic. Go hard or go home.” He licked the roll up paper and glanced back to where Colton sat, studying Devon like he had no idea where he’d come from.

“I was joking,” Colton replied, laughing. “I know you like to get your hands dirty. God forbid I’d ever take that away from you. You can fucking swim in his blood for all I care. Bathe in it. Have a fucking party, foam style, and paint the town red.”

Devon tutted but Colton carried on. “You know, I can see you doused in blood, getting it on with some red-blooded females. Get it? Females... red-blooded... covered in blood.”

There was a collective groan from the room, which was rightly deserved. As much as we liked to call him our joker, sometimes his sense of humour missed the mark.

“What? Don’t you like blood comedy?” he mused. “Is blood sport not your thing, Dev?”

“Your joke was shit,” I piped up from my corner of the room, and each one of them turned to face me. “Not even Tyler and Will are laughing at it.” I stepped forward, pointing to the two lads as I sauntered over to the fridge to get a cold beer. “Laughing at you maybe, but not your joke.”

Devon huffed a smile and Colton beamed, putting both hands behind his head as he focused his attention on me.

“Well, it got a rise out of you. So that’s a win in my book. I rattled the mighty Noble enough to make him bite back.”

“You’re not the only person he’s bitten back at today,” Tyler guffawed, and I glared across at him, waiting for him to dare to elaborate. “Or was that another soldier that pinned some Sandland fucker to a fence with a knife through his hand today?” The way he smirked, I felt like stabbing one right through his to wipe the smile off his face.

“I don’t need to explain myself to you,” I answered, scowling as I popped the cap off the beer and threw the bottle opener down on the counter.

“No, you don’t. But it’d be nice to hear it from someone other than Sarah fucking Pope who was gossiping on the corner of Oakdene Road this afternoon. Mate, if someone needs a reminder of who we are, we do it together. Isn’t that the deal?” Tyler added.

“It wasn’t Brinton business. You didn’t need to be involved,” I informed him in a disinteresting manner that was supposed to get him to drop it.

“Could this have something to do with a certain blonde bombshell you’ve been obsessing over lately?” Colton asked, wiggling his eyebrows.

I narrowed my eyes at him and noticed a slight flicker in his confident facade, but it was so slight no one else would’ve

noticed it, only me. I knew these lads better than they knew themselves. And he knew better than to test me.

“I don’t obsess. I admire.” I smirked, trying to change tack.

“And she is very worthy of that attention,” Colton added on a chuckle, waving his mobile phone in the air. “Although, from the look on her face right now, I don’t think she appreciates your level of admiration.”

It suddenly clicked why he was holding his mobile phone up. Our CCTV system was linked to our phones, and Olivia must’ve been somewhere on our premises. That thought alone made my stomach flip. One, because I’d dropped the ball for a few hours. Last I’d checked, she was at her friend’s apartment. And two, she was here. Finally, she’d made the journey across town to come here and see me. The thought of her being here, whatever it was for, was making me nervous, anxious and excited all at once. I hadn’t had many face-to-face encounters with Olivia, but when I had, it’d been fireworks on acid, and I loved it.

The sound of the intercom buzzing broke the tension in the air, and Colton shot out of his chair to answer it using the system attached to the wall.

“And what can we do for you on this very fine evening?” he sang down the line like he didn’t have a care in the world.

“Are you fucking joking?” Even through an intercom, she sounded sexy as hell, and I felt my heart rate spike even higher. “Just open the goddamn door, will you? I don’t want to be here any longer than I have to be,” she shouted, and I couldn’t keep the smile from creeping slowly over my face as I imagined her angry and ready to start World War three, her cheeks growing redder by the second as she pushed her face closer to the camera to try to look menacing. Trying... but failing. She was too cute.

Fuck, Olivia. What are you doing to me?

“Well, that’s just rude,” Colton replied. “What’s wrong with our company? I’ll have you know there are ladies who

would kill to be in your position. Fighting over themselves they are to get an audience with us.” Colton could win Oscars with his performances, but he wasn’t winning Olivia around. That’s what I loved about her. She was nobody’s fool.

“Fighting to get away from you, more like. Just cut the bullshit. Either open up or send him down here to face me.”

“And by *he*, I assume you mean our esteemed, self-proclaimed leader, Mr Noble,” Colton added as he turned to stare at me.

“Who else would I mean?” she snapped back impatiently.

“There are four other options up here. And some of us aren’t averse to the idea of sharing, unlike your man, Noble.” Colton’s comment made me tense up and return his stare with a warning glare.

Don’t push it, mate.

“He isn’t my man,” she growled, and then I heard the sound of her banging on the thick wooden doors, rattling them like she could force them open with her tiny hands. I’d have to watch the CCTV later. That was one image I really needed to see for myself.

“Okay, okay. Calm your tits,” Colton said with a hint of amusement in his voice. “Wouldn’t want you to break a nail now, would we? Give me two minutes and I’ll be down to let you in, princess.”

He turned to look at me as he said the last part. Then he smirked and turned the intercom off.

“Do *you* want to go down to her? Or shall I bring her up here?” He glanced around the room then added, “We could all do with a laugh.”

“No. Send her to my room.” I slammed my beer bottle onto the counter and then turned around slowly to face him. “And if you ever call her princess again, you’ll be wearing your balls as souvenirs around your neck.”

“Your room?” He gasped like he couldn’t believe what I was saying, totally ignoring my threat about using a pet name

for her.

“Do you have a fucking hearing problem as well as personality disorder? Yes. My room.”

The others shrugged and Colton rolled his eyes before muttering under his breath, “This one must be special. And I’ll have you know I’m very proud of my personality disorder. It’s taken years to perfect.” And then he sauntered out of the door.

Chapter Eleven



I stood on their doorstep with my arms folded, trying to take deep breaths to calm my nerves. This was the first time I'd been to the Asylum since they'd opened it up as their new club, The Sanctuary. I'd heard a lot of buzz going around about the place and what it was like, but I'd never wanted to step foot in here. Not until now. Now I needed to settle a score. I needed to face this, whatever it was, head on.

Lost in my thoughts, thinking about what I would say, I flinched when the large wooden double doors cranked open, pulling me from my daze. I was surprised when I saw Colton King standing in the doorway with a stupid grin on his face. Adam would never come down here himself and do his own dirty work. Colton looked me up and down and chuckled to himself, but I had no time to break down all of his issues. He could get in line. I had bigger fish to fry.

"Typical," I snapped. "He couldn't even be bothered to come and answer the door himself. Always the coward." I tapped my foot in irritation and glared at him, but he wasn't fazed by me. Instead, he just seemed to get off on my irritation, grinning like an idiot and chuckling to himself.

"Oh, now come on. We were all fighting over ourselves to get down here and open the door to you. I was the lucky one who won." He winked at me and stroked his jaw as he carried on playing the part of the joker. "Don't deny me this pleasure, Liv."

He didn't show any indication that I was welcome to come in. He didn't move to the side or give me a way to get past him. Instead, he just stood there, gawping at me and smirking.

"Where is he?" I snapped.

"Rude." Colton pretended to look offended, holding his hand on his chest and fake gasping. "I'm just as good company as he is. Probably more, in fact. There's lots of things I can do with my mouth other than talking."

I screwed my face up and he threw his head back, laughing.

"You know, it's not often we get visitors," he added. "Will you be staying for dinner? Shall I set an extra place at the table for you?"

"You all sit around the table together?" I frowned, struggling to imagine the weird scenario he was painting.

"Well, more like a KFC bucket really, but I'll save you a wet wipe." He chose that moment to step backwards and give a sweeping gesture with his arm for me to enter.

"You're hilarious," I responded drily, rolling my eyes as I pushed my way past him into the main foyer of the building.

"So I've been told," he answered, slamming the door shut with way more force than he needed to.

I stood in the middle of the foyer and looked around. They'd done a decent job of cleaning up the place. Even the stained-glass ceiling, which used to be broken and plagued with trapped birds shitting over everything, looked sparkling and new. Like most clubs, the stench of stale alcohol mixed with cleaning products and furniture polish hung heavy in the air. Nice to know they made some effort to keep it clean. The old, plastered walls still had some of Finn's graffiti artwork on display, and the floors—which were once cracked and uneven—had been replaced with a highly polished wood effect. I doubted it was solid wood. I don't think anything these men did was legitimate or the real deal. They were, after all, the masters of tricks and illusions. But granted, it looked... classy. For them.

“Like what we’ve done with the place?” Colton asked as he came up behind me.

“I thought the rubble and bird shit suited you better. But then I suppose all criminals like to hide somewhere, in plain sight. You’ve created quite the hideout.”

“The perfect hideout,” he whispered. “We’re just like Bruce Wayne, only there’s five of us here to be extraordinarily awesome and fuck shit up. You should stop by one of the nights. I’m sure Ad wouldn’t mind showing you around the themed rooms we have on offer.” I turned to give him a snarky response, but he was already stalking off down the corridor towards the stairs that’d lead us to the other floors.

“Themed rooms?” I called out after him. “As long as one of them is a torture chamber, I’m game. I think *he* deserves a taste of his own medicine after the shit he’s doled out, and I would love to be there when it happens.”

“You don’t really mean that,” he said, twisting his head to smirk down at me as he took the stairs two at a time. “You say you hate him”—he stopped on the top step and spun around, bending forward so his face was level with mine—“but that look in your eyes says different. You like the games, admit it. You’re all about the chase.”

I took a few more steps so my face was closer to his and I glared at him. “I also like my freedom. I’m no one’s property.”

“Well...” He shrugged, standing upright and backing away a few steps. “Best to let him down gently then. I don’t think he’s gonna take too kindly to being told he can’t have you.” He turned and started to make his way up the next flight of stairs and casually threw out his next comment. “Because when Adam wants something, he always gets it.”

I followed him up that last flight, and when we got to the top, he halted again and nodded his head towards the door at the far end of the corridor.

“You do know you’re the first person ever to step foot in his room other than us four?” He leant closer towards me and whispered, “You’re the first girl to be invited into his lair. Are

you ready for it? Huh? Do you feel flattered that you're the chosen one?"

"Flattered?" I spat back. "About as flattered as a turkey would be when it's picked for Christmas dinner."

Colton threw his head back again and laughed. "I like you, Liv. I can see why he's so... taken."

"Taken. That's one word for it." I pointed to the door we were staring at. "Is that his room?"

"That's it. The love palace."

"I guess I'll go and knock then." I started walking forward but Colton didn't join me.

"Don't knock. It's more fun catching someone by surprise," he called out, and as I turned, I saw him stroll off down the other end of the corridor, whistling to himself.

When I got to the door, I froze.

What the hell was I doing here?

Had I just made the biggest fuck up known to man by coming here and confronting him?

I liked to think I had balls, but was this a suicide mission?

Did I really know what I was getting myself into?

Back at Emily's, when we were discussing everything that'd gone down between Adam and Chase, I'd felt furious. I wanted my pound of flesh. But now, I felt nervous, apprehensive even. What if this backfired spectacularly and I'd put myself in danger coming here? I'd always been convinced that Adam would never hurt me. Hurt for me, as was clearly the case today, but actually hurt me... no. But had I been naïve in that respect?

I felt the nerves flow through me as my hand hovered over the wood, ready to knock. My stomach was doing backflips and I was shaking like a leaf. I touched my shell necklace, reminding myself that I needed to channel my inner warrior. I'd come this far, and I was no quitter. I had something to say,

and he was going to hear it. Fuck it. I bypassed knocking, just like Colton had said, and turned the door handle.

Let's just get this over with.

I stepped into his room and closed the door behind me. That manly smell that was all him hung heavy in the air, and my stomach flipped over again, but this time it wasn't from nerves. I wasn't ready to address what it actually was, but it definitely wasn't fear.

Looking around the sparse bedroom, I couldn't see him lurking anywhere. He wasn't here. I guessed I'd been sent in here alone and he would follow when he was good and ready, like some kind of twisted waiting room, for him to play a little more with my patience and my nerves. Or maybe he was watching me from a secret hideaway, and he had a camera stashed somewhere in the room? Perhaps he wanted to study me first, see where my head was at? I wouldn't put anything past him. Just in case, I stood tall and stuck my middle finger up, flicking the bird into all four corners of the room so he could see it.

"Take that, you fucking freak," I whispered under my breath, and then I heard a grunt coming from the other side of his bed, and cautiously, I tiptoed around to the other side and found his dog curled up in a basket on the floor.

"Hey, boy," I said, bending down to stroke him and scratch behind his ears. "Where's your owner, hey? Is he hiding from me?"

I heard the click of a door unlocking behind me, and in my crouched state, I turned to see another door—different to the one I'd walked through—open up and Adam come strolling out like he was a model on a runway.

I couldn't speak or move for a few seconds. I felt paralysed. I'd forgotten how striking he was up close. For someone who oozed the kind of intimidation that'd scare most people away, he didn't scare me.

His eyes were piercing, as if every time he looked at me, he wasn't just observing but assessing, claiming, and as he

walked further into the room, he kept that gaze solely on me. Probably to intimidate me, but the intensity he used to stare at me made me feel stripped bare. Warm almost. Like he wanted to know every inch of my body and my soul. Devour me to understand me better but leave me in ruins as a result. His jaw held a dusting of stubble that looked good on him, I couldn't lie, and his mouth always seemed to be twisted in some kind of smirk, like he couldn't wait to be given an opportunity to lash out with his tongue. To create the maximum impact of damage with his brain as well as his body. He had a scar on his forehead that I'd never noticed before, and I had to stop myself from asking about it. I wasn't here to make small talk. He needed to be told that what'd happened today was out of order. He needed to back off. So why was I frowning to myself and purposefully holding myself back from asking about what had happened to cause that scar? Why did I even care?

He stood still for a moment in the middle of the room, and he watched me as I knelt next to his dog. I was rendered speechless for the first time in a long time, and I think he felt the same. Neither one of us knew what to say to start this off. So, I did what came naturally. I broke the ice with an off-hand comment.

“You're lucky you have such a loyal dog. At least you'll always have a friend. So when the rest of the world finds out what an asshole you are, he'll still be by your side.”

I had to tear my gaze away from Adam and focus on the dog. His stare was too intense and unnerving, even for me, and when my put-down made him smile, I had to bite my tongue and think of what my next move would be. He liked the way we bantered, and I had to make sure I didn't play into his hands. I had to be smarter before he tied me up in knots and I ended up feeling like he'd played me, not the other way around. He did have a way of twisting things, a macabre skill of making me second guess everything.

“Why do you think I keep him around?” Adam answered in a low voice, taking a step closer towards me. “I'd trust him over any man I've ever met. He's a friend for life.”

I found his answer kind of sad, but telling, all the same. If I had a dog, I'd probably feel the same way. We were alike in that aspect. We didn't trust easily. But I didn't trust him at all, and so I didn't let his small hint of humanity sway me. I had a job to do, and I needed to get it done.

I gave Tyson one last scratch behind his ear and then stood up, bracing myself for what was about to go down.

"You need to stop." I looked him right in the eye, shutting my brain off with its ridiculous notions about intensity and hypnotic attraction. I think I'd been reading too many of Effy's and Emily's romance novels. I wasn't about to become the weak heroine that falls for the bad boy's charms because of the way he looks at her.

"Stop what?" He cocked his head to the side, a small smirk playing at the corner of his lips that made my beating heart go from fluttering to fuming in a nanosecond. He thought this was a joke. This was all a game to him. He thought that he could play with people's feelings and get away with it. But his days of toying with mine were over. I wasn't his, and I never would be.

"This," I snapped, gritting my teeth and pointing from myself to him and back again. "All this. It stops. Now." He laughed at me and shook his head, which only spurred me on even more. "Don't fucking laugh at me."

"I'm not laughing at you, Olivia. I'm laughing at the fact that you think you can control this." He took another step closer to me. "There is no stopping this. It'll never stop."

I huffed but stood my ground, folding my arms over my chest and taking a deep breath to steady myself. I wouldn't let him intimidate me.

"Can you even hear yourself?" I asked, looking at him with exasperation in my eyes. "Do you know how ridiculous you sound? You're crazy! I can't believe I ever engaged in any kind of response with you. I can't believe I've kept this going for as long as I have. I know I'm partly to blame in all of this, but you can't message me anymore. It's dangerous, stupid,

totally and utterly ridiculous, and it's gone too far." I pointed my finger at him. "You've gone too far."

"I don't think I've gone far enough." He rubbed the back of his neck and that sinister smile appeared again. "I think I did the right thing today. It ended well for me, anyway. It got you here."

"Jesus, will you listen to yourself. You stabbed a guy. Okay, he might be a really shitty guy, but you stabbed him, Adam. Over me. That's not right. And I'm not here for some social call. I don't *want* to see you. I needed to see you to make sure you knew that this is over. This silly little game you think we're playing, it's done. After today, I don't want to ever see or hear your name. You are nothing to me."

My declaration didn't penetrate through any of his walls. Instead, he grinned and replied, "Where I come from, he was asking for it."

"Where *you* come from?" I scoffed. "Where is that exactly? Manson's family? Because as far as I'm concerned, that isn't right in anyone's world. Not a sane world, anyway. Ugh! I can't do this, Adam. Are you even listening to me?"

"Oh, I'm listening," he replied, and the smirk that he'd had since he came into this room turned to a serious stare. "I hear everything you say. But not just with your mouth."

"What the hell are you on about now?"

"I hear when you're nervous," he whispered. "Because you do that thing where you twist your hair around your finger."

I untwirled my hair from my finger as fast as I could and glared back at him. So he knew I played with my hair. Big deal. Didn't everyone know that? But he didn't stop there. He carried on.

"The way you swallow and your eyes dart to the left when you don't know what to say and you need time to think."

I swallowed again. Where the hell was all this coming from?

“The way you put one foot in front of the other and drop your hip to pretend to look confident, but you’re not.”

Fuck, why was he listing all the things I was doing right now?

“And there’s a pulse...” He was standing right in front of me, God knows when that’d happened, and he reached forward to gently graze his finger down the right side of my neck. “A gentle beat... just here, that I always notice when you’re angry.” He leant his face forward so his nose was touching mine. “I hear everything.”

I shuffled backwards, backing myself up against the wall, but not caring in the slightest that I’d probably put myself in a worse position. I needed to get away from him. I had to remove myself from the strange vortex he’d created just now. I couldn’t breathe with him this close to me.

“It’s not gonna stop.” He shook his head, a deadly serious expression on his face as he stalked towards me again. “It’s never going to end.”

“It can and it will,” I stated firmly.

“What are you afraid of?” He tilted his head and frowned at me. “Is it me?”

“I’m not afraid of you.” I huffed out a smile, but I was nervous, and the corners of my mouth twitched, refusing to maintain the grin I’d wanted to give him.

“So you must be afraid of facing your true feelings then? You’re afraid that you want this more than you’ll admit.”

“I don’t want anything from you!” I snapped. “Why would you think I do? Okay, so maybe I’ve led you on a little, and I’m sorry for that—”

“You’re sorry.” He lifted his eyes to the ceiling and shook his head again, then slowly he looked back down at me, and I could tell he didn’t believe me.

“Yes. I am sorry. I’m sorry I ever met you. I’m sorry I replied to that first text. I’m sorry I led you on and made you think that whatever was going on in that sick head of yours

was real. Because it's not. Real that is. I'm not yours and I never will be. The messages, they won't happen again. I won't let you hurt anyone else because of me. You might not have a conscience, but I do."

"A conscience is highly over-rated." He moved back into my space and every inch of my body tensed. "You need to learn to let that shit go."

"A conscience shows you're human, something which you're clearly not." I could tell I was starting to get to him now. Something behind his eyes had changed, glazed over even, like he was fighting a battle in his own mind.

"I would never hurt you," he stated, and I wondered if that affirmation was for my benefit or his. Who was he trying to convince?

"But you do hurt people, Adam." I spoke quietly now, because I knew something inside of him had changed. He was like a wild animal, and I had to tread carefully.

"I hurt people who deserve it." He spoke with conviction, and I knew, deep down, he believed what he did was in some way right.

"But who are you to say who deserves it and who doesn't? You're not God," I said, wondering if this was the turning point. Had I finally made my way through the cracks of his hardened mind?

"No, I'm not. I'll choose hell over heaven any day," he answered.

I looked deep into his eyes, but there was no feeling there. No emotion whatsoever. Dead eyes. That's what I saw.

"I think you're already there," I said quietly, but my solemn response seemed to snap him out of whatever trance he was in, and the fire returned with a vengeance.

"Do you really think you can walk away from me? Do you really think it'll be that easy?" His face started to contort with anger, frustration. He didn't like the way this was going because he knew I was winning.

“I won’t have other people’s safety on my conscience,” I said, standing my ground.

“Ah, there it is again, your fucking conscience. Well, what about this? I can’t have yours on mine,” he snarled.

“What does that even mean?” I frowned, not having the first clue what he was on about.

“I’ve marked you. You’re mine. Most people will stay away from you because they know what’s good for them, but some will want to take a pop. Try to get to me through you.” When he said that, I felt a sharp drop inside of me, like boulders invading my stomach.

“Oh my God. Are you saying you’ve painted a massive red target on my back today?” I was beyond furious.

“I’m saying I’ve painted a ring around you. No one fucks with you.” He smiled, like he was proud of what he’d done.

“What the actual fuck, Adam? No. Enough. No more texts. No more games. No more truth or dare.” I had to leave. We were going round in circles, and he wasn’t listening. Obviously, actions would speak louder than words in this case.

“Do you really think I’ll be that easily dissuaded?” His body was pressed against mine now, and I could feel his chest as he panted out his breaths.

“You don’t have a choice,” I hissed back at him.

“There’s always a choice. And I choose you.”

“I’m not a choice you can make!” I shouted in his face, and calmly, he smiled back at me.

“Oh, but you are.”

He slapped both of his hands onto the plaster either side of my head, blocking me in, and leant his face into the crook of my neck, taking a deep breath as his nose grazed my skin and then buried into my hair.

“I can’t stop, Olivia.” He sighed quietly into my ear. “I want you. I want this... us.”

“No,” I replied through gritted teeth, my whole body tense and alert from how close he was to me.

“Yes.” He moved his head back slightly to look into my eyes. “I know what you need,” he carried on, pushing his face back into my neck, burying himself in my hair. “I know you better than anyone. Your friends think they know you, but they don’t see what I see when you’re at home alone. Or even when your mind wanders when you’re with them and they don’t notice that you’re there in body but not in spirit. You want to be noticed. You need to be cherished. I just want the chance to take care of you.”

I felt the heat of his breath dancing over my skin, causing goosebumps to rise up despite myself. And when I felt the softness of his lips kissing me just below my earlobe, I reacted, placing both hands on his chest to push him away. He didn’t like that, and he smacked his hands back onto the plaster by my head. But when he heard a fierce growl, he started to laugh, dropped his hands by his sides, and looked down to the left of us where Tyson was stood, baring his teeth at Adam in a threatening manner, warning him off.

“Fuck me. I know I said to protect her, but I didn’t mean from me,” he said, reaching forward to try and stroke Tyson into submission, but Tyson only growled louder and then barked when Adam got close to him.

“It’s okay. I’m okay.” I reached my own hand out, and Tyson came to sit at my feet, letting me stroke his head to calm him down. “Do you see? Even your dog thinks you’re an asshole.”

Adam laughed, then the sparkle in his eyes faded and he glared from me to the dog and back again.

“You two are the most important things in the world to me. I couldn’t give a rat’s ass if he goes against me, as long as he’s always guarding you.”

“Adam.” I ran my hand through my hair and gripped in frustration. He wasn’t getting any of this. My whole visit had been pointless. “You don’t know anything about me,” I argued. “This is all so... ridiculous.”

“I know all I need to know.”

“Which is?” I held my arms out to the side, challenging him again. Okay, so he knew little tell-tale signs, but he didn’t really know me, who I was, what my hopes and dreams were. He knew a fantasy that he’d created in his own mind. That was all.

“You fight for other people, just like me,” he replied, looking hopeful. “Only you don’t shout it from the rooftops. You’re a silent assassin, and I’m the loud one.”

“That may be so, but that doesn’t mean anything.” I sighed.

“It does to me. I’ve never met anyone like you before. I can’t walk away.” And I believed him. In his stubborn mind, he could never admit defeat.

“You don’t have to walk away. But I will. And I’m doing it right now.”

I headed for the door and reached for the handle.

“You can try, but I’ll always follow you. I’ll always be there.”

I ignored him, stepping out into the corridor, and sure enough, he followed me.

“So, what now? You’re going to trail me home again? Just like that time at the underpass in Brinton Manor, when I came to tell you to stay away from me the first time?”

“What sort of man would I be if I let you come all the way here and didn’t see you home again?”

“It’s not chivalry,” I said, stomping down the corridor and hearing his footsteps following. “Whatever you think you’re doing. It’s not a kindness, it’s just plain creepy.”

“It’s me. That’s all I can say, Olivia. I will walk you home. And it won’t be the last time. You’re my responsibility.”

“No, I’m not, but you know what? I’m getting tired of arguing this point. If you want to follow me all the way back to my house, then more fool you. But know this, I won’t put

up with your bullshit anymore, Adam. What happened today, with Chase, that never happens again.”

“I don’t do bullshit. I already told you,” he replied with a lightness to his voice.

“Your whole life is bullshit, Adam.” I felt drained by our exchange, and the weight of it all was crushing.

“Whatever you say, sweetheart.” I could hear the smirk in his voice, I didn’t need to turn and look.

“Don’t call me that. I’m not your sweetheart,” I snapped.

“No, you aren’t. You’re my Olivia.”

Oh lord give me strength.

“I give up.” I sighed and made my way out of the Asylum and out of his life.

Chapter Twelve



T rue to his word, he walked all the way home with me. But unlike the last time, I didn't engage him in small talk or banter. There was no point. Nothing I'd said was getting through to him, and by this point, I was done trying.

Once we got to my road and I stepped foot on my driveway, I shouted over my shoulder, "Don't even think about following me to my door. If you do, I'll have you arrested for trespassing."

"It's a better view from down here anyway," he shouted back, and I resisted the urge to engage in another battle of wills. You can't argue with stupid, and his skin was so thick it'd take every comeback I had to penetrate through his walls. Actually, strike that. There was no penetrating through anything when it came to Adam. He was a law unto himself.

I slammed the door shut and then fell back against it. Closing my eyes, I prayed to God that my day had reached the pinnacle of awfulness and it would be downhill from here on in. But when I heard my mum calling my name from the kitchen, I realised that wish wasn't about to come true anytime soon.

"Liv? Honey? Is that you? Can you come in here for a minute please? I need to get you up to speed on some things." That was my mum's code for, I need you to drop everything and run my life for me. My mother would never need a PA in her life. She had me for that.

“I’m coming!” I sighed, pushing myself off the door I was using to keep me upright and then headed down to the designer kitchen that my mother took months to choose but never actually cooked in. Sure enough, when I walked through the door, she was dishing up a Chinese from takeaway cartons. I shouldn’t complain. At least she’d actually thought about feeding her three children.

“What’s up?” I asked, perching myself on one of the bar stools, stealing a won ton from the bag and popping it into my mouth whole.

My mum scowled at my lack of table manners, then her attention turned to my nails and she said, “Olivia, when was the last time you had a manicure?”

I turned my nails to look at them and shrugged.

“A few weeks ago. Why? They’re not that bad.”

“A few weeks?” She gasped in horror. “No wonder you haven’t had a date in ages. How do you expect to attract a decent boyfriend if you don’t take care of yourself?”

I almost choked on my won ton.

“I take care of myself. And who says I want to attract a boyfriend?”

She gave me a pitiful smile and reached across the counter to stroke my face.

“Of course you do. Every girl wants a boyfriend. Maybe not like the ones your two friends chose, but then you’re special. You’re the pretty one. You’ll get one who can look after you. We’ve got to make sure he can keep you in the manner you’ve become accustomed to with your daddy and me.”

My mother was unbelievable. It wasn’t that she was a bad mother, like Emily’s. She certainly didn’t have the motherly instinct, like Effy’s mum did. But I swear, she had a way of cutting me down without even realising it. She could make me feel so small, all whilst trying to big me up. To her, the pretty one meant the one with less brains. I knew that. So my grades hadn’t been as good as my friends. It didn’t mean I didn’t have

ambitions of my own. Ambitions that didn't involve getting married and being the trophy wife.

“Mum, the condition of my nails doesn't mean shit.”

“Language, Olivia. I haven't brought you up to be so crass.” She gave me a filthy look as she sashayed past me, carrying the plates over to the table we had set up for less formal family meals in our kitchen diner. We did have a separate dining room, but she tended to reserve that for when special guests came, so she could show off her matching Versace dinnerware and furnishings.

I took a deep breath and swallowed down the cutting retort I had on the tip of my tongue.

“I'm sorry, Mum. I'll book an appointment tomorrow if that'll make you happy.”

She smiled sweetly back at me. A smile that never met her eyes.

“It will. Liv, you're such a good girl. Have I told you that lately?” she asked.

Here it comes.

She wasn't complimenting me because she could. She wanted something.

“Not since you had that business associate visiting from out of town and you needed me to do the school run every day for Hayden and Oliver,” I replied drily.

Hayden and Oliver were my two little brothers. I loved them, probably more than their own parents. I also looked after them more than Mum and Dad did, which at age seven and eight respectively, wasn't an easy task. Those boys had more energy than a Duracell bunny.

“Well, it's funny you should mention that...” Mum continued.

Here we go again.

“You know it's your father and I's twentieth wedding anniversary this month?”

Yes, because you mention it twenty times a day.

“And...” She went on in her sing-song voice. “He’s booked us onto the most amazing cruise. Liv, I need to show you the brochure after dinner. It makes our usual five-star service look completely lacking. The suite he’s booked is bigger than our bedroom, ensuite, and our dressing room put together. It’s stunning.”

She was giddy like a teenager talking about it, but I knew exactly what it meant for me.

“We thought about taking the boys with us,” she added. “But it’s the middle of the school year. We can’t take them out. If they’re going to be a bother to you, I can always ask Effy’s mum, Jenny, if they can go and stay there—”

“No,” I cut in. “They aren’t a bother. They never are. And I don’t want them going to stop with Jenny and Steve. They belong here. This is their home. I don’t like them being disrupted.”

My mum came over to where I was sitting and placed a kiss on my cheek.

“I knew you’d see it like that. You’re always so selfless when it comes to those boys.”

Someone had to be.

“I’ll make sure the pantry is well stocked, and Daddy will put extra money into your account to cover any takeaways and days out you three have. It’ll be so much fun. Like one big brother and sister sleepover.”

She didn’t need to sell it as some fairy tale. They needed a responsible, caring adult, and that’s what I’d be.

“It’s fine. I have money,” I answered, popping another won ton into my mouth and not giving a fuck what she thought of my manners. I was good enough to raise her sons for her, so fuck it.

“Oh, and don’t forget the school run. And they both have football practice on a Tuesday,” Mum added like she was being helpful.

“Wednesday,” I corrected her. “Their football practice is on Wednesday until five o’clock.”

“Oh yeah.” She giggled to herself. “I forgot.”

That’s because you’ve never been to watch a single practice. I have. I’ve been to most of them.

“Your father always used to wonder why I never employed a nanny when we had those two, but you know, it’s just like I told him, why pay money for someone we don’t know to do it, when we have you?”

She really thought she was complimenting me, and I didn’t correct her. Karma would do that job when she was older and wondering why her children never took the time to visit her. You get out what you put in in this life, after all.

She glided over to the door—in the graceful way she always moved—and called for my dad and my two brothers to come and join us for dinner. I slid off the stool and took my place at the table. There was one positive... looking after my brothers would give me a distraction from the catastrophe that was my life right now. I might be a monumental fuck up, but I was determined that my little brothers wouldn’t take the same route. For them, life would be better.

I’d make sure of it.

Chapter Thirteen



I sat on my bed with the laptop open in front of me. I'd had it on for most of the night, but this morning, I hadn't taken my eyes off the screen. It wasn't just our CCTV that we were hooked up to, Tyler had managed to hack into Olivia's too, and right now, I had a ringside seat to view her back garden and the game of football she was currently playing with her two little brothers.

Her face was glowing, it always did when she didn't wear make-up. And she was wearing grey joggers and a tight white top that turned me on even more than the little dresses she wore. The three of them were laughing as they kicked the ball around and Olivia tried and failed spectacularly to tackle them both to get the ball off them. One of the boys scored a goal and the other ran and jumped up into Olivia's arms and she hugged him. I loved watching her in these moments. She was always at her happiest and most relaxed when she was with her brothers.

The weight of holding him up made her stumble and fall backwards, and they both laughed. The other brother saw what was happening and abandoned his goal scoring victory dance to join in and pile on top of the two of them. I watched, frozen in place as the three of them rolled around on the grass, with Olivia tickling them. I had the biggest smile on my face, and it made me flinch. What the fuck was that all about? I didn't smile. Ever.

The door behind me swung open, and I knew it'd be Colton. Fucker never knocked. I didn't bother to pull my gaze from the screen to greet him, I just snapped, "What do you want?"

"I thought I'd come and see how it went yesterday? You know, with the love of your life. I saw you both leaving last night, and then I got... distracted... by a very persuasive and bendy red head in the communal room. I didn't see you come home. Was the whole stabby through the hand thing a real turn on for her? Did she let you stop the night at her house?" Colton sat down on the bed, and I moved the laptop out of the way.

"Still haven't gotten enough of her, huh?" he said, pointing to the screen.

I wasn't about to explain myself to him, or anyone else for that matter. What happened between Olivia and I was no one else's business. So, I ignored him and carried on watching, hoping my silence would send him packing. It didn't.

"I have a theory. Want to hear it?" he whisper-yelled, trying to act dramatic as he leant his head towards me.

Again, I didn't respond, but that didn't deter him.

"If you want to get to her. I mean really get an in with her... they're your key."

I turned to face him now, intrigued by where he was going with this.

"Those two boys," he said, elaborating further. "They're the key to her heart. I haven't seen anyone else play with them like she does."

Instantly, my back went up.

"Have you been watching her?" I asked, feeling ready to explode and tear him and everything else in this room apart.

"Chill your boots, big man," he replied. "I did routine maintenance on the connection the other week, and I saw her teaching them how to shoot hoops right over there." He pointed at the screen to where a basketball net was attached to

an outhouse nearby. “Seriously though, I wouldn’t do that to you. I know how much you like this girl.” He was sincere, but I still felt pissed off.

“Next time you need to do routine maintenance, I want to be there,” I hissed, recoiling at the thought of anyone else watching her like I did.

“Noted,” he replied, rolling his eyes. “Well, as fun as it must be to sit and watch her play pile-on with her brothers all day in this stuffy room of yours, I have something else which might pull you out of your sour mood.”

“What?” I was going to argue that I wasn’t in a mood, but I’d be lying. Just him being here was setting me off. That, and the fact that he’d seen glimpses of Olivia’s life that I hadn’t.

“We have the number for the mobile phone Karl Cheslin uses in prison. I didn’t want to send the first text without running it past you first,” Colton said.

Hearing that did pique my interest, and I turned to give Colton my full attention.

“What are we waiting for? Let’s get it sent out and start this.”

Colton pulled the soldiers’ mobile from his pocket, the one we used for our game of consequences, and he started to read out what he’d composed for the first message but hadn’t sent yet.

“So far, I’ve got... ‘Welcome to your game of consequences, Mr Cheslin. We are the Soldiers of Anarchy, and we are here to make you pay for being a low-life rapist scumbag who doesn’t deserve to see the light of day. Your time for payback is finally here. Let me tell you how your game is going to work. We are going to set you some tasks. You can choose whether to carry out those tasks or not, but like the game says, there are consequences. If you comply, you live to see another day. If you don’t, you will regret it.’ And that’s as far as I got.” He moaned and his hand that was holding the phone fell limply into his lap. “I didn’t know if we were going to record a video or not. I didn’t even know what

we were threatening him with if he doesn't comply, because let's face it, he's a heartless fucker who doesn't care about anyone."

"But himself," I added.

"I'm shit at this side of things," Colton whined. "That's why you're here. You do it so much better than the rest of us."

"We need a hook," I informed him, wracking my brains to think of what it could be. "We need something to bait him. Has he got any family? Did you find anything when you were doing your background checks?" I usually did all the background checks myself, but since Olivia, my focus had waivered somewhat.

"He's got three brothers. His dad is dead, and his mum moved away years ago to get away from him. But I don't think any of those will persuade him to be a complete prick for our benefit."

"What about money?" I asked. "Businesses? Anything shady there we can use?"

"There is talk on the street that he's been linked to some trafficking shit, but we haven't been able to confirm it yet," Colton said, wringing his hands in his lap.

"Do you think it's a lead? What does your gut tell you?" I was starting to regret not looking into this more myself. I'd have known one way or the other if it was an avenue we could pursue.

"My gut tells me he's got more shade than Ray-bans and he's knee deep in that shit." Colton's response was enough for me.

"Well, there's your answer. Always go with your gut. We'll use the threat of exposing the trafficking. He won't want to lose his shot at probation. He's a coward and he'll do whatever he can to save himself."

I knew enough about men like him to know he'd sell his own mother to get a free pass out of jail and back to his filthy dealings. I guess that's why she'd disowned him and moved

away. She'd already seen the inevitable and she was clever enough to save herself.

Colton started fiddling about with the phone and grimacing to himself.

“Do you want me to write it?” I asked, and his face lit up.

“I thought you'd never ask.” He threw the phone into my lap, and I picked it up and started to compose our first contact.

Welcome to your game of consequences, Mr Cheslin. We are the Soldiers of Anarchy, and we are here to make you pay for being a low-life rapist scumbag who doesn't deserve to see the light of day.

It is time for payback.

And it will be with your blood.

But until then, we have a few things we need from you.

Let me start by telling you how your game is going to work. We are going to set you some tasks. You can choose whether to carry out those tasks or not, but like the game says, there are consequences. If you comply, you live to see another day. If you don't, you will regret it.

“Why should I comply?” I hear you say. I think the parole board would be very interested in the evidence we have involving your role in a certain trafficking ring. Freedom is so close, and yet, we could take it all away. And we will, if you don't do as we say.

We'll be in touch with your first task very soon, but know this, Mr Cheslin... We are always watching.

The Soldiers.

I added our signature cartoon joker at the bottom of the message and passed the phone back to Colton.

“No video this time?” he asked.

“No video. We don't know what kind of phone he has access to inside. Let's keep it simple.”

He nodded and read through the message.

“I like it.” He smiled. “And send. There. That’s gone. Now we wait for the fireworks. Any ideas you want to share about what you’re gonna make him do?”

“I have a few. In fact, you can check if Jake Colt is still in Belbroughton for me. I think he’d be perfect for the first task.”

Jake Colt was a well-known armed robber from Brinton. He was also a very talented tattoo artist, who’d taken to practising his craft in prison to keep his skills on top form while he was in there.

“I doubt he’s been let out. We’d know about it. But I’ll double check,” Colton informed me, standing up and heading for the door.

“Good. And tell him we have a new client coming his way soon. One he’s gonna enjoy marking some fucked-up shit on.”

Later that night, as I was getting ready to leave the asylum, we got a message sent through the soldiers’ phone from Karl Cheslin. He told us to fuck off and that he wouldn’t play ball. It was a standard response and one we expected. So, Tyler pulled a few strings, got a message to a group of inmates in there to pay him a visit to his cell and make sure he knew the soldiers could reach him anywhere.

Why didn’t we just off him in his cell?

Because where was the fun in that?

We were soldiers, we liked battle and we enjoyed the war. He was our prey, and we wanted to play with him. This was what we enjoyed, where we got our kicks. His days were numbered, his cards were marked. But we would have a little bit of fun with him first. This was what we all lived for.

I put thoughts of rapist scum out of my mind as I climbed on my bike and headed to Olivia’s house. I’d had enough of CCTV, and I wanted to be closer to her. She’d been ignoring every one of my messages and I was done with the silent treatment. I wanted to be heard.

Once I pulled into her road, I turned into the dirt track that ran along the back of her house and parked up in my usual spot. Again, I mounted the wall and reached across to scale the fence. Then, I made my way through the fir trees and undergrowth towards the house, seeing a light shining bright downstairs where her kitchen was. As I got closer, I could see her standing and staring in concentration, stirring something on the hob. She looked serene, beautiful. I couldn't tear my eyes away from her.

Her two little brothers came bounding in and beamed when they saw her. She mouthed something to them, and they sat down, clearly doing what they'd been told. Steam billowed in the air as Olivia turned to the sink to drain something, probably pasta or spaghetti. Then she got busy serving their food up and carrying it to the table. The three of them settled down to eat their meal and I felt my heart lurch in my chest.

I wanted that.

I wanted to be sitting there, at that table, with her.

I wanted to be the one that backed her up when the boys didn't listen.

And then a thought suddenly struck me. I wanted it to be my family. I wanted to put a baby in her and watch her grow. See her be a mother. In all my life, I'd never wanted that. Never thought I was father material, but the urge that'd suddenly and spontaneously jumped into my brain totally floored me. Where the hell had that come from? And why wasn't I repulsed by it?

I couldn't take my eyes off that window, seeing her collect the plates afterwards and smile as they each took an ice-cream cone from the freezer and sloped off to their rooms like little terrors who'd gotten away with stealing the cookies. She pretended not to see them, but when she sat down at the table on her own and appeared to sigh, my heart twisted again.

I reached into my pocket and pulled out my phone.

Me: Truth or dare?

She picked up her phone, read my message and put it straight back down on the table. No response. Nothing.

Me: Don't ignore me, Olivia.

This time she kept the phone on the table but tapped the screen to open my second message. Then she turned her phone over, so it was face down. No response, again. I didn't like this.

Me: I'm not going anywhere.

She tried to ignore that she had another message from me, but after a few seconds, curiosity got the better of her, and she picked it up. When she saw what I'd written, she stood up and walked over to the window, but she still didn't reply. I was losing patience, and I didn't like being ignored. So I lifted my phone and took a photo of her standing in her window and then I sent it to her with a message.

Me: I'll always be here.

She lifted her phone up and looked at her latest message, and when she saw it, her eyes went wide. Instantly, she grabbed the cord for the blinds and closed them, shutting me off completely.

I gripped my phone in my hand and took deep breaths, counting to ten to stop myself from marching up the lawn and storming into her house. Then her name appeared on my screen. She'd replied.

Olivia: Is this meant to scare me?

Me: I'm not here to scare you. I'm here to protect you.

Olivia: You have a funny way of showing it.

Me: But I am showing it.

I waited, but the next response never came. I'd had all I was going to get out of her tonight. And when I saw her bedroom curtains close only minutes later, I knew she wasn't in the mood to play. It didn't matter. Just knowing she was safe in there was enough for me.

For now.

Chapter Fourteen



I tried to forget that Adam was out there somewhere, watching what I was doing. To be honest, I was more annoyed for my brothers. How dare he watch us like that, invading on our private moments together. I contemplated calling the police, but as always, I ignored that urge. He was too clever, and the police—in my experience—were pointless. They'd never find him, and their incompetence would just irritate me. So instead, I chose to block him out. He'd get bored eventually when he wasn't getting the reaction he wanted. Wasn't that how they told you to deal with bullies?

I sighed, thinking about the mess that was my life right now. It was Thursday night, and unlike my friends who were off out with their significant others, I was at home, looking after my brothers. It wasn't that much of a hardship. They mostly played on their X-boxes and then, when I told them to brush their teeth and go to bed, they did. They rarely made a fuss. Not like I used to when I was their age. But still, it was a sorry excuse for a life by any nineteen-year-old's standards.

Once they were both tucked in bed and I'd switched their lights off, I made my way to my own room. My curtains were firmly closed, and I flopped down on my bed, debating whether to watch a Netflix box set or give myself an extra treat courtesy of Ronnie. It didn't take long for me to think fuck it, I deserved to feel good about myself after everything that'd happened lately, and I took my trusty friend out of my top drawer.

I settled back on the bed, making myself comfortable and closed my eyes, letting Ronnie work the magic that always came whenever he was out to play. But for some reason, it wasn't happening. I tried to zone out and picture my favourite fantasies to see if that'd help. The one where I'm at the gym, on my own in the changing rooms, and some guy comes in and starts talking dirty to me, telling me everything he wants to do to me in the showers, but nope. That didn't work. So, I changed it up to the one where I meet a faceless stranger in a hotel bar, and we decide to go to his room. Sometimes there were other guys waiting for me when I opened the door. That one was usually a hit, but after a minute or two, I realised it was a non-starter too.

I was beginning to lose patience with myself, so I decided to pull out the big guns and go with the one where I stumbled across a hidden biker gang's lair, and they take me. The only girl in a room full of horny oversexed men, and yet... Ah! Nothing. Fuck it. I threw Ronnie onto the bed next to me and gritted my teeth, feeling totally and utterly useless. I needed to relax, shut my brain off and go with the flow. Let it come naturally. Let my imagination take over.

I reached for Ronnie again and closed my eyes. This time, I made slow, sweet circles and delicate grazes over my clit as I imagined myself lying right where I was, listening to the rustle of the leaves outside, the swish of the breeze as it blew through the trees. I imagined my curtains billowing as the wind blew them through the open window, and then, a noise in the darkness.

He was here.

Slowly climbing through my window like a thief in the night, ready to take what he wanted. Dressed all in black, with his hood pulled down low to hide his face.

I didn't stop, and he stood still, watching me, taking deep breaths as he saw me pleasuring myself, on display for him without a care in the world. Having him watch me was the biggest turn on, his eyes focused on the way I was playing with myself, his tongue darting out to lick his lips and his breathing irregular and desperate. He wanted me, and I wanted

to orgasm so badly, but I wanted him to enjoy it too. I wanted him to get off on seeing me like this.

When he made his way towards me, my breath caught in my throat, and I felt myself start to pulse, the heat between my thighs growing more intense. Suddenly, without a word, he took Ronnie out of my hands and threw it down on the bed, climbing onto the mattress and crawling over me like a caged lion that'd just been set free. He grabbed my thighs, yanked me down the bed to where he wanted, and forced my legs open wider. And then his mouth was on me. His tongue swirling over and around my clit as I arched my back, crying out at how fucking amazing it felt. He clamped his whole mouth over me, and the suction sent my brain spiralling. I couldn't speak, I could barely move, but the feelings, holy fuck, the feelings were better than anything I'd ever felt before.

His mouth sucked, licked, ate me like he was a starving man, and when he pushed his tongue into me, I whimpered, feeling the familiar burn of my orgasm building, but so much stronger than I'd ever known.

I looked down at him, seeing his face buried between my legs, and I grabbed him, pushing him forward, riding his face like my life depended on it. His tongue trailed back up to my clit and when he sucked hard, I screamed out, fisting the covers next to me and coming harder than I'd ever come before. But it didn't stop, my clit was throbbing and beating so hard I couldn't cope with the intensity, and I came again, my legs shaking as I totally lost control. I had multiple orgasms, the strongest and best I'd ever had, and I panted, feeling the sweat trickle off me onto the bed sheets.

I was gasping, quivering, struggling to come out of my hallucinogenic orgasmic state, but when I did, I looked at Ronnie discarded on the bed, and then at my fingers that were soaked. The window wasn't open, and the room was in total darkness.

What the fuck was wrong with me?

I started to feel disgusted with myself. Ashamed. Had I really just fantasised about my stalker breaking into my

bedroom and giving me oral? What sort of fucking freak did that make me? And yet, thinking about it made me tingle. I needed to make sure no one ever found out about this. That was one fantasy I had to keep hidden.

Forever.

Chapter Fifteen



I woke up the next morning, and the weight of shame still hung heavy in my heart.

What the hell had I been thinking about last night, picturing him in that way?

Of all the fantasises I could've had, that was the one that worked?

Shoot me now.

I glanced at the clock on my bedside table and saw that I'd overslept. I needed to get the boys ready for school, and there was no time to spare. Jumping out of bed and throwing on some clean underwear and a summer dress, I began tying my hair up as I marched out of my room and started shouting for them to get up and get dressed. Hayden's door flew open, and he stood there gawping at me, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"We're late, come on. Get ready for school," I chastised him as I flung Ollie's door open and found him sitting up in bed.

"You need to get up, mate. Get cleaned up and put your uniform on. It's a school day and we've all overslept."

"But I don't need my uniform today," Ollie proudly informed me.

"Why?" I folded my arms and gave him the 'don't bullshit me' stare.

“Because it’s Ancient Greece day at school. I have to go dressed up as a Greek.” He spoke with such pride and excitement, but I just stared at him, not quite believing what I was hearing.

“Greek day? You have to dress up as a Greek? In what? What Greek outfit do you think I have that I can magic up in the next fifteen minutes?” The morning—that’d started out as a shit heap—was quickly turning into a catastrophic pile of crap. “Seriously, Ollie, you couldn’t have told me about this last night?” I turned to face Hayden, who was loitering guiltily in the doorway. “And you? Do you have to dress up as a Greek too?”

Hayden shook his head and his cheeks reddened as he said, “Mine is next week. And it’s a Roman Empire Day.”

“Ugh! Well at least I can order something online for that. But what the fuck am I supposed to do now?”

They both gasped at my use of the f-word, but that was the least of my worries. I glared at Ollie, and his little face dropped, tears welling up in his eyes.

“Bud, don’t cry. We’ll sort something out. It’ll be fine,” I said, crouching down to give him a hug, but not believing a word I was saying. I opened my mobile and googled Ancient Greeks kid’s dressing up clothes, and when I saw the white togas and the sashes, I figured that maybe I could make it work.

“Listen,” I said, gripping him by the arms. “Go and brush your teeth, have a wash and brush your hair. I’ll be back in a minute, and we will make you look like the baddest Greek that’s ever lived.” I stood up and headed for the door as Ollie darted into his ensuite bathroom. “And you, Hayden. Scoot.” I shoed him away. He was the older of the two, and Ollie needed my attention more this morning.

I went into my parent’s bedroom, cursing my mum for not telling me about this before she left. There must’ve been some correspondence sent home or something on the school newsletter about this. But there was no time to wallow and complain. I had a job to do.

I rooted through her drawers and found one of her extra-large white pillowcases, a blue silk pashmina, some gold belts and a gold headband. Then I headed down to the kitchen and grabbed the scissors from the drawer, cutting out a hole for Ollie's head at the top of the pillowcase and then two holes at the sides for his arms to fit through. Once that had been taken care of, I ran back upstairs, charged into Ollie's room and threw everything down onto the bed.

"Now, this might be a little short, so maybe put a white T-shirt and your white football shorts on first," I told him, and he got busy doing just what I'd asked. He was always such a good boy.

Once he was standing in front of me in his little white outfit, I put the pillowcase over his head, draped the blue pashmina across his shoulder—to fall down to his hips—and then I tied a gold belt around his waist to hold it all in place.

"Do you still have your brown sandals from last summer?" I asked him, and he nodded and pointed to his closet.

I crawled over and grabbed them from the pile on the floor. Then, I slipped them onto his feet and fixed the buckles. He went to move towards the mirror, but I stopped him.

"One last touch, bud," I said, tying the gold headband around his head like the photos I'd seen on Google. "There. Now go and look." I gestured to his mirror.

He walked over to check himself out and when he gasped and fist pumped the air, I almost burst into tears. God, I loved him.

"This is awesome. I look so cool," he said, turning to check himself out from every angle.

"He really does," Hayden piped up from the doorway, dressed neatly in his uniform.

"Just call me super Liv!" I sang, pushing myself up from the floor, deciding to leave the mess of the beds for later. "Come on then. We have to go!" I clapped my hands to get them moving.

All three of us ran downstairs, and I grabbed their school bags and the lunch boxes I'd made up for them last night and we headed out.

When I pulled onto the carpark opposite their school a few minutes later, I felt pride ripple through me. All the kids in Ollie's class were dressed up, and my Ollie's outfit was way better than most of theirs. I'd done a good job. Maybe I wasn't such a monumental fuckup after all?

"Have a good day, kiddos!" I shouted as they both jumped out of the car and made their way through the school gates.

And then I sat there, contemplating what else to do with my day after the whirlwind morning I'd just been through. I could go home and clean, but then, I couldn't be arsed. Both of my best friends had classes, but I'd already dropped out of my business course after I found it to be the most depressing way to spend my days. I still didn't know what I wanted to do, but my dad had told me to take time off to figure it out. Only problem was, the answers weren't coming to me. I needed to do something to clear my head. Go somewhere to try and figure out what the hell I was doing with my life.

Chapter Sixteen



I watched her drop the boys off at school, then I followed her on my bike as she seemed to drive aimlessly through the streets of Sandland. Eventually, she pulled up in the carpark of the local park and got out. I parked my bike not too far away from where she was but kept my distance.

There was a little boating pond in the middle of the park with benches around the outside, and she sat down on her own, staring out at the water and the ducks that were gliding across the surface, pecking at old crusts of bread that'd been thrown out to them. I took my place under a tree that was set back from the main play area, and I saw her, sitting in what was becoming a crowded park for this time in the morning, with dog walkers, joggers and older couples taking a stroll, but she was all alone. She looked lonely, and it made my heart hurt.

I don't know how long I stood there, watching her, but my legs grew tired, so I leant up against the trunk. I was trying to figure out why she was sitting there, lost in her thoughts.

Was she thinking about me?

A few times, she took her mobile out of her handbag that was rested at the side of her on the bench, but every time she tapped the screen, she put it away again moments later. There were no messages. Was she waiting for me to text her?

I noticed an ice-cream van a little way down the path, and I turned to a young kid who was with his mate, kicking a ball around. They should've been in school, but who was I to

judge? I rarely spent any of my own childhood in education. No one wanted me there and that suited me just fine.

“Here. Mate,” I called out to one of the lads, and they both stopped what they were doing, scowled at me, then their eyes went wide when they saw who I was. They must’ve had parents who’d warned them about the soldiers. Either that, or they were originally from Brinton. I didn’t recognise them though, so I assumed my reputation had proceeded me.

“See that van over there?” I nodded down the path. “I want you to go and buy an ice cream. A decent one, all the works, yeah. Then I want you to take it over to that girl sitting on the bench. Do you understand?” I took my wallet out of my back pocket and handed them some cash. “If you do that, I’ll let you keep the change. Fuck me over and I’ll cut your balls off, take them home, and feed them to my dog.”

“We know who you are,” the taller of the two said, taking the note off me like he thought I was a rabid animal who might bite. “We won’t fuck about.”

“Good. Oh, and when she asks, you can’t say it’s from me.”

“Who shall we say it’s from?” the little one asked, frowning.

“I couldn’t give a shit. Say it’s from a secret admirer, I don’t fucking care, just don’t say it’s me.”

They both nodded and then traipsed across the grass like their legs were made of lead as they went right up to the ice cream van.

I watched them buy an ice cream, all covered in sprinkles and shit, and then pocket the change, smiling to themselves. They glanced across to where I stood, hidden in plain sight, and their grins faded. When they made it over to Olivia, she turned, and as they thrust the ice cream towards her, she reeled back, obviously questioning what the hell was going on. There was some discussion, and they shook their heads. I bet she’d told them to eat it themselves, but eventually, she took it and

they left her, scurrying out of the park as fast as they could without looking back.

Olivia held the ice cream like it was a bloody grenade and scanned the park, looking all around her. Then, an old lady sat on the far end of the bench, and she held it out, offering her the ice cream instead. The old lady shook her head and Olivia stood up, her shoulders sagging as if she was sighing, and the ice cream ended up in the bin right next to her.

Fuck it.

I couldn't even send her a shitting ice cream without her losing it. I wasn't having that. So I pulled my phone out and fired off a message.

Me: You won't even eat a bloody ice cream?

She fished her phone out of her bag and read my text, and what happened next totally blew my mind. She stood in the middle of the park and shouted at the top of her voice, "I don't want your fucking ice cream! It sucks! And so do you! Leave me alone!"

The old lady stood up and scurried away in disgust. The ice cream vendor shouted something back about his ice cream being the best Sandland had to offer.

And me?

I could not stop laughing.

This beautiful, stubborn, infuriating girl was crazy. My kind of crazy. And I was so here for it. I fucking loved it.

She stomped out of the park and over to her car, getting in and slamming the door before punching her steering wheel. And I couldn't resist sending one last message.

Me: I love it when you're angry.

Chapter Seventeen



What was the matter with me?
I was losing my damn mind over an ice cream.

Okay, so it wasn't just about the ice cream... I was stressed and irrational and couldn't even think straight. But still, an ice cream fucking broke me.

Why was he still following me?

What was so special about me?

I took deep breaths as I sat in my car, trying to calm myself down and I turned the radio on to hear the Kim Dracula version of Papparazzi playing like a flipping omen to my misery. Maybe Kim Dracula had a point though? He would follow me until I loved him, or until he'd got what he wanted. Wasn't that what all guys were like? The ones I'd encountered certainly were. The minute you opened up, or opened your legs, they lost interest and you didn't see them for dust. I'd bet money on him being the same.

I turned the radio off, not really feeling the whole stalker vibe of the song, and I suddenly felt guilty. He'd bought me an ice cream. He could have grown a pair and given it to me himself, but if I looked at it from a different angle, wasn't he just trying to do a nice thing?

No, Liv. Stop it. There are no nice gestures and sweet moments where Adam Noble is concerned. He's a soldier, a

vigilante, he kills people for fun and everything he does has a sinister, gratifying, self-satisfying edge to it.

I shook my head and then banged it back against the head rest behind me. I felt like I had an angel and a devil sitting on both my shoulders and even they couldn't agree on what was happening in my life. The lines of good and evil were blurred, and I couldn't see the wood for the trees.

I tried to rationalise it in my mind. I'd spoken to him, warned him off, and he still wasn't deterred. I'd tried ignoring him, that didn't work either. Maybe I needed to take a different avenue? Maybe I needed to meet him halfway. Invite him in a little. Show him what I was really like. Maybe then he'd lose interest and move on. I needed to change the plan, rewrite the rules. So far, I'd played into his hands. It was time he played into mine, because let's face it, if there was one thing I usually did really well, it was scare guys off and get left high and dry. What was it Chase had said? I wasn't the girl they stayed with. I was dispensable. Maybe all Adam needed was to see that.

So, I took my phone out and I sent him a message.

Me: I'm sorry I threw your ice cream away.

The dots indicating that he was responding danced around and I held my phone in a death-like grip, waiting to see what he'd reply.

My Stalker: Why did you throw it away? It had sprinkles on it.

I laughed, despite myself. Nice try at using a bit of sarcasm to diffuse the situation.

Me: Because I was angry and I'm tired. Tired of these games.

I wanted to make sure he knew that this wasn't a joke for me. It was about so much more than sprinkles and ice cream cones.

My Stalker: I only wanted to make you smile. You looked so lonely.

I was floored by his response. It wasn't like Adam to be so candid. The angel on my shoulder gave a little whoop as if to say, 'See? It was a kind gesture.' While the devil huffed, 'Always manipulative. He's even using your emotions to blackmail you.' I was so confused I didn't know which one to believe.

Me: How can I be lonely when I have you following me around?

I was lonely. But I would never admit that, not even to my two best friends.

My Stalker: Sometimes, the loneliest people are the ones who surround themselves with others. You forget that I know you, Olivia. I get you.

He thought he got me. But how could he when I didn't even get myself?

Me: You think you know me, Adam, but really you don't. I'm a horrible person. I speak my mind and people hate it. I spend way too much time on my appearance. I'm shallow. If you got to know me, you'd realise that.

I thought I'd hit him with the truth. Tell him exactly what sort of a person I really was.

My Stalker: That's what you want people to think, and it breaks my heart if you actually believe that to be true. Do you? Because I don't see it that way. You speak your mind because you care. If people don't see that then more fool them. You are beautiful with or without all the shit you put on your face because beauty is more than just a pretty face, its kindness and love. You do things for other's even though they don't know about it or acknowledge it. They don't thank you because they take you for granted. You're not shallow, Olivia. You have more depths than you'll ever let anyone see. I know you, but I want to know more.

He'd just managed a slam dunk with that response.

Me: Where is all this coming from?

My Stalker: I've watched you. I understand you. I appreciate you.

That last statement, those three small words, they floored me more than anything I'd ever heard in my life.

He appreciated me?

The guy, who'd shown me so many different faces the other day in his room at the asylum that I'd grown dizzy, appreciated me. How could that same guy send me a message like this?

I really wished it was true. All I'd ever wanted was to be appreciated. But I never was. Not really. My friends were amazing, they were like family to me. But my real family didn't appreciate me. I was a convenience to them, but not an asset. Even my dad, when he'd told me to take time out to think about what I wanted to do with my life, hadn't said it because he thought that's what I needed to hear. He just didn't have the time to sit with me and work out what it was I wanted. He threw money at the problem. Paid me off so I was out of his hair. And my mum? I wasn't even hired help; I was a step below that.

Me: You talk a good talk. Well... text that is.

My Stalker: I speak as I find. I don't do bullshit.

I was starting to feel uncomfortable with his honesty, and so I decided I'd hit him with a curveball of my own.

Me: Truth or dare?

It didn't take him long to shoot back his reply.

My Stalker: Truth.

Me: Tell me something you don't like about me.

This one I had to hear.

My Stalker: I don't like that you put yourself down. It's almost like you do it to get in first, to beat the rest of the world to the punch. I wish you could see yourself through my eyes.

Oh fuck. That was so true. I was an ace at proving to people that they couldn't belittle me, because I'd get in there first. I was the master of self-sabotage.

Me: Nice answer. You should change your career from psycho killer to psychotherapist.

I replied, trying to stay aloof and not let him know that these new, deeper messages were getting to me.

My Stalker: Tell me something you don't like about me.

He asked, and I was going to go with some catty comeback to put him down, but the little angel on my shoulder told me, 'Use this to your advantage. Coax the devil from the darkness into the light.'

Me: I don't like that you hide behind text messages and in the shadows. If you want to get to know me, come out into the open and do it.

My finger hovered over the send button, wondering if poking the sleeping bear was such a good idea. But I knew I had to at least try. Force him out of hiding and then maybe all this would come to an end.

My Stalker: Maybe I will.

I didn't know what to reply, so I put my phone back into my bag. I'd leave the ball in his court and see what happened next. I'd cast my net, thrown out my line. Now, I just needed to reel him in, and then throw him back once he'd experienced what being caught by me really meant. Once he found out what I was really like, he'd run a mile.

Chapter Eighteen



Later that night, I was at the club, trying to show a bit of fucking effort and pull my weight. I didn't want to be here. I wanted to be wherever Olivia was. But I couldn't leave the others to do everything, not all the time. I'd slacked off enough lately, and that thought was starting to piss me off.

I stayed on the ground floor, making my presence known but checking her CCTV on my phone in case I was needed. Devon was circling around too, and the other three were keeping things ticking over on the first floor. Their domain.

A little later, Colton came down to join me, and we headed out the back for a bit of fresh air and a break from the pumping bass that seemed to resonate through your whole body like an electric shock. It felt good to get away. Sometimes I wondered why I'd agreed to this club business, when in reality, I hated other people, socialising, and all the other shit that went with it.

"I feel that as your best friend, I need to tell you something, man to man," Colton said as we stood in the darkness.

"I'm not sure I want to hear this, and who said you're my best friend?" I answered, sticking my hands in my pockets and savouring the cool night air.

"Okay, so you might like Devon a little more, but let's face it, I'm the one that entertains you the most." I glanced to the

side where he stood and just gave him a raised eyebrow. No words were needed. “Whatever. Someone needs to help you out because you’re doing a really shitty job on your own.”

I turned to face him now, intrigued with where he was going with this. He certainly had balls to call me out on a supposedly shitty job.

“Go on. Spit it out,” I snapped. If he dared to question my status in the group, I was ready to show him exactly why I was still number one.

“This whole stalker thing you’ve got going on, it’s not working, mate. You need to face facts. If you want this girl, you’ve gotta try a different way. Trust me. Most girls, they don’t actually like that sort of psycho shit. They prefer flowers and sweet talk. You know, maybe even getting asked out on a date. So far, Liv’s had about as much say in your relationship as our kills have in their final breath. I think you need to ditch the whole game of consequences thing with her and tread a little softer. Save the scary shit for when you’re working with us.”

I frowned. I didn’t like being questioned about anything, but right now, I was starting to feel like a lost cause.

“What do you mean, tread a little softer?” I hadn’t ever expected to get advice about women from Colton, but I did feel like I was banging my head against a brick wall lately. Nothing I did seemed to get through to her. She was mine. But she didn’t want to be.

“I mean woo her. You know what you should do?” Colton said, pointing his cigarette at me as we stood in the darkness in the grounds at the back of the asylum.

“Not a clue.”

“You should invite her here.”

I shook my head in exasperation, thinking his suggestion was the worst thing I’d ever heard. She’d never come here, not when it was me inviting her. Or would she? She had said she wanted me to come out of the shadows. Fuck it. What did I know?

“This is the last place I’d want to invite her. And have every guy in there all over her? Not gonna happen,” I stated, even though my mind was still mulling over the possibility.

“I don’t mean in there,” Colton scoffed, thumbing behind him towards the ground floor. “I mean a special invite. Maybe one of the rooms.... Ooo, I know, the dark room. She might not know it’s you. That might even sway her decision.”

He thought he was funny. He wasn’t.

“If I was to invite her, and if I did ask her to the dark room, I’d make damn sure she knew it was me.” And she knew me well enough to know it would be me too. I’d never let anyone else touch her.

“So, go for it. Ask her.” He wiggled his eyebrows, like it was that simple.

“I don’t know,” I answered, pissed off at my own indecisiveness. I always knew what to do. I didn’t like feeling like this.

“I think you do, and one thing I never took you for was a coward.”

That got my back up.

“I’m not a fucking coward, I’m just biding my time. I’ll get her where I want her. I just want to do it my way. This isn’t a game, Colton. She means a lot to me, and I want to make sure that when I go all in, she’s right there with me. I have to do this my way.”

He shrugged his shoulders and took another drag of his cigarette. “Your way? Watching her through a video screen and being fifty paces behind her at all times? It all seems a bit lame if you ask me.”

“I didn’t.”

“And it’s going at a snail’s pace. How long has it been since you first met her?”

“A few months, not that it’s any of your business.” I could hear the demons in my head rearing up again. I didn’t like being questioned and challenged.

“And in all that time you haven’t even kissed her. Or anyone else for that matter. Your balls must be so blue you could snap them off and use them as Christmas decorations. Probably get more use out of them too.”

“Not that I expect you to understand, but it isn’t all about sex for me. I want more than that.”

He laughed at me for saying that, but I didn’t care.

“Do you want to marry her?” he teased. “Have little Adam and Liv’s running around, growing up to be even more fucked up than we are?”

“If I had kids, I’d do a damn sight better job than our parents ever did,” I replied without giving a second thought to my response.

“Oh my fucking God! You’ve actually thought about it. Jesus. This is more serious than I first thought. You need help, my friend.” Colton shook his head as he whistled his disapproval.

“Not from you I don’t. But thanks all the same,” I stated, turning my back on him.

“Oh, man.” Colton sighed. “I think we need to get back out there and do some more soldier shit. I think you’re starting to grow a vagina, you’re more of a pussy than she is.”

He laughed but I snapped, slamming him up against the wall and getting right in his face.

“You think I’ve gone soft? That I can’t still rip your fucking head off and shove it up your ass?”

“Not at all,” he squeaked as I gripped his neck tightly. “I love that you’ve still got it. Squeeze a bit tighter. Show me you really care.” He blew me a kiss and I snapped back to reality, letting go of his neck and shoving him away from me.

I’d had enough fresh air for one night, and now my chest felt even tighter than before. So I left him gasping and spluttering where he stood, laughing at my retreating form as I headed inside. I stalked across the dance floor, nudging people

out of the way as I did, and headed straight for the stairs and the real sanctuary that was my room.

When I got there, I slammed the door shut, making a sleeping Tyson jump up from his bed and start barking at me.

“Don’t you fucking start,” I said, pointing my finger at him. “If you could talk, you’d be giving me grief about her too. Fucking traitor.”

He growled and whined a bit, then settled himself back down into his bed, turning his back on me and going back to sleep.

“I can’t invite her to the dark room,” I said to myself, trying to make some sense of the jumble of emotions in my head. “If I’m gonna tread lightly, maybe I could ask her to come to the club. Build up to the dark room.”

I didn’t stop to think or talk myself out of it. I grabbed my phone and sent her a message.

Me: You want me to come out of the dark? Then meet me halfway. Come to the club this Saturday.

I stared at my phone, willing a reply to come through, and when it didn’t, I threw it down onto the bed, feeling angry that I wasn’t getting what I wanted. I needed an answer now. I didn’t like being made to wait.

But then I backed-up, feeling like an ass for being the way I was. Maybe I did need to change, for her. I knew one thing for sure, I really needed to cool down, and I figured a shower might help. That, and maybe I could drown myself in my misery, but when I heard my phone vibrating, I flew across the room to get to it.

Olivia: Okay. You’re on. I’ll see you on Saturday.

My heart did a flip in my chest and nerves like I’d never felt before ran right the way through me.

She’d said yes.

She was going to come here.

For me.

Me: I'll see you before then, but Saturday will be something else.

I replied, feeling the doubt and fury from earlier wash away faster than any shower.

Olivia: I'm counting on it.

The next morning, I went into our games room, feeling lighter than I had done for a long time. The other four were all there, lounging around, and from the looks on their faces, they'd been waiting for me.

"You're looking very pleased with yourself," Colton joked. "Who did you slay last night to achieve that level of happiness?"

"None of your fucking business," I spat back, and the others grinned to themselves.

"We've had word from Jake Colt in prison," Devon piped up. "He's ready to do whatever work you want on Cheslin. What exactly is it that you want him to do?"

I smiled to myself. This day was just getting better and better.

"I want to fucking mess with his head," I answered. "I'm gonna get Jake to tattoo the words 'Rapist' on him."

"Ooo, where? On his forehead? Or better yet, on his cock and balls?" Colton asked excitedly.

"How could it be on his cock and his balls?" Tyler asked, shaking his head in exasperation at Colton.

"We could give him a choice. Maybe spread the letters out a little?" Colton added, pointing to his own crotch as if he was demonstrating the logistics.

"No choices," I stated. "He gets it somewhere visible. I'll let Jake choose where. He's the one that's got to pin him down

and do it. There'll be none of the usual hygiene either. I want him to make it as painful as possible."

"Is he gonna use a rusty knife to do it?" Colton asked.

"I couldn't give a fuck if he uses a teaspoon. The more pain the better," I replied.

I saw the soldier's mobile sitting on the side by the kettle, so I went over and flicked the switch to make a brew then picked up the phone to send the message to Cheslin. Part one of his game was about to start.

I'm glad you finally saw sense and agreed to comply with our game, Mr Cheslin. Your first task is a simple one. There is a friend of ours in Belbroughton, Jake Colt. Your task is to go and see him today. He has a special gift that he wants to give you, courtesy of the soldiers of anarchy.

We shall await confirmation from Jake that the task was completed to his—and our—satisfaction. If you succeed, you live to play another game. Fail, and we will ensure that you never see the light of day from the nonces' maximum-security wing we get you sent to. Solitary will be a dream you will aspire to after a few hours on there. But hours won't be enough. It'll be months, years that you'll be stuck there. So think hard, Mr Cheslin. How are you going to play this hand?

We'll be in touch.

The Soldiers.

The kettle switch flipped off, letting me know it had boiled, and I put the phone down and got busy making a cup of coffee.

"Anyone else want one?" I asked, and the stares I received back made me ask, "What?"

"You never make the coffee," Devon replied.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say you got lucky last night." Colton smirked at me.

“I did.” I turned my back on them so they couldn’t see my smile, thinking about my Olivia and the fact that I was going to get the chance to see her and really be with her on Saturday. “But it’ll be a cold day in hell before I ever tell you about it.”

Chapter Nineteen



It was Saturday, and I'd planned everything down to the last detail. I'd booked a babysitter for my brothers. I'd bought the perfect outfit that was sexy but not too revealing, just enough to look classy. I'd even booked an Uber and had a glass of wine on the go, to give me some Dutch courage before I went out. What I hadn't planned for was my nerves. I couldn't stop shaking, and that wasn't like me. I was always the one who gave no shits when it came to going out. Take me as you find me, that was my motto. But that motto had got up and fucked off, leaving me with crippling self-doubt and anxiety.

What the hell was I doing?

I hadn't told anyone else I was going to The Sanctuary tonight. Em and Effy had invited me to a couple's night in, swearing that I wouldn't be the third wheel as they watched some crappy film with their other halves over popcorn and fluttering eyelashes. I thanked them for thinking of me, because despite everything, they were trying to include me in their night. But I didn't need any more reminders about how tragically single I was. I could get that by sitting in my own living room, and I'd probably get to watch a better movie too.

But now, I was starting to second guess everything. Maybe going on my own wasn't such a good idea after all? It wouldn't be the first time I'd gone out alone, that wasn't the problem. It was the nerves, and the fact that he'd be there. I didn't know if I really and truly had the balls to go through

with this. What was the matter with me? What had happened to the girl—who months ago—had stood her ground in front of all of them and told them to fuck off?

I tried to put my fears to one side and carried on getting ready. I left my hair down and kept my make-up simple, neutral. The dress I'd chosen was a red strappy one. When I'd bought it, I liked that the colour would make me stand out. I loved red. But now that I was standing in front of my mirror, I wished I'd gone for something black. Something that'd help me blend into the darkness that they all lived in.

I heard the doorbell go and I fluffed my hair one last time, took a sip of my wine, touched my shell necklace for good luck and grabbed my clutch bag, heading for the door. When I got downstairs, Hayden had already let Charlotte, our babysitter, into the house and he was talking ten to the dozen about all the things they'd done since they last saw her. Ollie stood scowling at me from the doorway to the living room. He didn't like that I was going out and when Mum and Dad were away—like they were right now—he liked to use a little emotional blackmail to try and get me to change my mind and stay at home. It was working pretty well tonight.

“I think your Uber just pulled up as I got here,” Charlotte informed me, thumbing to the front door behind her. Instantly, the nerves suddenly made my stomach roll over.

“Guess I'd better go then.” I leant down to kiss Hayden and then turned to do the same to Ollie. “Be good for Charlotte. Go to bed when you're told and if there's any naughtiness, I will be cancelling your football practice on Wednesday.”

They both groaned, but Charlotte smiled.

“They'll be fine. They're always golden. Go and have fun. Don't feel like you've got to rush home.”

I nodded and took a deep breath, then stood tall, throwing my shoulders back and heading out to my taxi.

I got the Uber to drop me on the corner of the road where the asylum, or The Sanctuary as it was called now, was situated. I could see groups of people walking towards the entrance, and I wanted to join them, to hide amongst strangers to try and give me the courage to walk through the doors. Luckily, I managed to tag onto the back of a group of girls who were teetering on their heels towards the line of partygoers. Up ahead, I could see the doormen checking people's IDs and vetting who was going in. I shuffled nervously on my feet and tried to calm myself by opening my bag and checking my phone. When I did, I noticed a message from him.

My Stalker: Let me know when you get here.

That made me chuckle to myself. Like he'd need me to tell him that I was here. I'd bet his CCTV had already caught my presence. He didn't need to be informed about anything. He was always one step ahead.

The line started to move forward, and as we got closer, I saw one of the doormen crane his neck to look past the group of girls I was trying and failing to blend in with, and when he saw me, he beckoned for me to come out of the line and over to him. Fuck. He'd probably been given instructions to escort me inside. Why did my legs suddenly feel like they were filled with lead?

I kept my head down and ignored the rest of the queue as I went up to the door. The doorman didn't make eye contact with me, he just muttered, "No need to wait in line," and then ushered me into the foyer, where the music was already so loud I could barely hear myself think. And I needed to think. Think about what I'd say and do. Why was I so nervous? I never got this nervous about anything.

I glanced around me, trying to see if I could spot any of the soldiers, but as crowded as the foyer was, it wasn't the main room. Why would they bother to waste their time out here?

I bit my lip, contemplating whether to send him a message, but I opened my bag then closed it again, deciding to keep a low profile for a little longer. Shit, I felt like a cat on a hot tin roof, and I was beginning to regret every decision I'd made

about bringing him out of hiding, letting him get to know me and coming here to this club tonight. Fuck it. I needed a drink.

Pushing my way through the crowds, I headed into the main room and stood at the door, looking around at all the masses of bodies dancing, drinking, and enjoying their night—unlike me. There was a bar on the other side of the room, but as I started to plan my move over there, I noticed Devon Brady a little way off, staring right at me. More rocks hit my stomach, and I turned away from him, only to see Colton King coming down the stairs and grinning at me like a motherfucker.

I couldn't do this.

I was like a wild animal cornered by the prey.

What the hell had I been thinking agreeing to come here?

Instantly, I spun around, and with long purposeful strides, I went back to the front doors, pushed past the doormen and ran outside.

“Are you okay, love?” one of the doormen shouted out after me, but I didn't stop. I couldn't. My heart was racing, and my legs were on automatic pilot, programmed to get me the hell out of there.

As luck would have it, the Uber that I'd used earlier was still sat there, thumbing through his phone, and when I opened the back door of his car, he looked up and was just about to tell me to get out, but he recognised me, frowned and then told me, “You should really ring up and book. I'm not supposed to take bookings off the street.”

“I have to leave,” I gasped. “Please. I'll pay double.”

He nodded, obviously realising that it was futile to try and argue with a fraught woman like me, and he put his phone into the holder on his dashboard. He knew a woman on the edge when he saw one. Then he started the engine up and pulled away from the kerb, making the rocks in my stomach reduce to rubble and the bees return to butterflies. I didn't look back to see if any of them had followed me out. I didn't even want

to check my phone. All I could do was close my eyes and wish myself back to my house, to the safety of those four walls.

I thought I could handle this, but I was way out of my depth. I wasn't ready to take on the soldiers. Not now. A few months ago, I'd faced off with them in a bloody alley way and felt like I'd come out on top. Now, I was this ridiculous nervous wreck.

What had happened to me?

Had he really ground me down that much?

I needed to have a word with myself. Find my inner warrior and start behaving like the badass bitch I always thought I was. Tonight, I'd bottled it. But I had to learn from my mistakes. I couldn't show weakness like that again. If I did, he'd eat me alive and spit out the bones. If I was going up against the best of them, I needed to be better.

Chapter Twenty



I knew she was here. I'd seen her location from the tracker on her phone, and the thought of her being so close made me feel things I never thought a man like me could ever feel. But when I left my room, ready to head downstairs, I saw Colton and Devon coming towards me, both of them with grave expressions.

"What's the matter?" I asked, knowing that the answer would be one I didn't want to hear.

"She left," Devon replied.

I took one look at Colton, and I blurted out, "What the fuck did you do?"

He held his hands up in defence and with a pleading look said, "Me? Why would you think this has anything to do with me? I didn't do shit."

"Well, there must've been a reason she left."

"How about she changed her mind," Colton added. "Or maybe she just wasn't that into you."

I lurched forward to knock him the fuck out, but Devon stood in my way, and then snapped, "Shut the fuck up," at Colton.

I clenched my fists, ready to punch the first thing I could find. I'd gone from nervous, excited energy to wanting to rip someone's head off, instantly. That switch in my head had truly lost any kind of function now. I couldn't even breathe

properly I was so angry. I took my phone out of my pocket and fired off a message to her.

Me: Why did you leave?

But when no response came, I stormed across the corridor where we were standing and into the games room, slamming the door in my anger and causing it to smash into the plaster—and probably leave a dent.

“No need to take it out on the furnishings,” Colton added, following me in, and then his smile faded when he saw the scowl I was throwing his way.

“This is fucking bullshit. What happened?” I sat down on the sofa and leant forward, putting my head in my hands. “I want to know everything.”

Just then my phone buzzed in my pocket, and I made a grab for it, desperate to know what the fuck was going on.

Olivia: I changed my mind.

I huffed out a laugh and almost threw my phone against the wall in frustration.

“She changed her mind,” I said, choosing instead to throw it onto the sofa next to me. “She changed her fucking mind.”

“I’d say”—Colton rolled his eyes—“From where I was standing it looked like she couldn’t get away fast enough.”

He wasn’t being helpful, and I repeated my earlier sentiment. “I want to know everything.”

“There isn’t a lot to tell,” Colton replied. “She took one look at us and shot straight back out of the door. It’s a shame really, I was looking forward to some fireworks. Liv is a real firecracker, and she always keeps us on our toes. I like that about her.”

“I don’t think it was that straight forward,” Devon added, and I swung my attention in his direction, needing to know more.

“What do you mean?” I asked, desperate to try and make some sense of all of this.

“What did her message say? Did she give any other explanation?” Devon asked.

“No. Nothing. Just one fucking line. *I changed my mind.*” I gritted my teeth, trying to breathe through the storm that was raging in my head and making me want to smash the whole building to smithereens.

“If I took a guess, I’d say there was more to it than that.” I looked up as Devon spoke, willing him to give me something, anything that would help. “She came in all dressed up. She looked...” He glanced at me and then winced, hoping his next words didn’t unleash my inner beast. “Beautiful. Her hair was down, and she was wearing a red dress that made her stand out. But when she saw me by the bar and then noticed Colton on the stairs, her face turned...”

“What?” I asked, needing to know every little detail.

“She looked petrified. Like an animal caught in a trap. She was scared, frightened. I’ve never seen her look like that.”

“I think I’d have to agree with Devon,” Colton added. “She did seem more jumpy than usual. Didn’t she come on her own too?”

“I think so.” Devon nodded in agreement, and I hung my head in shame.

“Fuck. I fucked up.” I ran my hands over my face and the storm inside turned from rage to anger and disappointment in myself. “She came alone... What the fuck? What was I thinking, inviting her here? It was a stupid plan.”

“I think that ship has already sailed,” Colton said, sitting down next to me. “No point stressing over it now. What’s done is done.”

I looked up at Devon, standing over me with pity in his eyes, and then at Colton sat next to me.

“Why do I feel like I’ve lost her when she was never really mine?”

“This is a bump in the road.” Colton sighed. “You’re down but you’re not out.” Then he stood up and stated, “Have a beer.”

You need something to dull reality, and you're really not thinking straight. Alcohol might help with that."

I ignored him and let him carry on fussing over beer in the fridge as I let my guard down and said what I felt in my heart.

"I thought this could be different. I saw something in her and I had this stupid idea that maybe I could have what other people had. I've never cared about anyone other than myself and our work here, but she gave me something I've never had before. She gave me hope. But I'm a fucking loser to think anything could change. What would a girl like her see in a fucking psycho like me?"

"This isn't like you," Devon said, frowning at me like he couldn't quite believe what I'd become. "You don't quit. You can't. Maybe you just need to talk to her? Find out where her heads at. If you want to make something out of this, have a proper relationship with her... you need to meet her halfway."

"Devon talks a lot of sense," Colton added, bringing three beers over and passing one to Devon before sitting back down again, next to me. "You invited her here, into our club, and she did come. Okay, she didn't stay for long, but she intended to. She wanted to see you, but for whatever reason, she got spooked."

"So, what do I do now? Because short of drugging her and keeping her hostage here, I'm at a loss."

"You go to her," Devon stated. "You meet her on her terms, on her territory. Somewhere she feels comfortable. Who knows, you might find out there was an entirely different reason that she left, but until you ask her, face-to-face, you won't know. Text messages don't tell you how a person feels, actions and facial expressions do. For all you know, 'I changed my mind,' could mean something else entirely."

"Can I add my two pennies worth?" Colton asked, and I nodded. "Give her some space tonight. Then, go and see her tomorrow, but don't give her the opportunity to bail again, just turn up. Show her you won't ever give up. Because despite that little speech you just did, I know you, and I know you won't quit. You're not programmed that way. None of us are."

But sometimes love makes us do crazy shit.” He shrugged as my head whipped to the side to glare at him. “Don’t ever apologise for it either. We’ve all been there.”

I chose to ignore the fact that he’d used the L word and I asked, “Tomorrow... I go to her and what? What the fuck am I supposed to say?” I felt like I was losing my mind. I was better at forcing the issue, not dancing around shit. I didn’t know how to do this.

“You don’t have to say anything. Just be yourself. Spend time with her. Let her get to know you,” Devon said.

“If it’s meant to be, it’s meant to be,” Colton added and pushed the beer he’d left on the table in front of us closer to me. “Now drink. The tension you’re creating in this room is really starting to get to me. I don’t cope well when one of us has a crisis. Especially when I can’t fight my way out of it.”

I took a swig of the beer even though I didn’t want it. I was so highly strung I could barely taste the bitterness as it went down.

“Just to take your mind off things, we had a message from Jake Colt about an hour ago. He managed to send a photo through of the tattoo he did on Karl Cheslin.” We both turned to Devon, intrigued by this welcome distraction.

“Please tell me he did it somewhere really fucking painful,” Colton said, sitting forward in anticipation.

“He said it was tough. Cheslin didn’t make it easy for him, but he managed to put it across his chest.”

Colton huffed. “I’d have preferred the cock and balls, but I guess that’ll have to do.” Then he announced, “Let’s send the next task. We don’t want to fuck about, and besides, it’ll give you something else to think about, Ad.”

I did need something else to channel my energy into tonight.

“Okay,” I told them. “I’ll send the next task.”

“What is it?” Colton grinned, rubbing his hands together.

“Something that’ll paint a massive red target on his back and make the last few weeks inside a fucking nightmare for him,” I said as I started to type out the message.

Congratulations, Mr Cheslin. I have been informed that you passed the first test in your game of consequences. I hope you like your new tattoo.

Now for task number two. You probably already know of Charlie Dunn. I’m sure his reputation at Belbroughton proceeds him. Your task is to approach Charlie, insult him in public, I’ll leave the finer details to you, and then you have to start a fight and lose. We have people on your side of the fence watching to see if you complete this task, and if you succeed, you will live to play another game. Fail, and it won’t just be Charlie Dunn who you should be afraid of. Trust me.

Until next time.

The Soldiers.

Charlie Dunn was a mean motherfucker. He’d spent more time inside Belbroughton than he had out. He was someone you didn’t want to mess with, and if Cheslin took a beating in front of the rest of his wing, it’d be open season on his ass. His life wouldn’t be worth shit in there. It was a risky task to set him, but he had to decide which of two evils to go up against. And as I’d always said, I liked a challenge. It was more fun setting a task when you didn’t know the outcome.

I stood up and took my beer off the table, leaving the other two behind and headed back to my room. Once I got there, I pulled my phone out. I knew I should’ve listened to Colton and given her space tonight, but when had I ever listened?

Me: I wish I’d seen you tonight.

I sipped my beer and watched as the dots danced, then stopped, then danced again. She didn’t know what to type back to me.

Olivia: It’s late and I’m tired. What do you want?

I could almost feel her exhaustion through the phone. She was still pissed about whatever had gone down earlier

Me: I want to know that you're okay. And I want you to know that I'm not going anywhere.

I hoped she'd read my message and hear the sincerity in my response. I might be a fuckup ninety-nine percent of the time, but for her, I did want to make the effort to be better.

Olivia: I'm fine. Good night, Adam.

It was short, to the point, and not at all the response I wanted.

Me: Truth or dare?

I would try anything at this point to keep her on the phone.

Olivia: Sleep.

She messaged back, but I wouldn't be deterred.

Me: That's not one of the options.

Olivia: Fine. If it gets you off my phone quicker, truth.

I smiled, glad that she was responding. If she'd blocked my ass, I wouldn't have trusted myself to stay sane.

Me: If you could have any superpower, what would it be?

I kept the question light, figuring she'd had enough stress courtesy of me tonight.

Olivia: Easy, flying. I'd rock that shit. And I'm guessing yours would be invisibility.

I liked that she seemed to be calmer, but her take on me was way off.

Me: You guessed wrong. If I could have any power, I'd want to be able to read people's minds, because right now, I haven't got a fucking clue what is going on in yours, but I want to. I want to know everything, and maybe then I could do something right in your eyes. I could make you smile.

Olivia: Is this your way of saying sorry? That you want to make amends?

Me: I want to know you, Olivia. I want to make you happy.

Olivia: If you wanted to make me happy, you'd let me go to sleep.

Me: Okay, fine. But this isn't over. I will make whatever happened tonight right. I don't know exactly what went wrong, but I'll sort it.

Olivia: Goodnight, Adam.

I knew I had to let her go for tonight, and in a way, I felt glad that I'd gotten things off my chest. The tension I felt was less. It was still there, but I could breathe a little easier.

Me: Sweet dreams. Think about me.

Twenty seconds later, I got my reply.

Olivia: Never.

Chapter Twenty-One



I didn't sleep well, and I hated myself for it. Why was I letting him get to me? That wasn't who I was. My days of letting men walk all over me finished a long time ago. But just lately, I felt like those walls were crumbling, struggling under the weight of everything that was going wrong in my life. I needed to get myself some stronger bricks. Maybe reinforced steel to rival Fort Knox would probably be better if I was going to go up against Adam Noble and his soldiers. Anything less would be suicidal.

After spending most of the day doing some heavy-duty procrastinating, I decided to get my shit together and get the boys ready for their sleepover at their friend's house. They had better social lives than me these days, and they were off to spend the night in a tent in one of the lad's back gardens. Better them than me. I wasn't the camping type. Give me a warm bed and heating any day.

I rolled up their sleeping bags and added them to the mountain of stuff they were taking that was piled up by the front door. Behind me, I could hear a scuffle going on as they bustled out of the living room and headed down the hallway.

"Did you remember to pack your toothbrushes?" I asked them both as they came bounding towards me. I pulled the blind at the window to the side and spotted their friend's Mum's car pull into our driveway.

"Yes, Livy." Ollie grinned, then his face took on a serious, solemn stare as if he was mulling over something. "Will you

be all right on your own tonight? Without us in the house? You won't get scared, will you?" The concern etched on his face made my heart melt.

"I'll miss you, but I'll be fine." I ruffled his hair then did the same to Hayden. "Don't worry about me. Go and have fun and then come back tomorrow and tell me all about it. I expect to hear all the ghost stories, what sweets you ate, and what you did to scare each other with those torches in the dark. I want to know everything."

"But what are you gonna do?" Ollie asked, still not looking convinced.

"I'm going to lie on the sofa in my PJs and watch love stories while eating all the pizza to myself." I gave them both a fake, self-satisfied smile that made them wrinkle their noses.

"I'm glad I'm not staying. Kissy films are lame." Hayden grimaced and pretended to puke on the floor.

"See, nothing for you here tonight. Now go. Jayden's mum is ready for you, look." I pulled the door open and waved as the boys shot down the drive to meet her. Guess I was going to have to lug the bags to the car myself then. Typical.

Five minutes later, I closed the front door and stood in the hallway, not liking the silence that greeted me. Maybe a love-free movie marathon would be better. I really didn't need to sit and depress myself anymore with love stories and reminding myself what I was missing out on. So, would it be Marvel, DC, or should I go really overboard and do a Fast and Furious night?

I ran up to my room and put on my favourite pyjama shorts set. Then I made my way down to our den, which my mum preferred to call the cinema room, and I started to scroll through the channels. I preferred to call it the den because it was dark, had two huge wrap around sofas, and when you drew all the curtains—like I had done now—you felt like you were hidden away from the world. Perfect for my current mood.

I decided I couldn't be bothered to cook, so I pulled up the delivery app on my phone and ordered a fully loaded meat pizza with a side of wedges and then lay back, waiting for the doorbell to rouse me out of my pit as I watched an episode of American Horror Story before starting the main movie with my food later.

When the doorbell rang a little later, I turned the T.V. off and made my way to the front door, hoping it wasn't Gavin who was on delivery duties tonight. I'd used up every fake smile I had in storage already today and I had no more fucks left to give. But when I opened the door, my jaw hit the floor. There, filling the whole frame of my doorway and holding three pizza boxes in his hands, stood Adam.

"What the actual fuck? Are you moonlighting as a pizza delivery guy now?" I couldn't believe what I was seeing. The lengths this guy would go to just to get to me was insane. Not to mention, I was standing in my pyjamas. Not my best look, but then, who was I trying to impress?

"Only for you," he said, standing his ground and burning me to the spot with the intensity of his eyes.

"What does that even mean?" I replied, trying not to show that I was feeling thrown and totally unnerved by him being here, at my house, on my fucking doorstep.

"It means I told the actual pizza guy to fuck off. I didn't want him here." He smiled and cocked his head to the side. "Aren't you pleased to see me?"

"Jesus Christ, please tell me he isn't pinned to my fence with your knife too?" His eyes darkened as I said that, and I couldn't confidently say that Gavin, or whoever had turned up at my front door, had escaped unscathed tonight.

"That reminds me, I need to pay that Lockwood fucker another visit." From the look on his face, he meant it too.

"No, you don't. If you go anywhere near Chase bloody Lockwood again, I will never forgive you. And I mean it, Adam. Stay away. He might be a weasel but he's nothing. A

nobody. I couldn't give a fuck about him, but I don't want any more trouble. Do you hear me?"

"I'll think about it," he said, but from the pensive look he was giving me, he was still debating that issue.

"You'll think about it. Great. Now, give me my pizza and fuck off." I reached forward to try and grab the boxes, but he stepped back, keeping them out of my reach.

"Fuck off?" He gave a low, disgruntled laugh. "And here was me thinking we might take this opportunity to get to know each other."

"I'm not letting you in," I said, folding my arms over my chest, determined to stand my ground. When he didn't respond, I huffed and then made another grab for the pizza. It was pointless, he wasn't going to give it up.

"No entry, no pizza, I'm afraid." He shrugged like he felt bad about the ultimatum he was giving me, which I knew he didn't.

"Then I'll go without. It's probably gone cold now anyway, after standing outside here, arguing with you. See you around," I snapped, trying to close the door on him, but he put his foot in the way so I couldn't. He was being his usual persistent self, and yet, there was a softness to him now. His eyes had a new, playful sparkle, and his smile was, dare I say it, sincere?

"Look. Olivia. I'm just here to say sorry for whatever happened last night, and to maybe, if you'll let me, spend a bit of time with you. No funny business. No games. Just two people, with nothing better to do right now except eat pizza and... talk."

He was being down to earth, and I had to admit that my plan to drive him away by letting him get to know me would be easier if it were on my terms, in my comfort zone.

"I'm not sharing my pizza with you." I gave him the under the lashes stare that meant I was deadly serious and watched as he smirked back at me.

“You have three boxes and I know for a fact there’s no one else in there with you. Stop being selfish.”

Was he serious?

“Selfish? Are you fucking kidding me?” He smiled again and a little voice inside my head said, ‘*You’re so screwed,*’ while my stomach twisted over, thinking about what that smile was doing to me. “Ugh! Fine. You can stay for the pizza. But that’s it. The minute you try anything, I will kick your ass out of here.”

The way his smile widened, I knew I was most definitely screwed.

“Do you have your Louboutin’s ready just in case?” he joked, and I gave a fake laugh back, rolling my eyes.

“I’ve got more than Louboutin’s. Don’t try me.”

I opened the door wider to let him in, and he stepped over the threshold like he was a vampire who’d just been invited in but was still cautious in case the powers of my home compelled him back onto the driveway. I shut the door and then walked off back to the den, not bothering to make small talk, and he followed, not talking either.

Funny, but I hated silence. I always liked to fill the void with inane chatter, even when I was with my friends and family, and yet, I didn’t feel that need with him. I felt at ease as I was. Well, as at ease as I could be with him behind me. My stalker. My opponent in this battle of wits.

I sat on one of the sofas and he made his way round to the other one, staying opposite me and just far enough away that it wasn’t threatening. He placed the pizza boxes onto the table in the middle of the room, and as he opened them, he started to frown.

“Why do you have two side orders of wedges?” he asked, and I stifled a laugh. Bloody Gavin and his wedges of eternal hope. Did he really think that was the way to a girl’s heart?

“I like wedges.” I shrugged and leant forward to grab a box. “But you can have the other box. Contrary to popular belief, I do actually share.”

He shook his head and chuckled to himself, then opened up the largest pizza box and grinned wide. “Meat. Love it. I knew you wouldn’t be a plain margarita or a fucking pineapple princess.”

“I’m no princess. I’m a queen,” I spat back, raising my eyebrow to warn him not to challenge me.

He nodded but didn’t respond, then he turned to look at the T.V. screen that was on standby.

“What are we watching?” he asked.

“I was thinking I might try *10 Things I Hate About You* or *Happy Death Day*, maybe *Natural Born Killers*, or I don’t know, *She’s Out Of My League*?”

I smiled smugly to myself, but he didn’t bat an eyelid, just settled back into the sofa, chewing on his pizza slice and said, “Yeah, sounds cool.”

I glared at him as he stared at the black screen then slowly turned to look at me. The way his eyes bored into mine made me feel hot, uncomfortable under his gaze, and the cocky confidence from seconds ago seemed to drift away as I sat forward, fumbling to pick up a pizza slice.

“I’m not here to watch the movie, but it’ll be good to have background noise,” he added, and I ignored the butterflies in my stomach that were making it hard to chew and swallow.

I switched the T.V. back on and the credits for *American Horror Story* were running. From the corner of my eye, I could see him smiling to himself, and I huffed, not bothering to address the fact that my tastes were probably more like his than I wanted to let on.

I scrolled through the movies, intent on putting on something that’d bore him to tears and get him to leave, but then I stumbled across *Reservoir Dogs*, and I couldn’t resist. I loved that movie. I didn’t care if he did too. This was my house and I’d watch whatever the hell I wanted to.

He didn’t comment on my choice of film, but as the movie progressed, I could see him watching me at certain points, seeing how I reacted. We didn’t talk through the film, but we

didn't need to. I was starting to feel surprisingly relaxed, and from the way he put his feet up and lay back on the sofa opposite me, he did too. When I found something funny, I could hear him laugh at the same time. His feet tapped out the rhythm of the soundtrack in the same way my fingers did. It was strange, but we seemed to have fallen into some weird alternate universe where we were in sync with one another and almost... connected in some way? I'd never expected to feel like this around him, like my soul was at peace, but I did. Wasn't that the craziest oxymoron ever? The violent, vigilante stalker made me feel a calmness I'd never experienced before. Life was certainly surprising.

Chapter Twenty-Two



It had just gotten to the part where Michael Madsen does the dance while cutting off the guy's ear, and I turned to see her reaction. In the dark, I noticed she had her head slightly tilted to the left, and her hair partly covered her face. So, I sat forward in order to see her better, but when she didn't move, I got up to go over to her.

She had fallen asleep.

I knelt down in front of her, but she didn't stir. It looked uncomfortable, the way she was sleeping in a sitting position, so I put my arms around her to lower her gently, so she was lying down, and I picked her legs up to rest them on the sofa. I didn't want her to wake up feeling stiff and aching.

Her hair still covered her face, and carefully, I tucked it behind her ear out of the way. Looking down at her, seeing her mouth open slightly, and hearing the gentle rasp of her breaths made the twisting sensation in my chest tighten. She was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen. Her blonde hair made her look like an angel, and it was so soft—all I wanted to do was sit here all night and stroke it. I used the back of my finger to touch her cheek and sighed at how amazing her skin felt, like velvet. Perfect.

She was wearing an off-the-shoulder top and pyjama shorts, and I couldn't stop the devil inside of me from touching her bare thigh, running my hand down to her knee, but I pulled away when I felt her stir and sigh. I didn't want to do anything that she wouldn't be comfortable with, and I knew

a hand on her leg was overstepping the mark. I wasn't ever going to be that guy. I might be a stalker, as she liked to call me, but I knew I could never take advantage of her. I may be a motherfucker, but as I always said, I was a motherfucker with a code. She was mine to protect.

I saw a fluffy blanket folded up in the corner of the sofa, so I grabbed it, shook it out and then draped it over her. Once I knew she was settled and comfortable, I went back to my own side of the room. But I didn't take my eyes off her.

Watching her sleep was the most peaceful feeling in the world. And I suddenly realised, that kill switch in my head, the one that went from psycho to simmering, it wasn't even on right now. The voices that were usually a loud screech or a dull roar, they were quiet. She did that. She centred me. And I knew in that moment, that I would never walk away from her. What started out as an obsession had become so much more. She was everything. She was my lifeline. My reason for being.

She was the one.

Chapter Twenty-Three



I opened my eyes, first of all feeling confused about where I was, and then realising that I must've fallen asleep watching the film last night. Panic struck me like a knife to the stomach as it dawned on me that he'd been here. He saw me asleep. I shot up into a sitting position, and when I looked over to where he'd been sat, I had to do a double take. He was asleep too, sitting back slightly with his arms folded but his body at ease.

Adam always seemed to have a permanent scowl or look of disdain on his face, but now, in sleep, his face didn't hold any of that anger. There was no tense frown or hardened jaw, only soft lines and peace.

He was beautiful.

Like cover model beautiful.

His jaw was strong and had that dusting of hair that always looked so good, it made me want to reach out and brush my fingers down it. His mouth was full and looked like it was curled into a seductive smile as he slept.

Was he dreaming about me?

I scoffed at my ridiculous thought, then silently, I slipped off the sofa and crawled across the floor, feeling an overwhelming urge to be closer to him.

Kneeling in front of his sleeping form, I could see the scar on his forehead, and I couldn't stop my hand from lifting up to touch it. The moment my finger connected with his skin, his

eyes shot open and he grabbed my wrist, like I was a predator and he'd just been alerted to the fact that he was my prey.

"I didn't mean to wake you," I whispered as he released my wrist from his death-like grip and started to sit up, wriggling his shoulders to release the knots that he'd created by sleeping in such an awkward position. "How did you get the scar on your head?" I asked him because, as always, when I was nervous, I couldn't control what came out of my mouth.

He rubbed his hands over his face, and I moved from my kneeling position to sit next to him.

"I got this a long time ago," he said, touching his forehead and then shrugging. "It's no big deal. Just a present from one of the many foster fathers I had growing up. I think, if I remember right, this one was courtesy of an iron fireplace poker and my inability to play quietly while he was watching the cricket on T.V."

"I'm so sorry to hear that." I hung my head, realising there was a lot more to his story than I'd probably ever know.

"It is what it is," was all he said in response. I could tell that he wore his scars like a badge of honour. I also knew the scars he held inside were probably the worst ones of all.

"Well, in the words of my favourite heroine, Harley Quinn, 'Don't feel ashamed of your scars. It just means you're stronger than the thing that tried to hurt you.' Or something like that." I laughed at how stupid I sounded, but he didn't laugh. He didn't even crack a smile. Just stared at me, and then, as if in slow motion, he reached out to cup my face and leant forward like he was going in for a kiss.

I couldn't help it. I shot backwards, moving away from him, and then, in my embarrassment, I blurted out, "Don't come any closer. I haven't brushed my teeth."

He hung his head, but this time, he smiled to himself and said, "Like I give a fuck."

He didn't seem embarrassed, but I was, so I stood up, brushing my pyjamas down and feeling like I needed to get away to compose myself. The last thing I'd expected was to

wake up and find him still here. More than that, he was trying to kiss me, with my morning breath. I couldn't cope with the way that was making me feel, so I told him I needed to get ready and made a beeline for the door to escape.

"There's some spare toothbrushes, paste and deodorants and stuff in the guest bathroom. First door on the left as you go up the stairs," I told him, the words jumbling out like I had verbal diarrhoea. "My mum always keeps them there in case we get surprise overnight guests." I internally cursed myself. Like he needed to know that.

"Thanks," he said, but his voice sounded hollow, defeated maybe?

"I don't mean to sound rude, but you need to leave after that. My brothers could be home any minute and I don't want you here when they come back." I couldn't seem to stop myself this morning. I was on a roll.

"I'll leave when I'm ready," he said, his voice devoid of any emotion.

"It's not your choice, Adam." I turned in the doorway to look at him. He needed to understand that this wasn't negotiable. "They're only little."

"And what the hell do you think I'm going to do to them?" he snapped.

"Nothing. Ugh!" I sighed and threw my head back. "It's just a conversation I'd prefer not to have with them right now. They have enough going on."

He nodded but his face remained stoic.

"Fine. I'll leave. But I'll have to meet them one day."

I frowned but I didn't have the energy to argue with him. The tension and anxiety I felt thinking about when they'd come bounding through that door had already settled into the pit of my stomach. I knew what light sleepers they were when they weren't in their own beds, and I didn't need any more complications this morning.

Going up to my room, I started to undress for my shower, and then the realisation that he was here, in my house, while I was naked and about to climb into my shower, hit me. So I clicked the lock into place on my bedroom door and got busy getting myself ready for the day, trying to fight the nervous energy coursing through me.

When I headed back downstairs moments later, I found him sat at the breakfast bar in the kitchen, drinking a cup of coffee like he belonged here.

“Time to go,” I said, pulling my hair into a ponytail and avoiding his gaze.

“Can’t I finish my coffee first?” he asked, making no effort to move, lifting the cup slowly to his lips.

“No. You can’t. Get a Starbucks on the way home.”

He laughed and put his coffee cup back down on the counter.

“But I wouldn’t get this warm welcome at Starbucks.” He spun around on the stool he was sat on to face me, and I stood still, staring at him, not quite sure what to say.

When he reached his hand forward and brushed his thumb across my bottom lip, I realised I couldn’t say anything. He’d put me under a fucking spell again, and I didn’t like it. Or did I? I wasn’t used to being like this—dumb struck and awkward. It felt like he was holding all the cards, controlling everything, and I needed to get a hold of myself. Show him why I was his equal.

Slowly, I tilted my head back and I repeated my earlier statement. “You have to leave.”

He sighed and his hand dropped back into his lap.

“Always fighting,” he said as he pushed himself off the stool and stood up.

He went to walk towards the hallway, but I stood in his way.

“Not out the front. They might be coming down the driveway. You need to go out the back way,” I said, ushering

him towards the patio doors that led to our garden.

Surprisingly, he didn't put up much of an argument, and when I opened the doors for him, he stepped through and turned to say something, but I didn't give him chance to speak. I slammed the door shut, closed the blinds and took a deep breath, relieved that finally I could breathe a little easier again.

I walked over to the coffee machine and started to make myself a cappuccino. His coffee cup sat on the counter like a guilty reminder of what had happened, of how I'd invited him into my world, and when I heard a banging on the back door, I almost dropped the cup I was holding in fright.

"What the fuck now?" I whispered under my breath and considered ignoring it, but I knew if I did, he wouldn't go away.

I flung the door open to find him stood there, eyes boring into me and his chest heaving like he'd run a marathon to get from one door to another.

What the fuck was wrong with him?

Before I could say another word, he stepped into my space, grabbed my face in both of his hands and he kissed me. A rough, hard, possessive kiss that told me he'd had enough of holding back.

I held onto his arms as his lips covered mine, and my body responded like the traitor it was. I couldn't push him away even if I wanted to. His kiss was hungry, and I was here for it. I leant into him, meeting his hunger with my own, and when I gave a low moan, he moved his hands from my face to wrap his arms around my waist and pull me closer. I curled mine around his neck and opened up to him. His tongue laced with mine, tasting me, teasing, making me forget where I was. To hell with little brothers and family commitments, my body wanted to drag his upstairs and find out if his promises of annihilating me were true.

His tongue worked mine perfectly, his lips demanding and skilful. Just feeling him so close, smelling him, losing myself in him, it was all driving me crazy. An overload of senses that

turned my brain into mush and made my sex starved body crave everything he had to give me.

His hands slid down to my ass, kneading me and pulling me closer to him. But when his hand moved to the front and popped the buttons on my jeans, I broke the kiss, panting and shaking.

“Not here,” I gasped, pushing his hand away. “I can’t.”

“But I need you,” he demanded, rolling his hips against mine to show me exactly how much he meant it. He pushed his forehead against mine and looked deep into my eyes. “You know this is going to happen.”

I didn’t need to answer, the noise of two little boys shouting and bellowing my name down the hall as they burst through the front door broke the spell, and I put my hand on his chest, forcing him out of the doorway. The look of pure desire on his face as I shut the door on him sent a shiver through my whole body. He was my stalker, and yet, if I had the chance, I’d probably open that door back up and throw caution to the wind.

Yep. It was official.

I was screwed.

Chapter Twenty-Four



I never thought I'd be jealous of two little boys, but here I was, staring at her closed door, wondering why the fuck I wasn't breaking it down after a kiss like that?

That fucking kiss.

I felt like it was the kiss I'd been waiting to experience my whole life.

Being with her soothed my soul. Sleeping in her presence was the best and deepest sleep I'd had since I was a kid. But kissing her? Having her in my arms? There were no fucking words. It was everything.

And she kissed me back.

She put her arms around me, pulled me to her, and kissed me back like she wanted it as much as I did. She might've shut the door in my face and told me to leave, but there was no way I could ever walk away from her. Not now. Not after that. She was ingrained in my soul, etched into my whole being. Cut me open and you'd find her name tattooed over my heart. She fucking owned me, and I couldn't wait to own her too. Make her mine in every way possible.

I stayed outside her back door, hearing her laughing with her brothers. But when my phone vibrated and I pulled it out to see a stream of missed calls and messages from the soldiers, I knew I had to go back to reality. My Olivia would keep. I had eyes on her all the time, anyway. We'd made headway last night and this morning, and I was all for building on that,

pulling her further in to my world. But I also had responsibilities that I couldn't ignore. I had to get back to the asylum.

“Well, it's all right for some, out all night, sowing their wild oats while the rest of us wade through the shit that gets thrown our way,” Colton announced with a sly grin on his face as I walked through the door of the games room.

“If you need me, you know where to find me,” I snapped back, not in the mood to deal with his shit today.

“We do. But it helps if you actually answer when we call. Your phone isn't just for sending love messages to Olivia, you know? Shit, that thing is your bat signal,” Colton added dramatically, throwing his arms out and then sighing when I didn't react.

“What shit are you talking about?” I asked, sitting on the sofa and scanning the room to gage the atmosphere. “What happened?”

“Nothing. Just a text from that Cheslin fucker to let us know he got the shit kicked out of him in prison last night and he's currently on the medical wing,” Devon informed me.

“Sounds like he's on easy street,” I added, wondering why this was so important they'd bombarded my phone with messages and calls.

“Exactly! We need to hit him now, while he's weak. We haven't got long before he gets out and we need to keep the game going for a little longer,” Colton whined. “I've missed this shit. It's fun.”

“What do you plan to do next?” Will asked, propping his feet up on the table in front of where he sat and lazing back, like he was waiting for someone else to do all the work.

“I say we challenge him to drop the soap in the showers. Go old school.” Colton's eyes lit up at the thought. “Or better yet, he becomes someone's bitch.”

The others laughed, but it wasn't a joke to me. This guy had hurt a little girl. Destroyed a family. He needed to pay for what he'd done and then some. She was fourteen fucking years old. If anyone was going to inflict mind numbing pain on this fucker, it was going to be me.

"No showers, no fucking about. This is serious," I said, pulling my phone out of my pocket. "We've scarred him, put a target on his back, and now he needs to do something for the poor sods who're stuck in there with him, having to breathe the same putrid air as him."

"Which is?" Will widened his eyes waiting for a response.

"He needs to smuggle in shit. Cigarettes, food, whatever the fuck Jake and Charlie say the inmates want. He's gonna get it for them," I stated.

"But he hasn't had a visitor in years. How the fuck is he gonna manage that?" Will replied.

"That's not my problem." And I meant it. I couldn't give a rat's ass if he failed. Whatever happened, he was still going to get ripped apart by the soldiers. His challenges changed nothing.

I started to tap out the next message, detailing the rules for his third task in his game of consequences. In my opinion, it was a pretty easy task. Okay, so he had no friends to help him, and getting anything past the guards would be impossible, but like I'd said to the others, that wasn't my problem.

I hear condolences are in order. R.I.P to your safety on the main wing, Mr Cheslin. I bet you'll do anything to be kept on that medical block, won't you? But your game isn't over. You passed your second task, but number three now awaits your attention.

In twenty-four hours, you will report to Jake Colt, who has a very specific list for you. That list contains every item that you will arrange to have brought into the prison and onto the wing. It's a list of luxury items that every prisoner wants. Call it pay back for them having to endure all those months and years breathing

the same air as you. Having to share a prison with a nonce like yourself.

If you get caught smuggling these items in, or if any other prisoner gets reprimanded as a result of your actions, you will fail the task. If you don't get the items onto the wing by six p.m. on Friday, you will fail the task. Fail, and you'll be begging to go up against Charlie Dunn and his men again, instead of facing us.

We will be in touch.

The Soldiers.

“I love the club, but sometimes, I miss the streets,” Colton said, and we all turned to look at him as if he'd gone mad. “What I meant was, I can't wait to get back to that warehouse and kick the ever-loving shit out of this guy and then laugh as he goes straight to hell. Was I not making myself clear?”

I huffed out a laugh. He wasn't wrong. Soldiers were who we were. This was what we knew. All the other shit was just decoration to the lives we'd fought for. Fancy trimmings that we really didn't need. We stood up for those who couldn't, and when this fucker got released, he'd be praying he'd never heard of the soldiers of anarchy.

Chapter Twenty-Five



It was hard to focus on entertaining two boys when all I could think about was him. Him and that kiss. My mind was a scrambled mess and my plan to play him at his own game; lure him in, chew him up and spit him out, was feeling weaker by the second. So much for me being some kind of Black Widow. I felt like fucking Bambi at the end of the hunter's rifle. I didn't know which way was up and which was down.

I was clearing away the dinner plates, after making the boys lasagne. Earlier, we'd endured the most pointless facetime with my parents, who thought it was more important to show us footage of the ship and their cabin than to ask us how we all were. It'd left me feeling a little deflated and a lot pissed off, but when my mind wondered back to him, I couldn't stop myself from smiling. I found that unnerving. If I was going to come out of this unscathed, I needed to wise up—and fast.

I scraped the food off the dinner plates, placed them into the dishwasher, then I yanked the bin bag out of the bin, ready to take it outside. I tied a knot at the top and dragged it across to the back door. I could hear the boys racing upstairs, arguing over some computer game they were playing up there.

“Keep it down or no X-Box,” I shouted as I unlocked the door and stepped out into the cool night air to dump the bin bag into the wheelie bin outside.

As I turned towards the bins, I squealed as a dark figure emerged from the shadows and came towards me.

“It’s me,” Adam said, holding his hand up like he came in peace and was trying to calm me.

I was gasping for breath, the bin bag discarded on the floor to the side of me, and my hand clutched at my chest as if that’d help ward off the impending heart attack he’d almost given me.

“What the actual fuck, Adam? Have you been hiding out here all this time?” I asked, because quite frankly, I wouldn’t put it past him.

“No. I’ve been home, done some business. But I had to come back and see you.”

“And you thought the best way to do that was to jump out of the bushes and scare me half to death?”

“I didn’t realise you’d be so jumpy.”

I huffed out a laugh at his naivety.

“Of course you wouldn’t. You’re a stalker and you kill people for a living. Why would you ever feel jumpy?”

“I’m not a stalker,” he reprimanded, but there was no malice in his tone.

“So what would you call this then?”

“Long distance admiration. Well, until last night... and this morning.” I could hear the smugness in his voice. I didn’t need to see his face to prove it.

“Look, Adam... about this morning...”

He didn’t give me chance to finish. Instead, he stalked forward, pushing me up against the wall and he kissed me. But this time, it wasn’t urgent and frantic, it was still demanding, but it was seductive, sensual and gorgeously toe-curling. His lips felt perfect, his tongue sliding over mine, taking control. Instinctively, I reached up to wrap my arms around his neck, and he groaned as I pulled him closer to me. Hearing him

make that noise did things to me. He made my body yearn for more. He made me feel alive.

I closed my eyes, lost in the moment and never wanting it to end. He kissed me like I was the most precious thing he'd ever held in his arms. Like he wanted to get as lost in me as I was in him. In this moment, he wasn't Adam the stalker, or Adam the psycho, he was just a guy who'd chosen me, who wanted me. And I couldn't deny it anymore. I wanted him too. That thought gave me chills, but it also scared me a little. Was I going to be strong enough to survive him? I hoped so, because I didn't think I could fight this anymore. That primal urge to be loved—and to love—was bubbling to the surface and I was embracing it.

He started to trail kisses down my neck as his hands grabbed my ass, pulling me to him as he ground his hips against me. It was almost too much to bear, but I managed to summon the last shred of dignity that I had, and I gasped.

“Not here, Adam. I can't do this here.”

He buried his head in my neck, taking a deep breath and then he whispered in my ear, “Come back to mine. Not the club, come to me.”

“I can't,” I replied breathlessly.

“Why not? It won't be like last time.”

“I can't leave the boys. They need me.”

He gave another sigh and then he lifted his head to look at me.

“Come to the club. You don't have to come through the front door, there's a side entrance. It'll be different than before. It'll just be me. You and me.”

“I'll think about it.” I bit my lip, ignoring the warnings and encouragement my angel and devil on my shoulders were giving me.

“I won't give up. You know that,” he stated, giving me a pointed stare.

I nodded and watched as he picked up the bin bag from the floor and took it to the bin, lifting the lid and throwing it inside. Then he came back over to me, leant down to give me a gentle peck on the lips and then turned and walked away, taking my heart and my breath with him.

Did I say I was screwed? Yeah, it was worse than that. I was gone.

Later that night, after tucking Hayden and Ollie up in bed and kissing them goodnight, I saw a message waiting on my phone.

My Stalker: Friday, seven o'clock. Come to the side entrance. Please. Give me a chance.

My fingers hovered over the letters, but it was pointless. The rules of the game had changed. I didn't even know what they were anymore. But I had to see this through for my own sanity.

Me: Okay.

Chapter Twenty-Six



By the time Friday came around, I had totally convinced myself that I'd got this. I was going to go to that asylum, The Sanctuary as they'd renamed it, and I would stay true to myself. I'd tell him that all the feelings he thought he felt were in his head. I was just an illusion to him, a dream he thought he wanted to make a reality. But life didn't work like that. Real life was tough and messy, and I would never fit into the ideal he'd created of what he wanted me to be. I was complicated, hard work, and ever so slightly neurotic, despite portraying to the outside world that I had my shit together, and I didn't suffer fools gladly.

I'd arranged for Hayden and Oliver to go and stay with Effy's mum and dad for a few days. They loved spoiling them and they had the added bonus of their husky, Luna, being a great playmate to my over-energetic brothers. That was one problem taken care of, now to focus on the next hurdle.

I got a text from Emily early on Friday, asking if I wanted to go bowling with them all, but I told her I had a date, which I knew was one way to stop her from badgering me. The prospect of getting me paired off was too appealing, and so she wished me luck and told me I had to ring her the next morning with all the gory details.

This time, I decided to go for a simple black bandeau dress, short and stretchy, but it made me feel comfortable, powerful. Black felt more fitting for a place like The Sanctuary. I'd really missed the mark last time, wearing the

red dress. As much as I liked to stand out, that wasn't the place to draw attention to yourself. Sometimes, less was more.

I kept my hair down, my make-up simple, and sipped on my glass of wine to give me the courage I knew I needed. My trusty talisman, the Tiffany shell necklace my gran had given me before she died, sat around my neck, reminding me that I was a badass. I could do this. When the Uber sounded its horn from my driveway, I took one last look in the mirror, grabbed my clutch and headed out, determined that this time, it would be different.

A while later, the car pulled up outside the front of The Sanctuary, and just like before, I could see people crowding around the entrance, lining up to get in. I leant forward from the back seat and asked the driver, "Could you pull around to the side of the building? I'm not using the main entrance." I have no idea why I told him that extra piece of information. Nerves, maybe? I did tend to ramble on whenever the nerves kicked in.

"No problem, love," he said, pulling the car back out and driving the extra few metres to park up around the side.

I paid him and then got out of the car, straightening my shoulders to give myself a boost of confidence. I wanted to walk in there, showing everyone that I was a strong, forceful woman. Project power and positivity and it can change your life, or so the self-help book my mum had insisted I read a few months ago told me.

I walked over the uneven ground towards the side door, and just as I got closer, it swung open and Devon Brady stood there, looking at me like I'd come down from the last spaceship. So, we were back to playing this game again? Send another soldier down to get me and deliver me to his lair. I'd thought after the kiss we'd shared—well, two kisses—that he might show some degree of humility, but who was I kidding? This was the psycho. He didn't act in the same way as the rest of us. I needed to remember that.

"I see he sent another lapdog to face me," I said, stopping right in front of Devon and looking him up and down like I

was about to tear him a new one. “I thought we’d finished with the mind games.”

“No games,” Devon replied in a monotone voice, and then he swallowed, showing a hint of vulnerability. “He wants me to show you the way. He got caught up with a few things, but he’ll be there.” He looked up at the staircase behind him as he said that, and I almost expected Adam to appear from the shadows, but he didn’t. This whole cloak and dagger shit was a far cry from the welcome I’d received the first time, and quite frankly, it was pissing me off.

“Well, what are we waiting for? Show me the way,” I said, feigning my enthusiasm. I was seriously doubting my ability to make sensible decisions lately and this was looking to be one of my worst. My head said turn and run, but I was ignoring that bitch in favour of the devil in my heart who wanted to know what I’d find at the top of those stairs.

He nodded to himself and stepped back to let me in. Once over the threshold, he locked the door behind me then told me to follow him up the back staircase. A dark, rickety old thing that I wasn’t even sure could hold our weight. I’d certainly be leaving behind a few dents from my heels on the softened wood. The smell of mildew and damp lingered in the air back here, and the graffiti that painted the walls was a far cry from the masterpieces Finn, Effy’s boyfriend, liked to paint. These walls were littered with crude graffiti tags and other pointless markings. Nice to see he’d rolled out the red carpet for me.

“Have you had to come far?” Devon asked, making a feeble attempt at conversation.

“I live in Sandland and I got an Uber,” I replied, making sure he could tell from my tone that a cosy chat wasn’t on the cards for him from me.

As we climbed the stairs, heading deeper into the heart of the building, my own heart started to beat harder in my chest. I could hear the thump of the bass from the floor downstairs, but the farther up you went, the more the atmosphere felt darker, more mysterious. Deadly promises were ahead, and I had no

idea what I was walking into. Where the fuck was Devon leading me?

We came to a landing and Devon pushed a door open onto a long corridor. There, I could see people quietly milling about, not really paying much attention to me but opening doors and then disappearing inside. I seemed to remember Colton talking about themed rooms, and my mind started to whirl, thinking about what that actually meant. I followed Devon down to the end of the corridor, but as I walked past, each door stayed locked, keeping the secrets of whatever was happening behind them away from my prying eyes.

When we came to the final door at the end, Devon opened it and we both stepped inside, into a room with one girl sat behind a desk, tapping away on her computer. Now I was really fucking confused and my pissed off level had reached *this-bitch-is-about-to-go-nuclear* mode. Who the hell was she? And what the fuck was going on? It was starting to feel like I'd walked into a trap, and I didn't like it.

"I think I'm just gonna leave." I went to turn around and walk out of the door, but Devon closed it and then stood in front of me, blocking my way. "If you don't want my foot in your ass, you'd better move out of the fucking way. Now," I told him, but he just looked back at me and shook his head.

"You can't leave. You have to give it a chance."

"I don't have to do shit. Let me out." I tried to sidestep him, but he wasn't having any of it.

"Please, just listen, two minutes. If you still want to leave after that, I'll drive you home myself," he pleaded.

"Like I'd get into a car with you," I hissed back, but going against what my head was screaming, I went with my heart and turned back around to face the girl sat at the desk.

"So, what exactly is the deal here? You look like you're about to sell me insurance." I glared at her, wondering why the fuck he'd brought me up here. Was this some fucking joke? Were we about to enter the torture room I'd joked about to Colton before?

“Faye will just need to take you through some quick paperwork before you go through that door,” Devon said, pointing to another door at the side of the room, and I swung back around to give him my death stare.

“What the fuck do you mean, paperwork? What the fuck is this, Devon? Speak now or so help me God, I am out of here.”

“He wants to spend time with you, here, alone. He thought this was the best way to do it.”

Devon had the whole pathetic ‘trust me’ look down to a tee, but I wasn’t stupid. They called him the reaper for a reason. He wasn’t a man you could trust. And yet, here I still was, standing my ground, ready to get some answers.

“Using what? A fucking non-disclosure to protect his innocence?” I spat back.

“No. But there are boundaries.”

Boundaries?

Really?

He had watched me, stalked me for months, and here we were talking about fucking boundaries.

This really was a fucking joke.

I huffed at the stupidity of it all. I was losing the will to live, and fast.

“Probably better to skip to the main part and make it quick,” Devon said, leaning his head around me to address the desk girl, Faye.

“Fine,” she replied, sounding bored. “Sign the disclaimer, here and here. The room is sound proofed but if you use the safe word, ‘spike,’ you will be released from it as soon as it’s safe for you to do so. If you have any hard limits, list them below, and enjoy your experience.” She gave me the fakest grin and went back to typing. I wanted to pick up her fucking laptop and fling it across the room.

“Hard limits? My hard limits are being brought to a fucking room and spoken to like trash. I’m leaving. Tell him to

have a nice life.”

I tried to push past Devon, but he held onto my arms to stop me.

“I think we can bypass the signatures this time, Faye,” he said, and then he looked at me. “Please, just go into the room. See him. You can leave at any time. You’re in control.”

I shrugged him off, not liking the lack of control I actually felt in this moment. But I had come this far. I had no idea what was going on and what I was walking into, but surely, I owed it to myself to see this through. Who was I kidding? I had a morbid fascination with what was on the other side of that door, and I’d always been a risk taker, a hell-raiser. I liked the challenge.

“Fine,” I said, shrugging out of his hold. “He has two minutes and then I’m gone.”

Faye didn’t even bother to look up as she pointed towards a door to her left, and I didn’t bother to say thank you for her stellar customer service. She could go and suck a dick.

When I opened the door, it led to a smaller corridor. It was narrow and dimly lit, with no windows to give natural light, and down at the far end was one door. I couldn’t hear anyone else down here, but that only added to the sinister feel of the place. Was this their own personal gateway to hell?

I could feel my heart beating rapidly, losing any regular tempo as it started to dance erratically in my chest, and my breathing became shallow. I felt like the typical blonde girl in the horror movies, and just like those dumbasses, I was heading right into danger without a second thought, but I couldn’t seem to stop my feet from moving forward.

“You’ve got this, Liv. You can do this,” I told myself.

When I got to the door at the end, I knocked, but there was no answer. So, I twisted the door handle and it opened to reveal a basic, square room. There were no windows, and the walls were painted black. Against one wall there was a black leather sofa, with a small chest of drawers to the side of it. Against another wall there was a table that appeared to be

bolted to the floor. I noticed a door on the other side of the room, but it was closed.

Cautiously, I stepped in and closed the door behind me. Despite the sparse furnishings and dark walls, it was warm, and I glanced around, expecting to see something personal that might tell me who this room belonged to. But there was nothing.

Then suddenly, the whole room went dark. There wasn't even a sliver of light showing from underneath the doorways. It was pitch black, and frantically, I started to look for something to steady myself. I still remembered the layout of the room. It wasn't that hard to remember. It was small and ridiculously basic, so I took a few steps forward until I reached the table, and then I turned and faced the room, cursing myself that I hadn't come better equipped with some kind of weapon to defend myself.

Being in this dark room and losing my sense of sight, my other senses began to kick in, working stronger and growing more attuned to the space around me. When I heard gentle breaths coming from across the room, I knew I wasn't alone.

I didn't call out though. I stood still, waiting, listening. I heard footsteps crossing the wooden floor, and I tried to keep my breaths slow and steady, even though it was becoming hard to fill my lungs with the level of tension I was currently experiencing.

I gripped the table with both my hands as I stood facing the room, and then I felt him. I could smell him too, that manly musky scent of his that did things to me, and I couldn't stop myself from blurting out. "It's you. I know it's you. I'd know you anywhere."

I heard him make a "shhh" sound but I wasn't deterred.

"Why did you send Devon down to meet me? And who the fuck is that girl back there? What the fuck is going on here?"

I felt him place his fingertip over my lips as I blurted out question after question.

“I said, shhh,” he whispered, but I wasn’t letting that stop me.

“You said you wanted to talk. You brought me here to talk to me—”

“This is the way I talk,” he replied, and just like that, I shut up, waiting for him to show me exactly what he meant.

Moments later, I felt a feather-like touch skimming down my cheek, brushing my skin so softly it didn’t seem real, but it was, and my body was slowly coming to life, responding to the gentleness of his caress. I don’t know why, the room was so dark, but I closed my eyes, savouring the feel of him stroking my face, along my jaw and then gently sweeping his thumb across my lips. Instinctively, I opened my mouth, and he pushed his thumb inside, letting me suck on it and then he trailed it back across my face and down to my neck.

I was shaking with anticipation. I hadn’t expected anything like this when I’d come here, but it was like I was a slave to this room. A slave to whatever he wanted to do to me. He took another step closer, his body brushing against mine, and I could feel his bare chest heaving with anticipation. Then he leant down to my neck and his nose skimmed across my skin as his lips softly moved, kissing, teasing, making me moan and move my head to the side, inviting him to go further.

I let go of the table I’d been gripping onto for dear life, and I wrapped my arms around his neck, scraping my fingernails through the back of his hair and pulling him closer to me.

He liked that, and he nuzzled deeper into the crook of my neck before moving his lips to cover mine, kissing me slowly, using his tongue to tease and taste me. His hand gripped the back of my head, forcing me to deepen the kiss, and his fingers twisted in my hair, yanking on the strands like he couldn’t get enough. He wanted to devour me, and I loved it, so I met his desperation with my own. It had been so long since I’d been with anyone and I’d missed this, the passion, the need. I could feel all of it right now and I never wanted it to stop.

We kissed, losing ourselves in each other for what felt like forever, and I started to grow needier, grinding my hips against him and moaning.

When he eventually pulled away, gasping, I wanted to let him know exactly what I wanted, but he spoke first, in his low, seductive tone, telling me, “I can’t wait any longer, Olivia. I need you so fucking badly.”

“I need you too,” I whispered, and then his hands were on me, pulling my elasticated dress down to my waist. He rubbed his fingers gently over my nipples then gripped my tits, massaging and squeezing them as he leant back down to my ear and said, “I really want to fuck these.”

“Then do it,” I answered back, brazenly pushing my chest forward and running my hands around his waist.

He was wearing sweatpants, the best thing a guy could wear in a situation like this. One downward pull and I’d get what I wanted. I ran my fingers under the waistband as he reached down to pull my skirt up, the material of my dress now gathered around my waist. Then he put his hands under my ass and lifted me onto the table, and I gave a little squeal through sheer excitement and anticipation.

“Lie back,” he said, but I didn’t do as I was told. I wanted to know what was going to happen next and I liked being in control. “I said... lie back,” he hissed through his teeth, and I couldn’t help but smile. “Do as you’re told, or I will tie your hands to this fucking table and fuck you with my tongue until you’re almost there, you’re so close... and then I’ll stop. I won’t let you come. I’ll leave you begging for it.”

As fun as it was to tease him, I knew he meant that, and I wanted the orgasm. I wanted it so fucking badly.

“I love it when you talk dirty.” I smirked to myself and then slowly, I lay back, running my hands down his chest as I did and cupping what I now knew from the feel of him was a very large dick straining to get out of those sweatpants.

I felt him kneel down in front of me. Felt the hotness of his breath as he yanked me to the edge of the table by the backs of

my knees. His head bent down, and he gave me an open-mouthed kiss right over my pussy—through the silk of my soaked G-string—and I moaned, lifting my hips up, wanting more.

He slid his fingers under the sides of my knickers and slowly pulled them down my thighs and then off. Then, he pushed my legs open, lifting my knees so they rested on the table at the side of me. I was wide open for him, hidden in the darkness, yet laid out for his pleasure. I could only imagine the way he looked right now, and that was such a fucking turn on.

“I know that one taste is never going to be enough. I swear to God, Olivia, I want to eat your pussy every day for the rest of my life.”

“That sounds like a pretty good deal to me,” I said and then gasped as I felt his tongue lick my pussy, right up to my clit and back again. He speared his tongue inside me, tasting as much as he could, fucking me with his mouth, but then, he licked back up towards my clit, circling and rubbing against it.

I reached down to touch him, I wanted to grab him and fuck his face hard, but when he sucked my clit into his mouth, creating a suction that had me writhing where I lay and bucking my hips up, I knew I was a goner. His fingers started to massage my pussy as he sucked and licked, and I clenched my eyes shut, feeling the orgasm building inside me. It was never this good when I used my toys and I blurted out, “Oh, fuck. Reality is so much better than the fantasy.”

Shit.

I’d just told him I fantasised about him, but I didn’t care. He had his head between my legs, his mouth on my clit and his fingers curled inside me, stroking my G-spot. I’d give him the world if he asked for it.

My legs started to shake, and I moaned as I ground myself against him. And then, my first orgasm hit like a fucking explosion, making me groan and throw my head back. It was a strong one, but I knew this was just the start. I had been his appetiser and now I was about to experience the main course.

He stayed where he was, kissing, licking, gently nuzzling me as I came down from my high, lapping at me and making me shiver with how sensitive I felt. When he moved his mouth away and stood up, he growled, “I let you have that first orgasm, but next time, you only come when I tell you to. Is that understood?”

I didn't reply. I wasn't about to agree to anything. If I wanted to come, I would. But I guess he thought I'd nodded because he said, “Good girl. I knew you'd do as you're told eventually.”

I lifted myself up to a sitting position on the table and I gave a satisfied moan as he started to kiss me again. Being able to taste myself on him was so fucking hot, and I kissed him back with all the desperation and need that I had in me. He was standing in-between my open legs, and I reached down to his sweatpants, pulling them down his thighs and feeling the hardness of his dick as it grazed my inner thigh. I put my hand out to grab him, and that's when I felt it. He had a piercing. A fucking barbell. I'd never been with a guy with a piercing before, but I'd always wanted to. Looked like tonight was my lucky night. That, and he was fucking huge. As stalkers go, I'd hit the jackpot.

I gripped him in my hand, gently rolling my thumb over his piercing as I started to stroke him, and he moved his hips, panting louder as he broke the kiss to concentrate on his own feelings. His forehead was pressed against mine and hearing his reaction to my touches—the gentle gasps and groans—made me yearn for more. I needed him inside me.

I started to speed up, but he pulled his hips back and moved my hand away.

“I need to fuck you,” he whispered.

“Do you want me to suck your dick?” I asked him. “You can fuck my mouth if you want.” After the high he'd given me, I'd do anything for him.

“I want that, but not yet,” he gasped. “If I'm not inside your pussy in the next few seconds, I'm gonna lose my fucking mind.”

I sat there, on the edge of that table, and I opened my legs wider. I could feel him rubbing the head of his dick with the barbell over my clit and then along my pussy, creating a delicious sensation that rippled right through my core. I was so wet for him, and when he started to push himself inside me, I cried out at how good it felt. The piercing stroked me in the most sublime way, the size of him made me gasp, and the darkness, all of it was so fucking erotic, I don't think I'd ever felt this goddamn horny and turned on in my whole life.

He grabbed under my knees, lifting my legs up as he sank deeper and deeper into me, and I clung onto his shoulders, holding onto him tightly. Once he was fully inside me, balls deep and filling me like I'd never been filled before, he started to thrust—long hard thrusts that made me cry out. He held my ass in place as he started to slam into me. I guess I knew why the table was bolted to the floor now, because he was driving into me like he wanted to destroy my pussy and own it like only he knew how. His piercing had this incredible, mind-blowing way of rubbing right over my G-spot, making me writhe and angle my hips, desperate for more, harder, faster.

“You feel fucking amazing,” he said as he drove into me.

“So do you,” I cried, grabbing his ass to force him into me.

He tried to kiss me, but we were both so lost to the sensations building inside us, we could barely breathe. My pussy started to tighten, tingling and sparking a fresh orgasm, and then I was there, pulsing and crying out as I came on his dick. He didn't stop thrusting, only whispered, “Fuck yes,” as he enjoyed the feeling of riding the waves of my orgasm until I could barely hold myself up. I moved my arms to hold him around his neck, clinging to him as he carried on driving into me, and then he pulled out, and I gasped all over again at the loss.

He picked me up in his arms and carried me over to the sofa. All the time, I was shivering from the aftereffects of my second orgasm. When he lay me down, he whispered in my ear, “Turn over. Face down and ass in the air.”

I didn't argue, I rolled over and lifted my knees up, sticking my ass in the air, ready for him to do whatever the fuck he wanted to do to me.

“As fucking sexy as it is to be here in the dark with you, I really wish I could see you right now,” he whispered as he climbed over me and ran his hand up the back of my thigh and over my ass, squeezing hard as he did before slapping me. I moaned and pushed my ass back into him, feeling his dick still hard and wet from being inside me. He positioned himself against my pussy, but this time he didn't take it slow, he slammed into me, and I grabbed the side of the sofa to brace myself for what I knew was going to be a hard fuck.

His body covered mine, his front to my back, and his arms came to rest either side of my head as he fucked me. He lowered his head so he could whisper in my ear as he rammed hard into me from behind. “You. Are. Mine. This pussy. Is. Mine.”

“Those are... big words,” I gasped back, and I was about to give him some stupid response about promises and putting your money where your mouth was, but I could barely talk. I didn't want to. I just wanted to enjoy the feel of him, concentrate every fibre of my being on how fucking amazing he was making me feel. I wanted to thank every one of my lucky stars that he was pierced and what that felt like.

His thrusts grew harder, more urgent, and I pushed myself back into him, meeting his urgency with my own. Then I felt him push himself up so that he was kneeling behind me. His dick was still buried balls deep in my pussy, but now, his fingers were playing around my clit, rubbing and stroking over me.

“Fuck that feels good,” I moaned, rolling my hips and squeezing my eyes shut as I throbbed and pulsed around him. Then, he took his hand away and I whimpered in protest until I felt him rubbing the wetness over my asshole. He used his thumb to push into my ass as he thrust into my pussy, circling and stretching me. I knew right then what he wanted. He wanted to own every part of me. He wanted to fuck me every way he could tonight.

He stretched me with his thumb as his dick filled my pussy, and I showed my appreciation by wriggling my hips and moaning, “Yes, so fucking good.”

When he took his thumb out, he rubbed over my asshole, then he leant his body a bit further over mine and I felt his fingers push into my ass this time. I took a deep breath because it was tighter, but it still felt so good. He was preparing me for what he wanted, and I wanted it too.

“Have you ever been fucked in the ass before?” he asked.

“Yes,” I answered, surprised he’d actually want to know that.

“I’ll deal with my feelings about that later,” he said, and I felt him slide his dick out of my pussy.

I lay there, not knowing what was going on, but I could sense he’d moved to the edge of the sofa. Then I heard drawers opening, movement behind me, and he said, “Keep your ass up for me. Good girl.”

I tilted myself into a position that I knew would give him better access, and then I felt the coolness of the lube he must’ve taken out of the drawer as he coated me in it.

“You remember your safe word?” he asked me in a low voice.

“I don’t need a safe word,” I replied.

“I asked you a question, Olivia.” The way he spoke, he wasn’t happy that I was playing games with him right now.

“Yes. Spike. Now fuck me already.”

He huffed a quiet laugh, and I felt the thickness of his dick and the barbell rubbing against my asshole. Slowly, he pushed himself into me, and I don’t know why, maybe it was his size, or the intensity of the moment, but I froze, and my muscles tightened.

“Let me in,” he hissed, sounding agitated and rocking into my ass to try and get me to open up to him.

I took another deep breath and moved my knees up, and as I did, my muscles relaxed and he pushed into me, filling me so full I could barely breathe.

He gave me a moment to brace myself as his whole body covered mine, pushing me into the sofa. Then, he reared back and oh... my... fucking... God, he fucked my ass hard. Long deep thrusts that had me gripping the arm of the sofa. He wrapped his hand around my neck, his other arm bracing himself above me, and he lifted my head as he slammed into me, squeezing my throat as he fucked me.

“Good girl,” he whispered over and over as he slammed into me, and all I could do was whimper, cry, and moan at how good it felt.

“Touch yourself,” he commanded, giving my neck another squeeze, then grabbing my hair and wrapping it around his hand, pulling on it and forcing my head back.

I lifted myself up slightly and reached down to touch my pussy and tease my clit, but then, I reached back further and cupped his balls, scraping my fingernails delicately over them and massaging him as he thrust into me. He liked that and he slowed down his movements then stilled inside me, filling my ass full as I stroked and played with him. I could feel the pulse of his dick as he stayed still, and then he sighed. “I’m so close, Olivia. So fucking close.”

He started to move his hips again, driving into me, and I moved my fingers back to circle my clit and tease out the next orgasm. My ass was pushing back into him, desperate to make him come, and when I started to shake and my orgasm hit, my legs buckled underneath me. He was laid over me, my body trapped under the weight of him as he rammed into me, and then he cried out himself and I felt him thicken. He was coming too. And hearing him pant, moan, groan and bury his head into my hair as he came made my own orgasm spark back to life.

Jesus fucking Christ. This was the best sex I’d ever had in my whole life. I didn’t even know if I had it in me to get up and walk out of this room it’d been that good. But as the high

of the orgasms started to wane, the dread in my stomach returned.

Here we were.

This was what I'd always expected would happen.

He'd got what he wanted and now it would come to an end, just like it always did. Only thing was, I thought I'd be strong enough to deal with it. Show him the real me, let him feast on that and then I'd be free. But after tonight, my chains were well and truly fastened to him, and that thought scared me. It scared me because sex was always just sex to men. It had been to the guys I'd known before, anyway. But for me, I always developed feelings, and that pissed me off, because feelings meant heartbreak and I'd had enough heartbreak to last a lifetime. Time to engage those barriers. I needed to start protecting myself.

Chapter Twenty-Seven



We lay on the sofa, and he put his arms around me, his front against my back. In that moment, I felt loved as he placed gentle kisses on my neck and shoulder and held me tightly to him. But I wasn't stupid. I'd just given him every part of me, and I knew enough to know that the obligatory cuddle always preceded the 'thanks for a great time and I'll see you around.'

"Are you okay?" he asked in a low, cautious voice. "I know I got a bit carried away, but I couldn't help it."

"It was perfect," I answered, instinctively threading my fingers through his to hold his hand.

"You're perfect," he said, kissing the back of my head. "I always knew you would be."

I don't know why, but I could feel the tears building up and I didn't want to prolong this anymore. I sat up and his arm fell away from me. He sat up too, so I slid past him and off the sofa, pulling my dress down and then yanking it up so that it was in place again. I probably looked horrific. I'd bet my hair was all over the place, but I was past caring.

He reached his arm forward to hold my hand, pulling me back to him where he sat, but I let go.

"Come back to my room," he said. "I don't want this night to be over yet."

"But it is over," I replied through the lump that'd developed in my throat.

“What the fuck does that mean?”

“Look, let’s not draw this out, okay? We had sex. Good sex. But it’s over. I’d rather just leave now and avoid the whole morning after walk of shame.” I’d done that enough times and it was no fun.

“There wouldn’t be a walk of shame. What the fuck are you on about?” He sounded pissed now, and I took another step back.

“There would, don’t lie. I’m not stupid, Adam. I know what this is—”

“Well, I’m glad you do because I’ve got no fucking clue. Is it because I was a bit rough?” He was acting clueless, but I wasn’t going to fall for it.

“No. I liked that. You were amazing. But I’m leaving now. Congratulations. You won,” I added, because I felt like he had. I was the loser in his game of consequences.

“I won fuck all,” he snapped. “Sit your ass down and let’s just talk.”

“You did your talking, remember? Now, I’m doing mine,” I said, determined to stay strong and stand my ground. “It’s finished, Adam. Over. You can move onto the next girl and play your games. I’m done.”

“The fuck you are.”

I sensed him standing up from the sofa, heard the creak of the leather and the presence of him as he came towards me, but I moved back over to the door I’d originally come through.

“Spike. There, I said it. Spike. Fucking SPIKE!” I shouted, holding onto the door handle, rattling it, and waiting for it to unlock.

“This is a fucking joke. This isn’t over, Olivia. It’ll never be over. After everything we’ve done, you’re still not getting it? What more have I got to do?”

“I think we’ve done enough,” I said quietly into the room, but jumped in my skin when I heard a loud bang, like he’d punched something, and then I heard the click of the door

behind me unlocking. I didn't stay to see him when the lights went back on. I couldn't face him seeing the tears that were now streaming down my face. I just turned, heading through the door and slamming it closed behind me. Then I ran down that corridor, back out to the office where Fuck Face sat glaring at me, and I ran out.

Out of that building.

Out of his life.

And out of this nightmare that never seemed to end.

Chapter Twenty-Eight



I'd punched that release button like I wanted to destroy the fucking thing. Make the mechanism break and keep her locked in here with me forever. I had no idea what the fuck was going on. I thought she'd been into it as much as I was, it certainly felt like it when she was moaning and coming all over my cock. But now she was running away like I was the fucking bogey man. If this was months ago, I might've bought it, but her reaction tonight was bullshit. She was running away from her feelings, and I'd had e-fucking-nough.

I stalked out of the dark room, slamming the door off its hinges and then ran up the stairs three at a time to get back to my room. I could feel my head growing heavy with all the noise.

Fuck this shit.

Make her pay.

Burn the fucking world down.

My anger was spiralling out of control, and I needed to do something to channel it. I needed to destroy. To kill.

I burst through the door of my room, fury radiating from every pore. Tyson took one look at me from the bed he was lying on, and judging my shitty mood, he got up and trotted out. I shut the door behind him, not giving a fuck where he went, and sat down on the edge of my bed, leaning my head down and raking my hands through my hair. I tried to take deep breaths, to focus on something positive to quell the

murderous thoughts, but nothing worked. The only thing that had worked lately was her. She calmed me. But now, she was the reason I felt this way.

I heard the door open, and I looked up to see Colton stood there. He was the last person I wanted to talk to, and I told him to, “Fuck off,” but he ignored me, as he always did, and sat down next to me on the bed.

“What happened?” he asked. This time he didn’t sound playful or mocking, he sounded sincere.

“She left.” I couldn’t say anything else. What else was there to say?

“Why? Did she give a reason?” He stared at me then added, “You were in there for a long time. We all took that as a good sign.”

“It was good. It was fucking incredible, but after, she got up, she said she didn’t want the walk of shame, whatever that is, and left. She said it was over. I’d won.” I laughed at that last part. *I’d fucking won.* If this was what winning felt like with Olivia, I wanted to be the loser every fucking time.

“Adam. Mate,” Colton said, putting his hand on my knee then swiftly removing it when I glared at him. “What she said and what she meant are two completely different things.”

“What are you on about now? Colton, just fuck off. I’m not in the mood for you.”

“I’ll ignore that, seeing as your having... issues. But I’m serious. She thinks you only wanted her for sex. She left because she’s avoiding what she thinks will be an awkward morning after the night before.”

“This has never been about sex for me,” I spat, clenching my fists, feeling like I needed to start hitting something to calm my aggression.

“I know that, and you know that, but does she? She’s a woman, Ad. Women never say what they mean, you’ve gotta read between the lines.”

“What lines? There were no lines. She said it’s over.” I felt a coarseness in my throat as I said that.

“She said she didn’t want to stay here, yes?” Colton asked, twisting my words.

“Yes.” I was irritated beyond belief and seconds away from dragging him out of the room by the scruff of his neck.

“So, go to her. Show her it isn’t over. Go to her, and then, in the morning, if she still hates you, it’ll be you doing the walk of shame, not her.”

Suddenly, the dark clouds in my head parted. He was right. I needed to go to her and prove that it wasn’t a one-night stand. It was never about that. I’d just spent the last few months being infatuated with this girl. Fuck it, I bloody loved her. I wasn’t about to let her walk away after what we’d just done. She’d wanted me too. She’d held me and loved me back. I wasn’t done fighting for her. I never would be.

“So”—Colton patted my back with a big grin on his face—“are we good? You’re gonna go to her house and spend the rest of the night fucking like rabbits?”

I stood up and grabbed my helmet and the keys to my motorbike.

“Too fucking right.”

Colton smiled, then wrinkled his nose at me in disgust.

“I’d take a shower before you leave, mate,” he added. “I could smell dirty sex on you before I’d even stepped foot through the door.” Then he sauntered out of the room chuckling to himself.

“Motherfucker,” I said under my breath, dropping my stuff and stalking over to my bathroom to take the fastest shower known to mankind.

Chapter Twenty-Nine



I cried all the way back in the taxi like a bloody fool. Then, when I got home, I headed up to my room, opened the window so I could get rid of the smell of my perfume that I'd sprayed earlier that still lingered like a sad reminder, and I jumped in the shower. The water mingled with my tears, but I let them fall. I had to get my emotions out some way, and on my own in the shower seemed like the perfect place.

After a few minutes, I shut the water off and grabbed a towel to wrap around myself. When I opened the bathroom door and stepped back into my bedroom, I screamed. There, stood in the middle of the room, arms folded over his chest and a scowl on his face, was Adam.

Jesus, he really wasn't giving up, was he?

"What are you doing here?" I asked, pulling my towel tighter around me defensively.

"You forgot something." He kept his scowl in place and took a step towards me. I didn't move. I didn't want him to know he was getting to me.

"What did I forget?"

"Me."

I felt my heart flip in my chest, and it suddenly became hard to breathe again.

"Adam, I don't... I..." I was lost for words. "How did you get in here?"

“You left your window open.” Then his scowl turned to a slight smirk. “You really need to be careful about that, you never know what kind of crazy stalkers are lurking out there.”

“I’ll bear that in mind next time I take a shower and leave my bedroom window open. I guess I should’ve known better. I do have extensive experience of dealing with crazy stalkers, after all.”

He smiled and dipped his head then looked up at me through his lashes. I’d never seen him look at me like that, like he was wrong and wanted my forgiveness. This was new.

“Olivia, can we talk?” he asked, gesturing to the bed and then sitting down on the edge and looking back up at me.

“I don’t think we have anything more to say to each other.”

He sighed and ran his hands over his face.

“You might not have anything to say, but I do.”

I didn’t sit on the bed next to him, but I needed to sit down, so I went over to my dressing table and sat on the chair there.

“This, all of this,” he went on. “It was never about sex for me. Sex is a bonus, I won’t deny that, but me wanting to get close to you wasn’t because I wanted a one-night stand or whatever you think that was tonight. I wanted to get to know you. Be with you. Even if we never have sex again, I’ll still follow you, Olivia. I’ll still be there, waiting, wanting you. What happened tonight, it changes nothing. Not for me, anyway.” He sighed again and the way he stared right into my eyes made me feel something I hadn’t ever felt with a guy before.

It made me feel hopeful.

Wanted.

Loved?

“Colton said you thought I only wanted you for sex. In case I haven’t made it clear, that’s bullshit. I want you, Olivia. Back at the club, I asked you to come back to my room

because I wanted to have you in my bed, hold you and fall asleep with you. You make everything... quieter.”

I had no idea what he meant by that, but I stayed silent.

“So, I decided I’d come here, to you. If you don’t want to wake up at my place, then I’ll wake up at yours, but I’m not going anywhere. I never will.”

I didn’t know how to process what he was saying. We’d had sex, and he still wanted more? He didn’t care if we never had sex again? I didn’t know whether to believe him, but then, why say those things if he didn’t mean them? I supposed actions spoke louder than words, but again, his actions spoke volumes. He’d come all the way over here, climbed up the side of my house and through my window, just to tell me this. No one had ever done anything like that for me, ever. And those tears that I thought were all cried out in the shower were threatening to burst free again.

“What is this?” I pointed between the two of us. “What is happening here between us?”

“Well, I hope...” He stood up now and gave me a pointed stare. “That we’re building a relationship. One where I get to be a little bit closer to you than I have been these past few months. I just want a chance, Olivia. Please.”

He looked so sincere and so honest that I could feel my walls cracking, each brick falling away with every word he spoke.

“How can I trust you?” I asked on a whisper. Fate hadn’t exactly been kind to me over the years, and I found it hard to trust.

“I can tell you to, but would you listen? I doubt it. Trust is something I have to earn. Something I have to show you. But I will, if you’ll let me.”

The little angel on my shoulder chose that moment to pipe up and say, ‘he could be the best thing to ever happen to you. Diamonds are found in the darkest places. Just because he is one thing to the outside world, doesn’t mean he can’t be something completely different to you.’ This felt like a

defining moment for me. One that I could love or live to regret for the rest of my life, and if there was one thing my gran had always taught me, it was to never live with regrets.

“You can stay,” I announced, and his face lit up. “But one wrong move and you’re out.”

He held his hands up in surrender and smiled. “I’ll kick my own ass if I hurt you again.”

And then he yanked his T-shirt over his head and pulled his sweatpants down, kicking them off and standing in front of me stark naked.

“Oh my God, what the hell?” I gasped.

“Come on...” He laughed and then winked. Adam Noble fucking winked at me. “It’s not like you haven’t felt every inch of my body tonight. Don’t start acting shy. I’m here to sleep, so lose the towel and get into bed with me.”

He lifted my duvet and climbed in. I stood there with my mouth open, not quite believing how big his dick looked in the light. That, and he’d just blown me away with his little speech and then climbed into my bed like he hadn’t just laid his heart out for me to stomp all over. Maybe he trusted me a lot more than I realised.

I dropped the towel on the floor and saw his eyes darken as he watched me walk across the room and climb into the bed to join him. I switched the bedside lamp off and the room went dark, and he snaked his arm around me and pulled me back to him, being the big spoon to my little one. He feathered kisses over my shoulder and onto my neck then whispered, “Are you feeling okay? Are you sore?”

I reached my arm back to stroke his jaw and run my fingers through his hair.

“A little, but it’s fine.”

“I won’t fuck you again tonight then. I’ll wait until morning.” He kissed me gently on the cheek then lay back down behind me, holding me close to him.

I lay there, barely breathing, struggling to get my head around the journey I'd been on tonight, and when I heard his breathing deepen, I knew he'd fallen asleep. A warmth spread through me, knowing that he was here. He'd come to me, and he wanted me. No strings. No more games.

Was this my chance to finally find something?

I closed my eyes and let the rhythm of his breathing send me to my own sleep. Life was certainly surprising, and I had a feeling that fate wasn't done with me yet.

Chapter Thirty



I was woken up by the bed rocking and feeling the weight of Adam climbing over me. He pushed my legs apart, and I gave a sleepy sigh and asked him, “What’s going on?”

“I want you,” he said, settling himself in-between my legs and then leaning down to kiss me. I kissed him back, enjoying the haze of sleep and desire mixed together. I could feel how hard he was as he rubbed himself against me, and I lifted my knees up and wrapped my legs around him.

We didn’t need much foreplay this time. I was wet for him, and he was ready to take what he wanted.

“This time,” he growled in my ear. “You don’t come until I tell you to.”

I moaned and arched my back, and taking that as an invitation, he speared into me, filling me in one brutal thrust. Then he pulled back out again only to thrust back in, hard. Long hard thrusts made me cling to him as he fucked me into the mattress. I loved that he wasn’t afraid to be like this, punishing, brutal, raw and demanding. Every drive inside of me was like taking another step to heaven courtesy of the devil himself. But I loved it. I loved that he didn’t treat me with kid gloves. He knew the way I liked it.

He ground his hips into mine, his piercing hitting my G-spot and his dick stretching me in the most delicious way.

“Harder, faster,” I moaned, and he lifted my leg at the knee, placing his arm under there so he could fuck me the way I wanted.

I felt my orgasm build, but he did too, and he stopped, and in a low voice he growled, “Hold it.”

“I can’t,” I cried, desperately trying to fight the fireworks that wanted to break free.

“Yes, you can. Hold it or I’ll stop.”

I nodded and clung to him, burying my head in his neck as he started thrusting again, painful punishing thrusts that had me moaning and writhing underneath him.

“Good girl. Keep holding it,” he gasped as his hips pistoned faster into me. “You’re such a good girl.”

I felt like I was about to explode, I couldn’t hold on anymore. My body was crying out for a release and all I could do was focus on his voice.

He got faster and faster until eventually he cried out, “Now, Olivia. Come for me.”

I threw my head back and came so hard I lost all sense of myself. My legs were shaking uncontrollably, and my pussy had lost its fucking mind, going all *Saturday Night Fever* and disco dancing all over his dick. He moaned as he rocked slowly into me, milking every damn sensation from our bodies as he told me I felt so good and what a good girl I was.

I didn’t seem to be able to gain control of myself, and I felt him hold me and whisper in my ear, “It’s okay, I’ve got you.”

I clung to him, my legs still quivering and my body shaking. And all the time he held me, he whispered, “I’ve got you.” Over and over again. I swear, it wasn’t just my body that had lost it, my mind was a goner too... and my heart.

No one had ever made me feel like this.

He held me in his arms and kissed me gently, with his dick still buried deep inside me. Eventually, my breathing steadied and my legs, although still like jelly, stopped quivering. But he

stayed still and stroked my cheek, staring right into my eyes as he said, “You are fucking amazing.”

“That was fucking amazing.” I sighed.

“Because of you.”

He slowly pulled out of me, and I didn’t like it. I didn’t want him to leave me, but when he pulled me back into his arms, I couldn’t complain. Who knew it could ever feel like this? I certainly didn’t. It was like I’d found a secret. A dirty, filthy, forbidden secret, and I never wanted to share it with anyone.

He was my secret.

He cuddled me and I wrapped myself around him. We didn’t say anything for the longest time, words weren’t needed, but eventually he broke the silence.

“You said something back at the club.”

I gritted my teeth, wondering where he was going with this.

“What did I say?”

“You said, the reality was better than the fantasy.” I inwardly cringed and stayed quiet. “Did you have fantasies about me?” he asked with a smugness to his tone.

“Maybe. I might’ve.” I shrugged and he gave a low chuckle.

“Don’t go all shy on me now. If you have fantasies you want me to fulfil, just tell me.” He leant down to whisper in my ear, “That’s what I’m here for.”

I gave a little shudder. I liked the sound of that, and it gave me goosebumps thinking of all the possibilities.

“You kind of fulfilled one tonight,” I said, and he pulled back to look at me with a puzzled expression on his face.

“The dark room?” he asked.

“No. The window.”

His eyebrow shot up and he looked over at the window and then back at me.

“You’ve fantasised about me coming in here through your window?”

I nodded.

“Fuck me. Why didn’t I do that sooner?”

I laughed and he kissed me then pulled away.

“I mean it though; you have to tell me this shit. I want to do it.”

“Looks like our games might not be over quite yet then.” I smirked and he slapped my ass.

“Go to sleep. But tomorrow, I want all the dirty details.”

Chapter Thirty-One



Another night spent with Olivia, and another morning where I woke up feeling more rested than I had done in years. She had that effect on me. An effect no one else had ever achieved. Not the soldiers, not any one of the foster families I'd been in growing up. No one. I always knew she was made for me.

I felt her wriggle in my arms as she started to wake up, and I brushed her hair out of her face and kissed her cheek. She smiled before she'd even opened her eyes and sighed.

“That’s a nice way to be woken up, although I quite enjoyed the other way you woke me last night.”

She stretched and then wrapped her arms around me. It felt good to lie here like this with her. I just wished that I could lock us in this room forever and never escape. Keep her here with me, protected from the outside world. But I had a job to do, and I knew I would have to leave her at some point this morning. I'd never be far away, and I'd always have my eyes on her, but I had to go back home. Do my duty as a fucking soldier in this town.

“I’m looking forward to hearing all about these fantasies of yours.” I nuzzled into her neck, my new favourite place, and then I bit her gently as I said, “It better not include any threesomes, though. You know me well enough to know I don’t share.”

“I think you’re more than enough for me. I don’t need anyone else,” she replied, scraping her fingernails across the back of my head, making me shiver with how good it felt.

“Too fucking right.” I lifted my head up then planted a kiss on her lips. “I might have a few fantasies of my own,” I added.

It was her turn to raise her eyebrow at me, and a sly smile spread over her lips.

“You may need to ease me in gently. I’m not sure I’m ready for the full impact of an Adam Noble fantasy yet. Maybe start me with the beginner’s level and then we can lead up to intermediate and expert.”

I laughed because she was right, she knew me so well. Some of the things I had planned for us were downright filthy, and I couldn’t fucking wait.

“The beginner’s level, huh? Well, I guess there is the shower fantasy I had not so long ago.”

She grinned and said, “Shower? I love it. Go on.”

“I’m not gonna tell you,” I said, giving her another kiss. “I’d rather show you.”

She sprang up to a sitting position then threw her legs over the side of the bed to stand up.

“Come on then, soldier. Show me what you’ve got.”

I loved her enthusiasm, and I followed her as she held my hand and led me to her bathroom. She insisted that we both brush our teeth before getting into the shower. It didn’t bother me, but it was kind of cute, standing with her at the sink and brushing together like a married couple. It made me feel warm inside, being connected to someone else like this. Standing completely naked with her and doing something so mundane, and yet, it was everything. It was as if my world had gone from black and white, dull and meaningless, to vivid colour since she’d walked into my life, and I never wanted it to end.

She reached into her shower and put her hand under the spray of water to test it out, and then, when she was satisfied that it was ready, she started to walk slowly backwards into the

shower, pulling me along with her and grinning at me as she did.

“This is your fantasy,” she said, wrapping her arms around my neck as the water cascaded over both of us. “I’ll do whatever you tell me to.”

I huffed out a laugh, appreciating her gesture, but knowing her well enough to know that if she wanted to mix things up, or change anything, she would. Nobody could tell my Olivia what to do. Not even me.

“When you sent me that photo,” I whispered in her ear over the sound of the water rushing down. “The one of your face after you’d used that... thing.”

“Ronnie?” she answered.

“Yes, that. I went into my shower, and I thought of you. I pictured us together, like this.”

I started to kiss her, grabbing her ass in my hands and squeezing, then pulling her hips tightly towards mine, pressing my body to hers. She lifted her leg up and wrapped it around my waist, and I held her thigh in place. My cock brushed against her pussy, desperate to be inside her. But I didn’t want to rush this. I wanted to take my time and savour every inch of her.

“Did you fuck me hard against the tiles? Did you make me scream?” she asked, reaching down to take my cock in her hand and stroke me, her thumb rolling gently over my piercing.

“I did, but I got to taste you first.”

She gave a little moan, and then in classic Olivia style, she showed me exactly why she was my girl.

“But that’s not fair. You got to taste me last night. I haven’t tasted you yet.”

I knew she’d find some way to try and take control, but when she was looking at me with her eyes wide, like my perfect girl begging to have her favourite treat, how could I refuse?

“I guess I could change it up a little, just for you,” I said, and she smiled and bit her lip.

I held my breath as she sank to her knees in the shower in front of me. I angled the shower head away from her and glanced down as she held me in her hand and then licked around the head of my cock, flicking my piercing with her tongue and playing with it. I gritted my teeth and took slow steady breaths watching her stroke and lick me, teasing me until I felt like I'd explode if she didn't take me down her throat.

When she started to cup my balls with her other hand and massage, using her nails to tickle and stroke me there, I felt shots of pure fucking ecstasy sparking all over my body. I rocked my hips as she stroked, licked and sucked my cock so fucking good I could barely breathe. The sensations she was creating were mind-blowing, I couldn't take my eyes off her. She had never looked more beautiful than she did now. Her eyes closed in ecstasy, her mouth wrapped around my cock, her hair wet and plastered to her back as she took care of me.

Then, she grabbed my ass and took me deeper into her throat, so I held her hair, thrusting into her. I was so close, and I had to hold onto the tiles with one arm to support myself. The other was firmly in her hair, guiding her, making her go faster, showing her what I wanted.

“I'm gonna come,” I grunted, but I didn't let go of her head. I thrust into her mouth and fucked her throat until I could feel myself pulse and thicken, and then I came right down her throat, gasping and groaning as I did, and she moaned back. I could feel her throat gripping me tighter as she swallowed gently, taking every drop I had to give her, and then she opened her eyes to look up at me, and fuck, the wave of emotions that surged through me in that moment almost made me stumble.

She was perfect.

She was mine.

And I couldn't deny it anymore. I fucking loved her, and I wanted her to know.

I moved my hand from her hair to stroke her cheek.

“That was so good, baby.” I was so fucking gone I’d even called her baby, and I hated that name. But in that moment, I’d cut my own chest open and rip my heart out if she asked me to.

Slowly, I pulled out of her mouth, but she held onto me like she didn’t want me to leave, and when she planted a gentle kiss on the end of my cock, I laughed and pulled her up to standing.

“What was that for?”

“I wanted to kiss you, and by the way, you taste fucking amazing.”

I couldn’t help myself; I crashed my lips onto hers and kissed the ever-loving fuck out of her, pushing her against the tiles and grabbing both of her legs to wrap them around me. I wanted to own her, possess her, carve myself into her and live as one together for the rest of our lives. She drove me crazy but in a good way. This was an insanity I’d happily drown in.

“Just fuck me already,” she gasped, pulling her lips away from mine and then grinding herself against me.

“This is my fantasy, remember? I let you have your fun, but now... you do as you’re told.”

She bit her lip and nodded, looking at me with the devil in her eyes like the little minx she was.

I knew how I wanted her, and it wasn’t like this. I wanted to watch my cock sinking into her tight pussy. I wanted her bent over, legs open and ready for me.

“Turn around,” I growled, and she slid down my body, putting her feet on the floor and then turned and glanced seductively at me over her shoulder.

The way her wet hair clung to her back and the beads of water that trickled down her face and over her body made me hungry for more, ravenous.

“Hands on the wall,” I instructed, and as she did, I pulled on her waist, making her lean forward. “I need you bent over,”

I added. "Ass out and ready for me." She gasped as I ran my fingers in-between her legs, stroking her pussy and rubbing her clit. "If you move your hands, I will stop." But I knew she wouldn't, because once I started fucking her hard from behind, she'd need that wall to hold herself steady.

I took a moment to just look at her, stood there with her hands splayed on the tiles, her legs open and her pussy glistening, inviting me in.

"You're so fucking sexy." I ran my hand down her back and then grabbed her ass in both hands, opening her up to me. She moaned as I started to rub my cock in-between her legs, teasing her with my piercing and the promise of a fast hard fuck.

With one hand on her hip and the other holding my cock, I pushed into her, my heart damn near beating out of my chest as I watched myself sink inside of her. I felt her soft walls gripping me tightly and heard the way her breathing changed as I filled her, burying myself balls deep.

"Hold on tight, baby," I warned and grabbed her hips in both of my hands as I slammed into her over and over again. Her nails started to rake down the walls as she felt each one of my thrusts, my cock stretching her, claiming her, proving to her once and for all that we were fucking made for each other.

"Fuck yes," she cried as I kept up a punishing speed, driving my cock into her tight little pussy. "Faster, Adam. Fuck me harder."

I loved making her this needy and desperate, and I did exactly what she wanted. I always would. I thrust into her so hard she could barely hold on, and feeling her legs start to give way, I reached forward to grab onto her hair and pull her upwards so her back was to my front. I pushed her into the tiles, thrusting up into her and telling her, "Good girl. Are you ready to come for me?"

She reached her arm behind to grab my neck and turned to kiss me as best she could with how breathless she was, then she moaned, "I'm ready. I'm so ready."

I reached around to rub her clit and she put her hand over mine, both of us rubbing her as I pounded into her and then I felt her walls clamp down around my cock. I held her up as we both came together. I fucking exploded inside of her, and she contracted hard around me, milking every last drop that she could.

We clung to each other as the sensations lingered, wave after wave of what I can only describe as pure fucking heaven. Then, I slowly pulled out of her and she turned in my arms, and we held each other as we stood under the water.

“If that was the beginner’s level, I can’t wait to see what comes next,” she said, and I could feel her smiling as she buried her face into my chest.

“There is no beginner’s level where you’re concerned,” I told her. “You’re a class all of your own.”

Chapter Thirty-Two



It was tough, after a start to the day like we'd had, to say goodbye, but when I told her I had business to take care of, she didn't make any fuss. I made sure she knew that I would always be there though, always watching. She wouldn't get away from me that easily.

When I walked back into our games room a few hours later, they were all sat there, and Colton had the biggest shit eating grin on his face.

"From the look on your face, I'd say you had a pretty good night. Are you about to go all soft on us now you're in love?" he said, walking a very thin line with my patience with his remark.

I kept the smile on my face, it was always better when you used violence with a smile, and I stalked over to him, pinning him to the wall with my hand around his neck.

"There's nothing soft about me, *mate*. I might be softer for Olivia, but the rest of the world can fuck off, you included."

Tyler came over to stand next to us in an effort to diffuse the situation, but Colton never did know when to shut his mouth.

"Soft for Olivia?" Colton tried to laugh through the pressure I was exerting on his windpipe. "I'm betting you were hard as fuck for her last night... and this morning."

"Okay, Colton. We get the message. You like winding up Adam, but now is not the time." Tyler put his hand on my arm,

and I gave one last squeeze on his neck before I let him go.

I walked back over to the counter to grab a coffee, and Colton rubbed his neck and took deep breaths to right himself.

“I love our foreplay, you know that, right?” He had to get one last dig in. The guy was certifiably crazy... more psychotic than me half the time.

“Trust me, you don’t want to fuck with me,” I spat back over my shoulder.

“Don’t be so down on yourself,” Colton joked, falling into the sofa and putting his feet up on the table in front. “We all love you really.”

I heard Will grunt a laugh, and Tyler shook his head. But Devon’s face was deadly serious and so I turned to him.

“What’s happened? You look like you’re about to tell me something really fucking shit,” I asked him, ready for him to hit me with whatever had made him look like that.

“We got another text,” he said, cutting straight to the chase. “From Cheslin. He’s done what we asked, but he sent us a ‘fuck you’ message. I checked the prison records and he’s due for release in four days. We need to wrap up this game and start planning what we’re gonna do.”

“Don’t worry. I’ve got it all in hand,” I said, feeling slightly pissed off that he’d question my organisational skills at this point. I know I’d been a little preoccupied with Olivia lately, but I was still the soldier that ran this show.

“Are we making the hit right out of the prison gates or what?” Will asked, looking around the room for confirmation.

“No. That’s too risky,” I answered. “Knowing him, he’ll head straight for a pub. Once he’s there, we make our move.”

“And what if he isn’t as predictable as you think? People can surprise you; you know.” Colton winked, but I ignored him, turning back to my coffee to stir it and take a sip before I replied.

“He will be. He’s played into our hands at every step. Why would this be any different? Some people surprise you, and

others are so fucking predictable it makes life boring.”

“There’ll be nothing boring about it once we get our hands on him. He’s gonna love our brand of fun.” Colton laid back on the sofa, putting his hands behind his head. “I’ve been itching to get my hands on that cunt for ages now. My beast has been caged for too long.”

“That’s not what I heard Sarah Pope saying when she left last night.” Will laughed, and Colton smirked.

“She always brings out the beast in me,” he said, and then rolled his eyes in irritation and added, “Next time she comes to the club hunting one of us down, will someone throw her the fuck out? You know I have no willpower where my cock is concerned.”

I really didn’t want to hear about Colton’s night, so I turned back to Devon and reiterated, “Like I said, he’ll be somewhere public, like the pub, parading himself like a fucking peacock. He’s a vain cunt and that’ll be his downfall. That’s how we get him.”

“What do you need us to do?” Devon asked, looking like he was ready to get on it now.

“Get the warehouse ready. Prep the tools. Set up the equipment. Oh, and get a van. A side opening one if you can. Cover the inside with plastic so it’s easier to clean and destroy the evidence later. And whatever you do, don’t talk about this to anyone. Not a fucking word.” I gave each one of them a warning glare, even though I knew Devon wouldn’t breathe a word, and I was pretty sure Tyler would take everything he knew to his grave. But Colton and Will? Who knew what went through their heads most of the time?

“Who the fuck are we going to tell?” Colton whined. “We only talk to each other.”

I didn’t respond. Instead, I pulled my phone out to see the message Cheslin had sent.

I got your message, and I did what you said. This is the last time you’ll be hearing from me and the last time I

ever do anything for you fuckers. You think you're big men, coming for me while I'm locked up in here, but know this, once I get out, the tables will turn. You'll wish you'd never met me. Fuck your soldiers' bullshit. I call the shots. Always have, always will.

I'll be seeing ya.

Ches.

I huffed and shut my phone off. I couldn't even be arsed to give him a response. He had balls sending that, but he'd signed his death warrant long before today. Replying would only play into his narcissistic fantasies, and where he was a dreamer, we were realists. Our brand of justice was long overdue for this fucker. The day of reckoning was drawing near, and I couldn't fucking wait.

Chapter Thirty-Three



I stood in the kitchen, tapping out various reworded text messages to Adam then deleting them. I didn't want to come across as needy. I'd been accused of that many times before, but when he left this morning, after that shower, I felt... empty. I guess in some weirdly twisted way, I missed him, but I needed to have a word with myself. As open as he'd been with me, I'd been here many times before and I was still scared of getting my heart broken.

On the fifth or sixth attempt, my phone started to buzz with an incoming call, and Emily's name popped up on my screen.

"Hey, Em. You okay?" I asked.

"Liv! I thought I'd give you a call and find out how it went last night? You know... the big date with the mystery man."

I wasn't ready to share my secret with my friends yet. I would, but only when the time was right. They all hated Adam, and I had enough voices in my head to contend with, without adding theirs to the mix.

"It was... ugh. It dragged and I don't think I'll be seeing him again." I did a good impression of sounding unaffected and so over it I couldn't even be bothered to talk.

"I'm sorry to hear that." Em sounded more disappointed than I did.

"It is what it is. No big deal."

“Okay, well I guess you might need a pick me up?” I didn’t, but I let Em carry on. “We’re having a picnic in the park later. Me and Ryan, Effy and Finn. I think Harper and Brandon are bringing the babies. I really want you to come. I feel like I haven’t seen you in ages and it’ll give you chance to have a good old moan and then indulge in some baby cuddles. What do you say?”

I didn’t have anything else planned. My brothers were loving it at the Spencer’s house so they wouldn’t be back yet. I knew Adam was busy with... whatever the fuck it was they did in the day. So, I figured I might as well join them. Be the spare wheel on their couples day out.

“That sounds great, Em. Count me in.”

I should’ve known better.

When I rocked up to the park a few hours later with a bag full of cakes and a few bottles of wine, I saw them all sat together, and there, on the end, was Kieron. He was some random guy that worked at Ryan’s dad’s garage, and was also my date for the day, no doubt.

Would they ever give up?

I stopped and stood still, taking a deep breath and rubbing my shell necklace in the hope that it’d give me some much needed confidence. They hadn’t seen me yet, so there was still time to turn around and hightail it out of there. But then my last drop of luck ran out, and Emily saw me, waving me over to join them.

“Liv! Come and sit over here.” She shuffled over to make space for me between herself and Effy, which I was thankful for. At least they weren’t going to shove me at the end with Kieron and expect me to make small talk with him. Don’t get me wrong, he was a nice guy. I’d seen him a few times around Sandland. But he wasn’t for me. He wasn’t Adam.

“I heard your date was a wash out,” Effy said, giving me a side hug.

I smiled to myself. As dates go, it was the best one I’d ever had, but I couldn’t tell them that.

“It was fine. We just didn’t click.”

Emily handed me a plastic glass filled to the top with wine.

“Here, you probably need this today. And if he didn’t click with you, he must be a bloody moron. Everyone clicks with you.”

We chatted and drank our wine, enjoying the midday sun and feeling carefree. But eventually, Emily and Harper became engrossed in talking about weddings and babies, Effy was cuddling up to Finn, and I was sat there, staring into my wine and trying to avoid making eye contact with Kieron. After a promising start, it was glaringly obvious that this whole picnic was a set up to try and push the two of us together.

“I don’t usually come to this park, but it’s nice, isn’t it?” Kieron tried to break the ice and I just nodded back with a vacant smile. “Weather stayed dry too,” he added.

We both looked up at the cloudless sky and hummed our agreement. Then an uncomfortable silence fell over us as the rest of the group remained engaged in their own conversations, ignorant of the awkwardness on our side of the picnic blanket. I wasn’t usually one to stay quiet or struggle in conversations, but I didn’t want to lead Kieron on.

“Em says you dropped out of uni. Any idea what you want to do?” he asked.

I had no idea, and I really didn’t feel like discussing it after a glass of wine on a nice day at a couples picnic.

“I’m taking a year out to get my head straight,” I answered. “I’m hoping inspiration will come to me at some point, so I don’t end up drifting through life for the next thirty years, sleeping on that park bench over there and eating out of the bins.” I was joking, but he didn’t see it.

“I’m sure one of us would help you out. Ryan’s dad always needs help in the offices.”

It was sweet that he was offering me a job that he didn’t have any say over, but my own dad ran a successful finance company. If I wanted to, which I didn’t, I could work for him and earn way more than Kieron made in a year.

“I’ll be sure to ask Mr Hardy when the time comes,” I replied. “I know how amazing he is to work for.”

Kieron smiled and started to fiddle with the tab on his can of lager. Then, when he cleared his throat and shuffled a little closer to me, my stomach filled with dread.

“Do you like Chinese food?” he asked in a low voice so the others couldn’t hear.

I swallowed before answering, knowing exactly where this was heading.

“I love it, but errr... Would you excuse me? I need the bathroom.” I stood up and he put his hand out to help me, not that I needed it.

“Do you want me to come with you?” He went to stand up too, but I held my hand out to stop him.

“No. It’s only that toilet block over there. I can manage,” I replied and started to walk off, not giving him a chance to argue.

Fuck. I needed to think of an excuse to leave. I liked Kieron. He was a good guy. But turning him down in front of all the others was going to be like kicking a puppy. It wasn’t going to go down well at all.

I made my way to the toilet block, opened the door and then headed to the cubicle at the far end. I was just about to shut and lock the door, when a force from the other side hit it, and I moved back out of the way. The door flung open, and there stood Adam, nostrils flaring, chest panting, and looking like he was about to self-combust. My heart suddenly kick started in my chest, beating erratically, and I held onto the wall to steady myself, shaking—but not with fear, more like anticipation.

Adam stalked into the cubicle, filling the space with his whole presence. Then he slammed the door shut and locked it, never taking his eyes off me as he did.

My breathing was shallow. My skin prickling at the nearness of him. It'd been hours since he'd fucked me in the shower this morning, and yet, I still wanted more.

He pushed his body to mine, pressing my back against the wall to the side of the cubicle, and then he cupped my cheek, stroking me with his thumb as he lowered his face to whisper into my ear.

“What the fuck do you think you’re playing at?”

I reached up to stroke him too, running my fingernails across the back of his neck as I answered, “I’m not playing at anything.”

He huffed a laugh and said, “I’ve been watching you... on your little date.”

“It isn’t a date. I didn’t even know Kieron would be here. I thought I was coming to a picnic with my friends. Anyway, I don’t need to explain myself to you,” I added, sounding like a brat.

“You don’t, but it doesn’t mean I won’t get jealous,” he growled. “I don’t like him being with you, Olivia. Talking to you. When he’s near you, it makes me want to burn the fucking park down. Destroy everything just so I can get him away from you.”

“I talked to him to be polite...” I reassured him.

“He touched you.”

“To help me up. Adam, you’re being a—” He cut me off.

“Fucking psycho?” he snapped. “That’s because I am one.”

“No.” I sighed. “I was going to say dickhead, but if you want to call yourself a psycho, go right ahead.”

I moved my lips, so they were hovering over his. As much as his anger was pissing me off, it was also turning me on. I liked jealous Adam. I liked it even better when I could feel

that he was rock hard, pushing his hips into mine as he explained how furious he was that another man had looked at me.

“I think someone needs a little reminder about who they belong to,” he said, rolling his hips hard against me, his breath feeding into my own and the promise of his kiss just a whisper away.

“I don’t need a reminder. I already know. But I’ll play along if it means you’re gonna fuck me right here against this wall and make me scream.” I moved my lips to graze against his ear, and whispered, “I never used to be a screamer... Not until I met you.”

Saying that was like lighting the fuse to his fire. He ripped open the buttons of his jeans and pulled them down to his knees, then he pushed the skirt of my dress up and yanked my G-string to the side, running his fingers through my soaking wet pussy. Then he took his dick into his hand and pushed it through my folds, rubbing my clit with his piercing. Over and over again, he slid his dick over me, teasing me, until eventually we were both desperate. When we couldn’t stand the tension anymore, he lifted me up, grabbing the back of my thighs as I wrapped my legs around him. Then he speared into me hard and fast, making us both cry out into the empty bathroom stall.

His hips pistoned in and out of me and thrust up into my pussy as he held me where he wanted me. Legs open, body against the wall, arms wrapped around his neck, and me begging him to go harder because he felt so fucking good.

“This,” he grunted. “Is my pussy.”

I moaned and he carried on. “You are mine.”

I buried my head into his neck, kissing him, loving him as he pounded into me, stretching me in the best way. His piercing stroked me from the inside, creating sparks of ecstasy to pulse right through me and mind-numbing sensations to ripple through my pussy. I could feel my walls begin to clamp down on him, my orgasm threatening to break free.

“Hold it,” he commanded as he increased his pace, angling his hips and slamming into me harder, grinding into my core until I was a quivering wreck, begging him for release.

“I’m gonna come,” I cried, because I couldn’t hold back anymore.

But when he replied, “Come for me,” I let it all go, coming hard on his dick, pulsing and contracting as he moaned through his own orgasm.

We clung to each other, riding out the feeling of pure fucking euphoria. His hips were moving slower now, but still sliding into me. It was crazy but I felt worshiped by him. Adored. He’d come in here to teach me a lesson, or so he thought, but we’d done so much more than that. We were always drawn together; we couldn’t stay away. Given a choice between being out there with my friends or in here with him, I’d chose him every time.

When he eventually pulled out of me, he reached over to get some tissues to clean me up. I stayed still as he got to work, but when he whispered—“I love making you dirty”—I sighed. I loved it too. “I’ve marked you. Now they’ll all know to stay away from you. You are mine.”

“You marked me ages ago,” I said, leaning forward and kissing him, tasting him. “And I marked you.”

We were holding each other, lost in slow, lazy kisses, when I heard the main door to the bathroom open and then Emily’s voice saying, “Liv? Are you okay? You’ve been in here for ages. We were worried about you.”

I saw Adam’s eyes flare with something—challenge maybe—but I held my hand over his mouth as I answered, “I’m fine. I’ll be out in a bit. I just needed a break.”

“I’m sorry,” Emily said with a sigh. “I should never have told Ryan to bring someone. It was a stupid idea.”

“Yes, it was.” Adam’s eyes grew dark and menacing at my response. But I smirked and moved my hand away, placing a gentle kiss on his lips. “I don’t want to be set up, Em. I’m just fine as I am.”

“I know. I won’t do it again. I promise. I’ll go back outside, just... come out when you’re ready.”

We heard the door close again, and then Adam put his forehead against mine and said, “If you didn’t want to be alone today, I would’ve come with you.”

I laughed. I couldn’t help it. Every person out there at that picnic hated Adam. Half of them wanted to kill him, and here he was, saying he’d have come along as my date if I’d asked him to.

“Yeah, no. I really can’t see that happening,” I joked but kept the twinkle in my eye and the smile on my face so as not to upset him.

“They’ll have to know about me sooner or later,” he added.

“And I’d prefer later. I like it as it is now. I like having a secret.”

He smiled back and nodded.

“I should ask how you knew I was here, but then I guess you have all manner of ways of tracking me. I’m not even sure I want to know what they are,” I said and watched as he shrugged his shoulders. He’d never give away his trade secrets. “I need to get back before they send Effy or Harper in here.”

I started to sort myself out, righting my clothes and running my fingers through my hair to smooth it down.

“You look beautiful,” Adam said, kissing me again and moving my hands from my hair to wrap them around his neck.

I indulged him for a few more seconds, but then I broke the kiss and told him, “Wait a minute or two before you come out. I don’t want them to see you. I think I’ve had enough drama for one day.”

He frowned, and I almost expected him to argue back, but then he seemed to soften slightly as he replied, “Fine. I’ll give you two minutes. And you can tell that pasty fucker out there to keep his hands to himself. No one touches my girl.”

I rolled my eyes at him and unlocked the door to the stall we were in. I washed my hands and looked at him through the mirror, leaning against the doorframe with his legs crossed and his arms folded. The smug expression on his face made me proud, but it also sparked something else in me and I turned to face him before I left.

“Just one more thing,” I said as I held the handle to the main door out of here and gave him a pointed stare. “If you ever question my loyalty again, you’ll be the one getting on your knees, proving to me who you belong to. I’m not a cheat and I never will be.”

He shook his head with a smile on his face and stared at the floor before looking back up at me.

“You’re fucking perfect, Olivia Cooper.”

“And you’re fucking mine, Adam Noble.”

And on that note, I turned and left.

Chapter Thirty-Four



Later that night, I was greeted by a grinning Adam standing at my front door, holding a mountain of pizza boxes.

“I bought you extra wedges,” he said, trying to look contrite but looking utterly adorable instead. How had the psycho stalker become the guy who made my heart skip a beat? Life certainly had a funny way of fucking with you. I wasn’t complaining though. He was perfect for me. He made everything... exciting.

“I don’t need extra wedges,” I said, grabbing two of the boxes from the top of the tower he was holding. “No man ever won my heart with the promise of extra wedges.”

He frowned at my attempt at making a lame joke that only my friends would understand, then shrugged and strolled into my house, heading straight for the den.

“I hope there aren’t more pizza delivery guys out there impaled on any fences,” I called after him as I shut the door, then I inwardly cringed. Boy, I was on top form tonight with my dreadful attempt at humour.

Adam’s face remained dead-pan and he put the pizza boxes down on the table in the den, and then came over to me, standing with his hands in his pockets as he faced me. There were only inches separating us, but I felt like something was off. Like there was a distance in his eyes.

“I’m... I’m sorry,” he said, dipping his head down to stare at the floor. “I shouldn’t have made you feel like I doubted you today. I didn’t, by the way. He was the one I was pissed at, but still. I never want to make you feel like I don’t trust you. I do... It’s just...”

I put my finger over his lips to shut him up. His words made my chest ache. I never thought I’d ever hear him apologise, not for being who he was. And I got it. He was jealous, possessive, and it killed him to see me with another guy. But I really didn’t blame him. If the shoe was on the other foot, I’d have been exactly the same.

“You don’t have to say anything. I would’ve done the same thing if it’d been you sitting in the park, talking to some girl. That’s a level of crazy you really don’t want to see from me.” I stepped forward and wrapped my arms around him. “I know some people might call you out for your jealousy, see it as a red flag or whatever, but I get it. I get you. You’re passionate and you don’t open up easily to other people, so the fact that you’ve opened up to me, it means a lot. It’s everything. You’ve put yourself out there, but at the same time, you need to protect yourself.”

He squeezed me back and planted a delicate kiss just below my ear as he said, “I need to protect you.”

“That too.” I smiled to myself, loving the attention. “Adam... Don’t ever apologise for who you are. I don’t want you to change. You’re you. You’re one of a kind. That’s what I... *like* about you. I’ve never met anyone like you.” I held myself back from using the other L word. I figured we’d had enough ‘moments’ for one day. But I was falling, and fast. Every growl, every stare, the intensity and the emotions, all of it was like some wild Adam Noble rollercoaster ride and I was here for every twist and turn. I’d never felt so alive.

“I know I can be intense and a bit too much to handle, but it’s only because I’m crazy about you, Olivia. Always have been and always will be.”

“I’m crazy about you too.”

I grabbed his face in both of my hands and brought it in front of mine and I kissed him, totally forgetting about the pizzas going cold on the table. Then I took his hand and led him up to my room. I was hungry for something more and the pizzas just weren't going to cut it.

I lay on my bed, in his arms, staring at the shadows on the ceiling as the trees outside danced around in the breeze. Our clothes were discarded all over the floor, but I still had my shell necklace on. My head was rested on his chest, listening to the gentle thud of his heartbeat, and his arms were wound tightly around me, his thumb rubbing circles on my shoulder, making goosebumps tingle all over my body. I couldn't remember the last time I'd felt this peaceful. Being with him, lying with him like this, it was like coming home. A feeling of total relaxation and well-being that I never wanted to lose. As corny as it sounded, I felt... complete.

He reached down to pick up the pendant on my necklace, twisting it around in his fingers to inspect it, and then he said, "You wear this every day." I was surprised he'd noticed and then he added, "I'm guessing there's a story behind it. Wanna tell me about it?"

I hadn't told many people about the story behind the shell pendant, but I was touched that he wanted to know.

"My gran bought me this necklace. It's Tiffany." Like that made any difference to him.

"I didn't ask who made it," he said, kissing the top of my head. "I wanted to know what the story was."

I sighed and smiled, thinking about my gran and how much she'd done for me.

"My gran gave it to me right before she passed away. She said it was something to remember how badass I am."

He laughed and I lifted my head to give him my serious 'what-the-fuck-are-you-laughing-at' stare.

“I’m not joking, my gran said those actual words,” I chastised him, and he tried to hide the smile on his face.

“But why a shell?” he carried on, and I settled my head back onto his chest.

“Because I always loved shells as a little girl. Years ago, before my brothers were born, my gran used to take me on holiday to give my mum and dad a break. She was my mum’s mum, but she was so different to how my mum is. Gran was down to earth, money didn’t impress her. Holidays with Gran weren’t fancy hotels with private kids clubs like my mum and dad used to sign me up for so they could go off and sunbathe all day in peace. Gran booked caravans or took me to holiday clubs where the adults joined in with the fun. She was awesome.”

“She sounds it,” he said, nuzzling into my hair, and I sighed at the happy memories now flooding my mind.

“One year, we went to a caravan park not far from Sandland. It was about an hour’s drive away, but it was on the coast. There was a little beach and loads of other kids to play with. Every day she’d take me to the sea to paddle, go crabbing, and collect shells. And then every night, I’d go back to the caravan, wash the sand off the shells and leave them in rows next to the door to our caravan to dry out overnight. But every morning, when I woke up, I’d find my shells had all been crushed. Every single one was smashed and left for me to find like some cruel shell crime scene. It pissed me off, but I wouldn’t let myself cry about it.

“Instead, I’d go back to the beach the next day, bring some more home, wash them, leave them over night to dry, but then the next morning the same thing would happen. Every day it happened. And on the fifth day, I lost it.

“I knew who was doing it, or at least I had a pretty good idea. See, there was this kid at the camp, a proper weirdo who never played with the rest of us. He used to hide behind the other caravans and watch us, but whenever one of us called out to him to join us, he’d run away and hide. We called him the creeper. I was pretty sure it was him smashing my shells.

“So, I filled a bucket full of the old, smashed shell pieces, sand, and some seaweed I’d gotten off the beach, and one night, after I’d washed and laid my shells from that day out on the concrete, I crept over to his caravan. His bedroom window was open, so I went back to mine, took the stepping stool Gran kept in there to help me reach the tall cupboards, and I took it back to that window, climbed up, and emptied every dirty piece of beach through it.

“When I heard the angry shouts coming from inside, I ran, leaving the stool behind, but I didn’t care. The voices from that caravan were so loud they scared me. I could still hear them when I got back to our van, and I darted inside, locking the door behind me, and I put a plastic chair against it because I thought that would help protect us against any would-be attackers.

“I didn’t sleep very well that night. I kept expecting the door to our caravan to burst open and someone to drag me out of my bed and make me clear up the mess I’d caused. But the next morning, when I woke up, the park was peaceful. And when I stepped outside, expecting to find carnage, I saw that not one of my shells were broken. He’d left them right where they were.

“I don’t know why, but I started laughing when I saw them all lined up on the floor, looking clean and pretty. Gran came out and asked me what I was cackling over, and I did think about lying, but I’d never lied to my gran, and I didn’t ever want to, so I told her. I told her what I’d done after she fell asleep the night before, and I told her why too. I thought she might tell me off, but she didn’t. She told me she was proud of me for not letting him get me down, and said I reminded her of herself. She said I’d proven that Andrews’ girls don’t take any crap. Andrews was my mum’s maiden name, and then she told me I should make a necklace out of the shells and wear it. Show that bully that I was better than him. So, I did. But I never saw him again. They must’ve left the park earlier that morning. I missed my chance.

“And that’s pretty much it. She bought this shell necklace because she wanted me to remember that holiday. Remember

that I should always stand up for myself, even when she wasn't here to remind me."

The room was quiet, and I noticed that Adam was tense. I lifted my head to see his eyes boring into mine as he breathed deeply, his face frozen into a stony glare.

"Coney sands caravan park?" he said quietly.

"Yes. How did you...?" I went to keep talking but my mouth had dried up.

"You were the girl with the blonde hair that everyone wanted to be around. The day before you came, no one played together like that, but when you arrived, everyone flocked around you. You were like a siren."

"Oh my God." I just stared at him and let him carry on.

"My foster family told me I wasn't allowed to play with the other kids. I wasn't like them, and they didn't want me scaring them or causing trouble that'd get us all thrown out. I hadn't done anything, but I was the foster kid they didn't want. The paycheck that hung like a millstone around their necks. If they could've left me at home, they would've. To be honest, most families that I stayed with did. I still don't know why they bothered to take me.

"But I watched you every day, your blonde hair and your pretty smiles. It didn't matter how old the other kids were, all of them wanted to be with you. I did too, but you never noticed me, and I hated you for it. That's why I used to watch you wash those shells, and then, when everyone had gone to bed, I snuck out and broke them all. It wasn't because I wanted to upset you. I just wanted you to notice me and I didn't know what else to do."

I was finding it hard to breath, but he took my necklace in his hand then he gave a sad smile.

"That night, when you poured the contents of your bucket through the window, you got my foster father right in the face. He blamed it on me. Said the rest of the camp were obviously freaked out by my being there, so they cut our holiday short, made us pack up our stuff in the middle of the night and leave.

I never did get to see you again. I'd have loved to see you wearing your shell necklace. But I always thought about you. I thought about you every day for years. The girl with the golden hair."

Suddenly, he clenched his eyes shut and his head fell backwards onto the pillow.

"Fuck. That night at the plastics factory, when I first saw you in Mathers' changing room, I knew I'd seen you before. I must've recognised you."

My heart stopped in my chest.

"After all these years?" I was speechless.

"I think you're under-estimating the effect you had on me back then, Olivia." He ran his fingers through my hair as he spoke. "I was so pissed at my foster family for making us leave early, so angry at the thought of never seeing you again that I set fire to the kitchen curtains when I got back, and they had me shipped off to social services right then and there to be rehoused. Fuck, I hated that family."

"If you'd come to play with us, I'd have let you. I wasn't a bitch back then." I felt like a knife had been pushed into my chest, I couldn't breathe and there was a lump the size of a boulder in my throat.

"Like I said, I wasn't allowed. And up until that day, when we left, I usually did what the foster families told me. But after that, I was out of control. No one could tell me what to do."

I took a moment to compose myself. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. All those years ago, the sad boy who cowered away from the world. The dirty boy who looked so unloved, like he didn't belong to anyone. The lost boy who couldn't use his voice, not even to other kids... that was Adam?

A yearning of sadness rippled through me, and yet, I realised that we'd both evolved back then. I'd met him and it'd made me realise my worth. He'd met me and he decided he wouldn't stay cowering in the shadows.

He would be seen.

He would be heard.

He was someone.

“I made you a badass too then?” I said, thinking about a little boy who’d reached his limits. A boy who wanted his life to mean something more than being pushed aside and ignored. A boy who knew what it felt like to be abandoned, thrown away by society, and treated like trash. And now, he was the one who stood up for people with no voice. He had created that power within himself. He wasn’t a monster; he was a fighter. A freedom fighter. And I fucking loved him.

He laughed as he stroked my hair. “I guess you did make me a *badass*.”

“We shaped each other,” I carried on, hoping that he could see what I saw. And I kissed his chest, right over where his heart was beating. The surge of love I felt for him was starting to overwhelm me.

“You brought meaning to my life,” he replied, totally getting where I was coming from. “As a kid, and now. Seems we were always meant to be. You and me. It was fate.” He put his hand behind my head, pulling me up to him for a kiss. When he broke away, he smirked and said, “What’re you doing to me, Olivia Cooper? I’m turning into a pussy. If the others could hear me now, they’d kick my ass.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone. Your psycho reputation is safe with me.” I ran my nose along his and then placed a gentle peck on his lips.

“It’s not a reputation. It’s a fact.” He smirked and then gave me that psycho stare I’d seen him do countless times before I’d really gotten to know him.

I sighed and rested my chin on my arms that were crossed over his chest, and I looked into his eyes.

“There’s only one thing in this goddamn world that can silence the demons in my head,” he said. “Twenty-two years they’ve plagued me, but now, I have an antidote.”

“Which is?”

“You.”

I had no words. What could I say to that? An ‘I love you’ wouldn’t have meant as much as what he’d just admitted to me. So, I cuddled right into him, breathed him in and held onto him, knowing that I’d always hold onto him.

I silenced the demons in his head. He silenced the doubt in my heart.

Maybe my heart was safe in his hands after all?

Maybe.

I really hoped it was, because he had it, and there was no going back for me. I’d fallen and I never wanted to be free.

Chapter Thirty-Five



My head was bent out of shape, trying to focus on the hit we had planned, but with Olivia swimming around in there too, it was hard to switch over to total fucking psycho. I had to, and when the time was right, I would. But having more control over that kill switch felt good. My life now was more than just a quest for vengeance. It meant more, and the excitement that gave me, the nerves in my belly, it all felt fucking amazing.

Today, I was with my soldiers, checking the warehouse over, making sure we were fully set up for what we were about to do. The game player's chair with the arm and leg restraints that we'd bolted to the floor was ready. Devon had laid plastic along the floors and on the walls to make the clean-up afterwards more straight forward. Not that we got involved in that, Gaz still held that job, but it didn't hurt to ensure it could be done easier and more thoroughly. In the corner was a table laid with every sick tool imaginable to perform our signature style of torture. And then, there was the stand for the video evidence.

Why did we video ourselves in the act?

Because it always gave us a sick thrill to watch it back, critique ourselves and improve our techniques for next time. Plus, it was extra evidence that a lot of our clients liked to receive. They wanted to watch the players suffer as much as we did. It was payback for them after what our victims had done.

Could we have been identified through the video evidence?

Probably, but we hadn't been caught so far, and if we were honest, we really didn't give a fuck. We kept our masks on, but most of us took our shirts off because it was hard work torturing someone. That, and we didn't want to get the blood stains all over our clothes. Those of us that had tattoos could probably be picked out in a line-up, but with the police in our pockets, passing the majority of the work our way, we didn't sweat it. We were the good guys doing very, very bad things. Broken angels doing the devil's work.

"I've got the van sorted. It's parked up round the back of the asylum, and when we're ready, it's good to go," Devon informed me as he picked up the tools on the table to inspect them.

The instruments were his favourite part, and I smiled as he picked up a katana sword and started to slice it through the air like some ancient samurai. The meat cleaver or the machete were more my style, but I let him have his moment. He was in his element.

"Are we gonna trail him from the prison?" Colton asked as he picked up the wire cutters and started snapping them in Will's direction.

"Yes. We'll stay back so he doesn't see us, but our job is to watch, wait, set the trap and then catch him. We'll bring him here and do what we do best. And that isn't fucking around, Colton." I stalked over to him and snatched the cutters out of his hands.

"I don't fuck around. Not when we have a job to do. You know that. I might be a useless prick the rest of the time, but when we're tag teaming, working like fucking masters in the zone, I'm there. I'm right fucking there with all of you."

He was right too. He was less clown and more Joker when we needed him to be.

Tyler was checking over the video equipment, and I could see Colton's brain going into overdrive from where I stood.

“So, once we follow him to the pub or wherever the fuck he decides to go, what then?” Colton leaned against the wall, folding his arms over his chest and trying to look smug like he’d asked a valid question.

“I wrote it all down in the group message. I’m not gonna go through it again. Read it,” I snapped, feeling my phone buzz in my pocket.

When I took it out, I saw a text from Olivia, and I turned my back on the rest of them so they wouldn’t see the way my face changed at seeing her name.

Olivia: I’m thinking of doing a spot of gardening today. But I’m awful at it. I really hope I don’t get caught by my grumpy, sexy gardener who wants to spank my ass for being a bad girl and destroying the rose bushes.

I almost threw my phone against the wall I felt that mad.

Me: What the fuck are you on about and who do I need to kill?

Olivia: No one! It’s our new game.

Me: Don’t fuck with me, Olivia. Who the fuck is this gardener? I’ll fucking kill him.

Olivia: There is no gardener. It’s you. I know you like playing games, and this is one of my fantasies. You being the moody gardener, bending me over and fucking me in the dirt because I did something bad. I would’ve gone for the pool boy, but we don’t have a pool. But I have a garden with a lot of secluded areas... so.... Are you ready to play?

I gave a low laugh and shook my head. My girl had almost given me a fucking heart attack and sent my brain spiralling into psychotic jealousy mode, so she’d better be ready. I was about to do more than spank her ass and fuck her in the dirt. I’d enjoy teaching her a lesson in how not to light the fuse to the time bomb ticking inside me. It didn’t take much to poke this beast into biting back, but she’d done more than poked with that first message. She’d smacked me right in the face. I think we needed to talk about code words to use so I knew what she meant in the future.

Me: I'll be there in ten minutes. Be ready.

I messaged back and then pocketed my phone, turning to face the others.

“I need to go.”

Devon and Tyler exchanged a look that I couldn't be arsed to tackle at this moment. Will shrugged. But Colton stepped forward, looking around the room for back-up as he said, “You can't leave. We haven't been through the itinerary yet. I need you to explain each step to me and not in a fucking group chat.”

“You don't need me for that. Everyone else knows the score, they can tell you. I have other stuff to do.”

“You mean you have Olivia to do.” Colton was treading a very thin line and I moved forward to challenge him, but Tyler stood up and put a hand on my chest to stop me.

“You go. I'm sure we can answer any questions Colton might have.” Tyler looked between the two of us then added, “I know you've set out a watertight plan, Ad. You've done enough. I also know you wouldn't leave here unless you really had to.” He addressed that comment to Colton, giving him a pointed stare, but a slight stab of guilt at leaving them behind hit me. I fought it, reminding myself that I had a right to do whatever made me happy. I'd given my whole life over to this crew. If I wanted to indulge myself and spend a bit of time with my girl, then I fucking would. She would always come first.

“I'll be back home later, and then we get ready to roll. We've done this hundreds of times. There won't be any problems.” I backed away, keeping my focus on Colton, and then I turned and left, ready to lose myself for a few hours in Olivia. Tomorrow would be a different story. We would unleash the monsters we kept chained up and safe from the rest of the world and send another motherfucker to hell where he belonged. Tomorrow, the soldiers of anarchy were coming out to play.

Chapter Thirty-Six



It was the day of reckoning, for Karl Cheslin, anyway. We'd sent confirmation to the father of the victim that today would be the day that the motherfucker who destroyed his little girl's life would breathe his last breath. We told him we'd send the evidence as soon as it was done and thanked him for his service in bringing the scum to our attention. Taking out evil like him was what we did, it was what we lived for, and as we stood together doing our final checks, the surge of energy and adrenaline felt unreal.

Soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder.

Warriors for the silent victims.

The voice that would never be silenced.

All of us wore dark clothing, black hoodies pulled up, and bandanas over our noses and mouths. We each carried a knife that we kept hidden, but the tools of our trade were waiting for us at the warehouse. When we got there, with our target secured in place in the bolted chair, we'd each pick our weapon of choice. Five soldiers, five instruments of torture, and five methods of using them to drive him to insanity before he finally met his maker.

"Colton and Devon, I want you to ride up front in the van with me," I stated. "Tyler and Will, do you think you can manage the main cab, wait in there and then watch him once we get him inside? There's a set of handcuffs attached to a railing on the wall that you can use to hold him, but when

we're driving, he's gonna try every fucking trick in the book to make noise and escape. We need you to be on him. Keep him quiet. Gag him..."

"Or cut his fucking tongue out if you have to," Colton added without a hint of humour to his voice.

"We can do that." Tyler nodded, looking to Will for agreement.

"Just don't drive like a fucking lunatic or we'll be all over the bloody cab too," Will moaned, and then, after Tyler glared at him, he added, "But it's fine. We'll watch him. That fucker won't be moving an inch or making a fucking sound once we've finished with him."

"Save some for the rest of us," Devon said as he walked past us and out onto the yard at the back of the asylum, where the side opening van was sat waiting for us.

"It's showtime," Colton sang. And the rest of us filed out, taking our places in the van.

An hour later, we were parked up a fair distance from the prison, staring at the gate that we knew the prisoners were released from. There was a mesh window that Tyler and Will could see through from the back, and we all sat, waiting and watching.

I was in the driving seat, Devon in the middle, and Colton was on the end, and the sparks of energy coming from all of us was palpable. We didn't speak. We were all too focused on psyching ourselves up for the main event. But when the gate opened and we saw him stroll out for the first time, clutching his plastic bag and glancing up and down the road with a cocky expression on his face, we all sat forward.

Every nerve in our bodies ignited, firing us up.

Every muscle tensed in preparation.

We were ready.

This was it.

He sauntered over to a black Range Rover parked on the opposite side of the street and opened the passenger door, throwing his bag onto the backseat before climbing in himself. We didn't see the other occupants of the car. It'd been parked up as long as we had and no one had gotten out, but we didn't care. We had our eyes on him and that was enough for us. Blue jeans, a black T-shirt; he looked like he'd blend into the crowd, but to us, he stuck out like a sore thumb. Now it was time to put our plan into action. First stage, follow the mark to his destination.

The Range Rover pulled out into the road, which was relatively quiet, and we did the same, keeping our distance so as not to alert him to our presence. As he drove through the streets of Sandland and back into Brinton, we managed to maintain a successful tail on him. The traffic lights were on our side and the roads were busy enough to conceal us, but not enough to stop him being hunted down.

After about twenty minutes, they pulled into the carpark of the Red Lion in Brinton Manor, and we saw Karl and another guy get out of the car, joking and laughing like they didn't have a care in the world as they headed straight towards the pub.

"I think that's one of his brothers," Devon remarked, and we all stayed quiet, watching them both disappear through the door into the bar.

"Stage one complete," I informed them. "We have our target cornered. Now for stage two, we need to know what the fuck is going on in there."

I took my phone out and started to call Gaz. He was on standby, ready to be where we needed him to be, and right now, it was inside The Red Lion, finding out exactly what was going on, who was there, and helping us get to our target.

"Red Lion, Cedar Road," I said as soon as he picked up the call. "I want numbers, details, get in there and let me know exactly what we're up against."

Gaz started to try and make small talk, but I shut the call down. I wasn't in the mood, and I needed to stay focused.

Ten minutes later, Gaz and few of his friends pulled up a few cars down from us, and when he got out, the fucking idiot waved at us.

“What the fuck is he doing?” Colton hissed through his teeth as he sunk low into his seat and pulled his hood down further over his face to hide himself. “That guy is a complete knob head. I don't know why we still use him.”

“He might be a knob head, but he's loyal,” Devon bit back. “Anyway, there aren't any windows in the pub overlooking this part of the carpark. No one inside would've seen.”

“How do you know he's inside and not around the back having a fag?” Colton spat back.

I blocked out their bickering, the noise in my head was loud enough, I didn't need them adding to it, but I started the engine up and slowly pulled the van around to the back of the pub, where there was a small smoking area outside. There was no one there right now, which was perfect for us. I'd waited to check that Gaz had arrived and had gone into the bar, and now, it was time to wait in our target zone, hidden from the road.

I turned to give Tyler and Will the nod, and they both got out of the van and then went over to the CCTV cameras pointed at the smoking areas. Raising the baseball bats we'd kept in the back of the van, they smashed them until they were useless and hanging off the wall. We weren't taking any chances with this one. Strike, grab, and run. Leave no trace behind. That was the plan.

I fired a text off to Gaz to let him know we were in position and ready, and he replied pretty quickly.

Gaz: He's here with a group of four other guys. At the moment, they're all standing at the bar, drinking. Nothing out of the ordinary. One went off to the toilet just now, but from the photos Will sent me, it wasn't him. What do you need me to do? I can't tell you much more.

I read the message to the others. We were used to waiting it out, taking our time over a target until it was just right. So, I replied to Gaz, telling him to lay low, listen, and if our guy broke off from the group, he had to let us know. There was no rush here. We were doing this properly. No room for fuckups.

A few minutes after that I got another text.

Gaz: They just ordered another round of drinks. Do you want me to go up to them? Get some info?

I ran my hand over my face in exasperation and didn't even bother telling the others what the message said. Gaz was obviously antsy and desperate to prove himself.

Me: No. Whatever you do, do not talk to them. Don't even look at them. Your job is to listen. Don't draw attention to yourself. Be invisible. Don't fuck this up, Gaz.

"Is our target on the move?" Colton leant his head around Devon to ask me.

"No, but I think Gaz might be if he doesn't stick to the plan," Devon replied.

He'd obviously read the text over my shoulder, but he knew better than to share its contents with the rest of them. Gaz was a loose cannon for us right now, and I needed to reel him back in without spooking the others.

Gaz: I won't let you down.

I stared at his response and hoped that he fucking didn't. I'd sent him in because he was an unknown. I couldn't risk one of us going in and someone saying something or outing our identity. The soldiers might run incognito when we were on a job, but in Brinton, most people knew who we were. Well, most except for Karl Cheslin. Seems he'd missed the memo. We'd enjoy correcting that little matter very, very soon.

Time ticked on, and I could sense the others were growing impatient. Colton's knee was bobbing up and down with nervous energy. The two in the back were huffing out their annoyance and sitting on the floor of the van with their heads hung low. Devon held it together pretty well, but if I looked closely, there were tell-tale signs that he was getting irritated.

A quiet sigh, tapping his foot way more than usual, and when I looked to the side of me, I could see the tick of his jaw as he clenched his teeth together. We needed action, and now.

I lifted my phone up to make a call, and instantly, a text came through from Gaz.

Gaz: Target is on the move. He's just told the others he's going outside for a cigarette and one other guy said he'd join him after he'd taken a piss. This might be your window but it's a small one. Anything you need me to do?

I typed back quickly.

Me: Try and stall the guy taking a piss. But stay inside. I'll text when it's safe for you to leave, and when I do text, you get out of there as fast as you can without making it look obvious. Understood?

Seconds later, I got my answer.

Gaz: Understood. I'm on it.

“Time to roll,” I called out, banging on the partition behind me to the other two in the back. “Stage two is done, now on to stage three. Let's get that fucker in this bloody van and get out of here.”

I started the engine as they opened the side of the van, fixed their hoods and bandanas in place, and grabbed the necessary equipment. Our next manoeuvre was something we'd done so many times we didn't need to rehearse it or check on our roles. We were like a well-oiled machine. Tyler and Will were on the front line, Colton and Devon the back-up, but only if they were needed, and I was the driver who'd bolt like a fucking maniac to get us out of there.

We watched from the inside of the van as Karl Cheslin wandered out into the smoking area, lit up a cigarette and started to tap away on a mobile phone, totally oblivious to what was going on around him. Tyler and Will walked right up to him, and before he'd even had chance to look up, Will had flung the clothe sack over his head, grabbing him into a choke hold as he started to make a grab for them. But he wasn't that strong, and they soon had him face down on the concrete.

Will knelt on his back as he secured the cable ties to his wrists. We would be upgrading to chains later, but ties did the job for now. Tyler grabbed his ankles and did the same, and then they hauled him up, sprinting to the van as best they could with him in their arms, then threw him into the back as they got in themselves and shouted, “Go, go, go.”

I sped off just as the side door to the van closed and we were out of there.

I told Devon to text Gaz and tell him he needed to get out of the pub right this second, and he did, letting me know when Gaz replied that the coast was clear. Gaz was out, we had Cheslin, and none of the fuckers in that pub had a bloody clue what’d happened yet. The plan was going like fucking clockwork, and now that we’d gotten the hard part over with, it was all plain sailing. Now the real games could begin.

Chapter Thirty-Seven



I knew the side roads in Brinton Manor like the back of my hand, and I drove as fast as I could to get us to the warehouse. We could hear banging and shouting coming from the back of the van, but after a minute or two, it died down. Tyler and Will must've gagged him and managed to chain him up to stop him thrashing about. I knew, despite how relaxed and carefree he looked when he went out into that smoking area, this guy was a master at worming his way out of things. He hadn't received proper justice before, but he would now. He couldn't trick his way out of this one.

The van started to bounce around as I pulled onto the unsteady ground around the back of our warehouse, and Colton and Devon both held onto the dashboard for support. No doubt, I'd be hearing about my shitty driving for the rest of the night from Tyler and Will in the back, but it was a hazard of the job. I wasn't going to apologise to anyone.

Once we were parked up with the side door of the van adjacent to the entrance to the warehouse, both Colton and I opened our doors and got out of the vehicle. We stretched our legs and rolled our necks, ready to start the next phase of the job, total and utter annihilation of the fucking scum that thought he could destroy a little girl's life and terrorise her and her family.

"I am so fucking pumped," Colton said, jumping on the spot and rolling his shoulders like he was a fighter about to go

to war. “Let’s get him out of there and get this show on the road.”

I couldn’t agree more, so I pulled the side door to the van open and found Tyler and Will standing over him. He had masking tape wound tightly around his mouth, but he was still trying to talk through it, spluttering and making a dull scream as he thrashed against the chains that were holding him in place in the van. He turned towards the open door, squinting from the sunlight behind us, and when he saw me, his eyes went wide and he kicked up his resistance a notch, jerking his legs as he tried to get away from us.

Colton leant his arm against the top of the open door to the van and with a smirk he said, “You might want to save some of that energy for later, *mate*. It’s not like you’re going anywhere, and with what we have planned for you, I think you’re gonna need all the energy you can get.”

Karl just panted out his breaths through the space Will and Tyler had very kindly left for him to breathe through when they shut him up. With each laboured breath, snot began to pour from his nose, creating bubbles to form where he was snorting out his disgust. He glared at Colton like he was giving him a warning for daring to speak to him like that, and Colton threw back his head and laughed.

“If looks could kill, hey?” Colton sang, then he sighed with fake sadness. “But they don’t.” He tapped his finger on his bottom lip and pretended to look thoughtful. “But you know what does kill? Us! So buckle up, Ches. You’re in for a bumpy ride.”

Tyler and Will both grinned and yanked the handcuffs chaining him up off his wrists, and then, with each one taking an arm, they hauled him up and dragged him out of the van and into the warehouse.

I was the last one in, and I shut the old metal door, twisting the locks to make sure we weren’t disturbed. Tyler and Will were busy getting Cheslin strapped into the chair. They started with the legs, but surprisingly, he didn’t put up much of a fight. But when they cut the cable ties from his wrists, he

lashed out, making a feeble attempt to try and grab his freedom. It was pointless. Within seconds they both had him restrained. There was no getting out of that chair once you were locked in, not until we'd finished with you.

Tyler moved over to the video equipment to make sure it was all set up, and I walked slowly down the middle of the room, my eyes fixed on the dirty fucker that was panting out his putrid breath, his eyes going from desperate and pleading to fury and vengeance.

“Welcome to your final game of consequences, Mr Cheslin,” I said, my voice sounding muffled through the material of the bandana. I cocked my head to the side and took another step closer. “Did you think we'd just walk away? Did you think you could end the game yourself?” I tutted and shook my head. “Wrong. We decide when it's game over, and this is your final task.”

I squatted down in front of him, staring right into his eyes as I reminded him of his crimes before delivering his sentence.

“We're here to bring justice. A justice you've avoided for far too long, just like the fucking rat you are. But not anymore, Karl. That ends today.”

I took out the photograph of the little girl that Michael Felton had emailed to us from my back pocket. The one he wanted us to show Karl and taunt him with. And I held it up to his face, forcing him to look at it.

His eyes went wide, and he started shaking his head and crying out a muffled, ‘No,’ as he made one last attempt to save himself. They always did when they got to this stage. Funny, they didn't show any mercy to the victims they'd hurt when they were the ones in control, and I told him that exact thing.

“See that, right there?” I pointed at him. “That look of fear in your eyes, is that what she looked like, that little girl you stole from the streets and violated? That same girl you taunted for months and months from your shitty little prison cell?”

He was sobbing now. A pathetic mess of a man. Fucking spineless.

“Well, guess what? That camera set up behind me?” I pointed over my shoulder to the stand holding the equipment that was ready to capture his demise in every glorious detail. “That’s gonna record every second of your final hours, and it will be hours; long, painful, drawn-out hours. Your days of terrorising little girls are over. You’re about to face justice, soldier style. And when it’s over, we’ll show that family what we’ve done to you, so they can have some kind of peace knowing that you were sent to hell in the worst way possible. There’s no place for a rapist, trafficking low-life like you in Brinton. We are doing the world a favour by taking you out.”

I stood up and turned to address the others.

“Have you all chosen your weapons? I hope you’ve left me something good.”

Tyler held up a pair of wire cutters, Will a machete, Colton held a barbed-wire covered baseball bat in the air and whooped, and Devon stared at his Katana sword like it was his first born.

“Time for me to choose.” I walked over to the table, pulling my hoody off and then ripping off the bandana. We had black ski masks laid out on the table, and I took one and put it on. Bandanas were fine, but when you were really in the zone, ski masks were better, they didn’t slip.

The others followed suit, masking up, and then we turned back to Karl Cheslin who sat whimpering in the chair as he hung his head in defeat and squeezed his eyes shut tightly, so he couldn’t see what tools we were about to use on him.

“Too scared to face us?” I shouted across the warehouse. “Too fucking scared to open your eyes and see what we have for you?”

He didn’t bite, just kept his eyes closed and shook his head as he moaned and gave a few feeble attempts to yank on his restraints.

I walked over to him and leant down into his face.

“Just so you know,” I whispered. “I chose the scalpel. It’s one of my favourites. Very... precise.” And I ran the blade

down his cheek, flames of satisfaction burning through me as he cried out and jerked away. I'd drawn the first drop of blood, but there'd be more where that came from.

"We need music," Colton announced, flinging his arms to the side dramatically. "I think an event of this magnitude calls for something epic."

We had a sound system set up in the warehouse to help focus and channel our energies. Some songs seemed to lend themselves to moments like this. But when the sound of *Dizze Rascal's Bonkers* came on, I snapped.

"No. Not a fucking chance. Turn it off." I stalked over to Colton, and he laughed.

"Have you got any better suggestions? I mean, we are fucking bonkers. I thought the lyrics might be ironic."

"I don't want irony. I want emotion. Pain. Pure fucking agony." I flicked through the playlist and found just what I was looking for.

Linkin Park's Papercut.

I turned up the volume for maximum effect, and as the song started playing, you could feel the venom working its way through our bodies. Like a drug injected into our veins, it crawled and consumed us all.

All five of us moved to stand around Karl Cheslin, singing the words to the song as we stared at him. We were wired and ready to create fucking mayhem and he was our canvas. Our muse for the masterpiece we were about to produce using his flesh, blood, and bones.

He looked at each of us in turn with a pathetic plea in his eyes, but once the chorus hit and that crescendo of notes mixed with the voice that was the master, Chester Bennington, penetrated through the air, Colton swung his baseball bat and smacked it right into the back of Karl's head.

The fucker slumped forward in his seat, but we weren't letting him get away with anything. He wouldn't be allowed to pass out. We had buckets of water ready and other, less

humane, methods of rousing him back into a lucid state on hand.

I stalked forward and grabbed a fistful of his hair, yanking his head up. Then when the words of the song talked about the face that we all had inside of us, being right beneath our skin, I took my scalpel and ran it along his hairline, pushing in deep and laughing when I saw the blood trickle down his face and into his eyes. He wouldn't look at me. Instead, he gritted his teeth and hissed as I dug my scalpel in harder, wanting him to feel every second of pain, every slice of the blade. The rush of adrenaline was truly hedonistic and I savoured every cry and scream. I was in the zone and nothing could stop me now.

Will stepped up beside me, and I moved to let him swing his machete into the fucker's legs, slicing his thighs through his blue jeans and turning them a deep purple from the blood that was soaking through the thick fabric. Two or three strokes of the blade and the filthy bastard looked like he was about to cave, so I picked up a bucket of water to douse him in reality. There would be no escape for him. Not yet.

I didn't mind sharing a kill with my soldiers, but this one felt personal, so I threw the scalpel down and pulled my knife out. Then I moved to stand behind Cheslin, grabbing his face and pulling it back so I could gouge the tip of my knife into his eyes, his cheeks, anywhere to inflict maximum pain. When his screams intensified, I ripped off the tape covering his mouth and then angled my blade in between his lips, pushing against the soft flesh of his face, cutting into his cheeks and right up to his fucking ears, giving him a Chelsea smile that'd make The Joker envious.

We made sure we gave Cheslin our five-star treatment. Tyler stood in front of him with his wire cutters ready and a shit-eating grin on his face. Like the seasoned pro he was, he held Cheslin's hand still and clamped the cutter down hard onto his finger, grunting as he used every ounce of power within him to cut it clean off. The crunch as the bone connected with the metal and then broke off was pure satisfaction.

Sitting in the chair, covered in blood and stinking of shit, Cheslin gasped for breath as he writhed and moaned in agony. That made me laugh even more because we hadn't even started yet. Once Devon got his hands on him, he'd wish the wire cutters were the worst of it.

Songs on the playlist changed. Our torrent of torture continued. And all the time, Cheslin fought the will to give in.

We took breaks to recharge, and we found new ways to utilise our tools. Tyler switched his wire cutters to pliers, and we all stood back and watched the duo that was Tyler and Devon go to work. Tyler clamped the pliers onto one of the nails on Cheslin's hand and then held onto the handle tightly as he ripped it backwards, yanking Cheslin's nail out as the fucker screamed and thrashed. Once Tyler had pulled it out, he threw it to the ground and let Devon step up in his place.

Devon smiled to himself and stood over Cheslin, whispering, "You've got no use for this now, have you?" And then lifted his sword up into the air and brought it down onto Cheslin's wrist, taking his hand clean off. Now, that was the kind of irony I loved.

At this stage, Cheslin was so out of it, he was drifting in and out of consciousness. We'd done a pretty fucking good job of making him suffer, and the video had caught every single satisfying second.

"Time to wrap this up," I announced, walking over to the table and taking hold of the axe that I'd been saving for this moment. Then I strolled back over to the chair that held the pathetic piece of shit, Cheslin. He was still wheezing and clinging onto this world, but it was his time to go. Time to meet his maker, the devil himself.

I didn't waste time with bullshit speeches, I wanted this over with. So, I stood behind his snivelling, rotten carcass and lifted the axe high up in the air, bringing it down into the middle of his skull with so much force that the handle snapped off.

"Oh shit," Colton laughed. "Looks like we need to go shopping for a new axe."

The axe blade was imbedded into his skull and I walked around to the front of the chair, feeling pride ripple through me that I'd done this to him, that we'd all done this to him. I bent down to get a better look at his face, a mangled mess of flesh and blood, and I smiled.

“Game over,” I whispered over his corpse. “I hope you rot in hell.”

I glanced up at the rest of the soldiers that stood around me, and when I saw Devon's face looking disappointed, I realised that I might've fucked up slightly. I had promised him the next kill, but it was too bad. I'd wanted this one, and I needed to see it through to the end. He knew better than anyone that my kill switch was broken.

“Sorry, Devon,” I shrugged, not really feeling sorry at all. “If you want to play with the corpse, be my guest.” I grinned and moved to the side. It was only fair that I let him create his masterpiece, after taking the kill myself.

Devon nodded and then approached the chair. He took a few deep breaths as he pumped his hand on the handle of his katana sword and said in a low, menacing voice, “I have a sister the same age as the girl you hurt. You deserved every single thing that happened to you today.” And then he stood to the side, held the sword firmly in both hands and swung hard through the air, slicing through Cheslin's neck and cutting his head off.

“Holy fucking shit!” Colton shouted and we all stood and watched Devon as he took more deep breaths and a slow smile crept over his face. Finally, he'd gotten what he wanted.

He looked at his sword and then at all of us. “You know, a katana sword can cut a man in half.” He glanced back at the body of Cheslin's carcass still restrained in the chair. “I did think about it, but I didn't want to damage the chair.”

“Oh my fucking God, you are priceless.” Colton laughed. “Can I have the katana sword next time?”

“Not unless you practice. It could be very dangerous in the wrong hands,” Devon said, his facial expression blank,

showing that he was totally serious.

“In the wrong hands,” Colton quipped, thinking Devon was hysterical. “Like either one of us have the right hands. We’re fucking maniacs.”

“I think we need to get cleaned up and get Gaz and his crew out here to sort this,” I said, grabbing a towel to wipe myself down.

From behind me, I heard a thud and turned to see Devon pulling Cheslin’s body out of the seat where it sat and onto the floor.

“Changed your mind about cutting him in half?” Will joked as Devon stood over the body on the floor, his eyes wide as he used the tip of the sword to lift Cheslin’s T-shirt.

“Or he wants to get a sneaky peak at his nipples,” Colton whispered under his breath.

But when Devon started to pant out the words, “No. No. No.” We all stopped what we were doing to look at him.

He lifted his head and swallowed before he spoke the next words that would send us into a spiral of utter chaos.

“I think we got the wrong guy.”

The blood rushed to my ears, blaring a siren through my brain that made me feel like I was about to explode right where I stood.

What the fuck was he on about?

We all stalked across the room to join Devon, looking down at the body that he was staring at.

“We didn’t get the wrong guy. That’s Karl Cheslin. I saw his photo. I saw him outside that fucking pub. It was him,” Tyler stated, gritting his teeth in anger.

“If that’s the case, then where is his tattoo?” Devon pointed his sword at the torso again, and Colton knelt down, yanking the T-shirt up so we could all get a better look.

“Maybe Jake Colt lied to us when he said he’d tattooed him in prison?” Colton said, looking back up at us all.

“No.” I shook my head, adamant that wasn’t the case. I couldn’t work out what was going on, but I didn’t believe for a second that Jake Colt would lie to me. “There must be some other explanation. Colt wouldn’t do that.”

Tyler reached into the pocket of jeans and pulled out what I assumed was Karl Cheslin’s wallet. He lifted a bank card out and then, as he read the name on the front, he held his hand over his mouth and said, “No fucking way.”

He opened the main compartment of the wallet, pulling out notes, and then he pulled out a photograph and his face went pale.

“This isn’t Karl Cheslin,” he said, nodding to the body. “This is Paul Cheslin.” He turned the photograph around so we could see the two men in the picture. “His twin brother.”

Chapter Thirty-Eight



“**A**re you fucking kidding me?” I shouted, storming over to the table with the tools and sliding my arm across the surface in rage, sending them all clattering to the floor. “Four of you. Four fucking soldiers, and not one of you found out he had a twin brother when you did your research?”

I picked up the baseball bat from the floor and started to smash it against the table, the wall, anything I could to try and stem the rage coursing through me.

“The one time... the one fucking time that I don’t do the recon and this fucking happens. Do I have to do everything for this fucking crew? Are you all so totally fucking useless you can’t even be bothered to do a proper background check?”

The others stood there as I lost my shit, not moving an inch or saying a thing.

“What else did you miss, huh? Do we have an army of fucking rapists about to burst in and take us all out for what we’ve just done?” I bellowed, holding my arms out furiously, gesturing to the doors.

“We knew he had brothers, three of them,” Devon piped up, but I didn’t want to hear it.

Too little, too late.

“This is the last fucking time I ever leave the details to any of you.” I was so infuriated I couldn’t keep still. I tried to think what my next move would be, pacing up and down as I swung

the bat, but all I could see was the red mist of my fury circling around me.

“To be fair, we did our best,” Colton dared to chip in. “You have been preoccupied lately with your girlfriend.”

He’d just stepped over the line, daring to challenge me, and I threw the baseball bat down in anger and stalked over to him, ready to knock him the fuck out.

“You leave her out of this,” I snarled in his face as Will and Tyler stood in front of him, trying to diffuse the situation.

“I’m not saying it’s her fault, or yours.” Colton shrugged and looked around the group. “It’s not any of our faults. It’s a mistake. Mistakes happen. And let’s be honest here, he was the twin brother of a sex trafficking rapist, so chances are, he was a client in waiting. I’d bet all the money in the world he needed our justice too. So we got ahead of ourselves. Took out a future game player. The way I see it, we’ve killed two birds with one stone today.”

“But we haven’t, have we?” Devon answered. “Killed two, that is. Do we even know where *Karl* Cheslin is right now?”

I ran my hands over my face and tried to think up a plan. Chances were they’d left the pub and were looking for us. Would they head to the asylum? Try to ambush us there? And why the fuck hadn’t Gaz noticed there were two fucking identical twins standing at the bar? I knew he wasn’t quite soldier material, but surely, he would’ve noticed something as glaringly obvious as that?

To say my head was gone was a fucking understatement. The voices, those demons in my head, they’d really taken over now. My kill switch was broken, stuck in psycho mode, and that wasn’t changing anytime soon.

“You need to check your phone,” Tyler suddenly announced quietly, the caution in his voice cutting through the tense atmosphere in the warehouse. I almost ignored him, too focused on how we’d get to Cheslin—the right Cheslin—before anyone else found out what we’d done.

“Wipe that fucking video,” I stated, pointing at the equipment. “No one sees that, do you hear me? No one.”

Then, I took my phone out and grimaced as I unlocked the screen and found a text from Olivia.

Olivia: Fantasy time. (See, I used a code word). I’m just about to jump into the shower, but I think I might have left my back door unlocked. I really hope someone doesn’t break in and then creep up my stairs, sneak into my bathroom and fuck me senseless against the tiles. Or even worse, over the sink so he can watch my face in the mirror as he makes me come.

A message like that would’ve usually sent me running over to her, but I closed it down. I couldn’t focus on anything but this job. I had to tuck Olivia up into a box in my head and keep her there for when all of this was over.

“I’ve got nothing on my phone.” I looked up to see the rest of them checking theirs and then glancing up at me, staring like I’d grown two fucking heads.

“Check our emails,” Devon said, and I did.

What I saw tore my heart out and made the rage that’d been bubbling from within burst free like fucking Krakatoa.

There, in our inbox, was a message.

To: soldiersofanarchy@gmail.com

From: Fuckyou.com@gmail.co.uk

Message: Surprise, Mother Fuckers!

You know, for a crew who claims to be ruthless and unstoppable, you really are fucking shit at this.

Did you think I’d let you fuck about with me and not do my homework?

Do you think I haven’t spent every moment inside prison gathering information on you too? Waiting for the day I could use what I know?

I’ve always been one step ahead of you. Always.

So, I guess by now, you realise it's not me that you've taken. I'm also guessing you've fucked my brother up pretty badly.

I knew you were following us even before we got to the pub. I saw you parked up in your shitty van down the road. So, I played a game of my own. I switched places in the car with my brother, Paul. He took my shirt, I took his. And when we got to The Red Lion, Paul, and our mate, Mark, got out. I didn't. I waited, hiding in the back seat until you drove around to the back of the pub, and then I left, driving Mark's car to the real destination for my welcome home party.

You see, I'm a big believer in that old saying, 'An eye for an eye.' And just look at what I've picked up to achieve that.

Good luck finding us.

I'll be seeing you, soldiers.

Ches.

Underneath the message was a photo of Cheslin, and he was holding my Olivia against him, his hand over her mouth as he took a fucking selfie and smiled. The defiance in her eyes damn near broke me. She was going to fight him with everything she had, and bastards like him fucking fed off that shit, it was their kryptonite.

I had to get to her. I had to stop whatever was about to happen. This was my fault. I didn't do the recon, I fucked up, and now Olivia was going to pay the fucking price.

"I'm so sorry, man. We'll get him. Have you still got that tracker on Liv's phone?" Tyler asked.

My head was swimming, my brain scrambled, as every instinct pushed me to get out of there. But I took a breath and opened up the app to see that red dot flashing, telling me she was still at home.

"I'll check her CCTV," Colton added, and my heart sank as he shook his head and looked back up at me. "It's out. The

fucker must've cut the wires.”

I didn't even stop to think, I just grabbed the keys to the van from the table and darted across the room to unlock the door.

“Hey, hold up, we'll come with you,” Colton shouted after me.

“No fucking time. Ring Gaz. Get this fucking mess sorted. Can I at least trust you to do that?” I shouted back.

“Soldiers don't act alone. We work together, wait up,” Tyler added, and I could hear them following me, but I was too fast. I climbed into the van, started the engine and sped off, just as one of them reached it and started banging on the side for me to stop. I never would though. I had to get to her, no matter what. This was my problem, my fault, and I had to end this.

Chapter Thirty-Nine



I sped through the roads, ignoring traffic lights and swerving around cars as I headed from Brinton into Sandland. All the while, I kept ringing her phone, praying that she'd pick up, but she never did. Every single one of my calls went straight to answerphone. The soldiers tried to ring me, but I cut off every single one of their calls. I didn't have anything to say to them.

I placed my phone on the dashboard in front of me as I drove, keeping the tracker app open so I could see if she moved. I prayed I wasn't too late. If he'd hurt her, if he'd fucking touched her, I'd rip him apart. I'd also tear myself apart. How could I ever live with myself knowing I'd done this to her? That this was all my fault.

When I eventually pulled into her driveway, I saw that there were no other cars. I leant over and reached into the glove compartment, taking out the knife that was hidden there for emergencies. It was only a hunting knife, no katana, but it didn't matter. I had the best weapon against any predator... Me.

I abandoned the van, leaving the engine running and the door open, and I sprinted up the steps to her front door. It was locked, and I was just about to kick the fucker open, but instead, I took the quicker option and ran around the side of her house to the back door to find it wide open. I smacked it hard, banging it against the plaster in anger, then I sped through the kitchen and into the hallway, grabbing the railing

and taking the stairs three at a time to get to her bedroom. I could hear the hiss of the shower still pouring, and I flung her door open, expecting to find him there with her, but the room was empty. I stalked over to her bathroom, slamming that door open, but again, nothing.

The air was thick with steam, and I reached into the shower to turn it off, shaking with fury at the fact that she wasn't here, she was gone. He'd taken her, and I had no fucking clue how to find them.

When I turned around, I saw a message scrawled into the steam on her mirror that made the beast inside of me want to tear my own fucking skin off.

See you in hell.

I roared like an animal, unleashing my rage. I was already in hell, a fucking hell of my own making, and I picked up a glass jar that was next to the sink and hurled it at the mirror, breaking the glass, shattering it into a million pieces, just like my heart. I would see him in hell, but he'd be going there first, once I'd hunted him down.

Standing in the middle of her bathroom, I howled, gripping my knife, desperate to cause pain. I needed to find them. I needed to tear him apart and decimate every inch of him, until every one of the voices in my head that were howling—as loud as I was—were quietened. Silenced by retribution. Nobody touched what was mine and got away with it.

I walked back into her room and grabbed my phone again, ringing her and praying to a God I didn't believe in that she'd pick up. She didn't, but I heard a gentle buzz and that's when I noticed her phone was on her bedside table. I shut down the call and went over to it, picking it up and seeing the list of missed calls and texts listed on her home screen, and all from one caller, me. She had my number saved as 'My Man' and my fucking heart twisted inside my chest, the splintered, broken parts piercing me from within, making it hard to breathe. My life wouldn't be worth living without her in it. She was my fucking life.

My phone started to vibrate in my hand, and I saw it was Devon calling. I answered, but I couldn't speak. The reality of what was happening was too much to bear.

“Ad, are you there?” Devon asked, and I grunted out a sound.

“We managed to tap into the back up on Liv's CCTV. We saw what happened before he dismantled it. He isn't that clever.” My heart lurched hearing what he said, and I held onto the wall, my other hand gripping the phone, desperate for something I could use, anything that'd lead me to her. “There was no Range Rover caught on camera, I think he ditched that, but there was a white van that we saw on there. We managed to get a number plate and Tyler is on the phone right now to his guy in the police, seeing if we can get a current location through number plate recognition.”

“How long is that gonna take? Wouldn't it be quicker to hack into the police systems ourselves?” I asked, the desperation pouring out of me.

“Not this time. Tyler said it's quicker this way,” Devon replied, then added, “I don't think he'll have kept her in Sandland. Brinton is his hunting ground. He knows the area. Maybe it's better if you come back here and once we get—”

“I'm not going anywhere unless it's to find Olivia. I'll drive down every fucking road, street, path, dirt track, and alleyway in Brinton until I find her. I'll burn the fucking town to the ground if I have to.” I wasn't going to give up. I wouldn't put anything on hold, waiting for some copper to pull his finger out and check a computer program. She came first. Nothing else mattered but my Olivia.

“Okay, well when we get news, I'll ring you.”

“You'd better,” I snapped and hung up, walking out of her room and back down the stairs with my phone in one hand and my knife in the other.

If Karl fucking Cheslin thought he had a rough time in prison, if he thought he'd met mean motherfuckers before, then he was in for a shock. He was about to come face-to-face

with the best of them. They didn't call me the psycho for nothing, and he was about to find out why.

Chapter Forty



I drove down every street, aimlessly looking for any signs of where they could be. A pointless endeavour, but what else could I do? The soldiers were trying to track them down, I'd tried every fucker in my phone list who might get wind of something shady going on to see if they'd heard anything, but I'd come up with nothing. My next stop was Cheslin's other brothers to beat the crap out of them and get to the truth, but then my phone rang, and I saw Devon's name appear on the screen.

"What?" I snapped, my heart beating in my throat with pure fucking dread at what he'd say.

"Number plate recognition has a trace." Every part of me was on red alert, desperate to hear the verdict. "The van was last seen in Queen Street. That was about ten minutes ago."

I didn't wait to hear anything else; I'd heard all I needed to. My brain and body were switching to autopilot, and I knew what I had to do. I ended the call, threw my phone down onto the seat next to me, and put my foot down, racing to get there.

Queen Street.

Was it just a coincidence that that was the same street that the Brinton Community Centre was on? The same building we'd thrown Harvey off all those months ago.

It looked like things in my life were coming full circle.

I gripped the steering wheel, my knuckles white with tension, and when I swerved into the street in question, I leant

forward, scanning the road for a white van. Then I saw it, parked to the side of the Community Centre. They had to be here, and I was praying that I wasn't too late. If he'd hurt her, I'd never forgive myself.

I pulled up next to the van and shot out of my vehicle. A quick scan of the interior told me there was no one inside, and so I held my knife ready and ran over to the entrance to the centre, ready to rain hell. The building was derelict, but the locks were broken, and anyone could access it. The perfect location for a crime, we knew that, and so it would seem did Cheslin.

Once inside, I tried to listen, to hear any signs that Olivia was here, but all I could hear were the occasional creaks of an old building, shuffling from mice or rats scurrying away from my approaching presence, and the wind as it whistled through the broken, boarded-up windows and rafters of the roof. I stalked down empty corridors, up the stairs, checking the other floors, but there was nothing. I felt hopeless and furious all at once. But then, suddenly, a creak above me caught my attention. I jerked my head to look up and heard the sound of footsteps moving above me.

They were here.

That had to be them.

I sprinted towards the stairs and up to the roof, ready to unleash the beast begging to be freed inside me and take on another sicko from this town. Bring him to justice on a roof that on numerous occasions had seen what I was capable of and what would happen if you were on the soldiers' radar. Live by the sword, die by the sword, and this guy was about to do just that. He'd touched what was mine, taken her, and now he needed to pay the price.

I flung open the door that led onto the roof, charging out like a wild animal, ready to rip my enemy to shreds. But then, I stopped dead in my tracks, my heart beating frantically out of my chest as I took in the scene before me.

I'd found her.

I'd found him too.

And in that moment, my whole world tilted on its axis.

He had her in his arms, a gun pointed to her head, and he was staring right at me, grinning as he squeezed her waist, hugging her tightly to him and revelling in what he thought was his triumph. Every instinct, every bone in my body told me to fight, but I couldn't, because that killer instinct, the very fucking nature of who I was... it was struggling under something else.

Emotions.

I couldn't give a fuck what he did to me. But her? She came first, always. I had to play this differently if I was going to save her. I had to think smarter.

"Noble." He cackled. "I see you brought a knife to a gun fight." Then he shook his head, giving a fake fucking laugh. "Well prepared as always."

I stood, staring at them both, my mind trying to calculate ways I could over-power him and get her away from him. Anything to turn the tables which were not in my fucking favour right now.

"Adam, don't," Olivia begged, her eyes pleading with me not to storm ahead and make things worse.

She knew me so well. She knew that I was seconds away from barrelling into this fucker and sending us both off the roof to perish on the ground below. But seeing her held against her will, not being able to get to her, it was killing me. The splinters of pain I'd felt back at her house were nothing compared to the sheer agony of this. He'd done his research back in prison all right, and he'd found my kryptonite, my Achilles heel. It was her. It would always be her. My greatest strength and my biggest weakness.

Karl glanced at her and then the fucker kissed her on the side of the head, making my blood boil and my hand grip tighter around the handle of my knife. He was going to pay for that.

"She's beautiful." He smiled. "I can see why you like her."

“Get your fucking hands off her,” I growled, stepping forward, but he moved the gun to point it at me, and then held it back against Olivia’s head, pushing it hard into her temple where he’d just left his dirty fucking kiss.

“I don’t think you’re in any position to be making demands here, do you?” Cheslin snarled and then leant closer to Olivia, licking her cheek and laughing at me as I stood there, my breath coming in sharp pants as I tried to control my fury.

Those bloody instincts and emotions were toying inside me, fighting in a battle for control. I willed my instincts to take over and shut down any other thoughts in my brain so I could pounce on him, tear him apart with my bare hands and to hell with the consequences, but I couldn’t. He had her. And if he pulled that trigger, it was game over for all of us. I couldn’t lose her. Not like this. The instincts I’d honed for years were drowned out by my emotions. My life wasn’t worth living if she wasn’t in it, and I’d burn the world to ashes if she was ever taken from me.

“I have a dilemma here,” Cheslin carried on, running the barrel of his handgun up and down the side of Olivia’s face. She tried not to show any emotion, keeping her head held high for my benefit, but I knew her. I knew everything about her, and I could tell she was scared.

“See, I would really love to fuck her in front of you. Make you watch every minute of it and then blow your brains out, or...”

I couldn’t help it, those words ignited a fire inside of me that I couldn’t control, and I stalked over to him, but when Olivia started shouting—“Don’t, Adam. Please. Don’t listen to him”—I stopped. Hearing the desperation in her voice pulled me back into the moment.

Think smarter, Noble.

Don’t let him goad you.

Get her to safety first.

“You’re gonna fucking pay for this,” I shouted. “You’re a fucking dead man, Cheslin.”

“Says the guy without a gun,” he sneered at me, rubbing his filthy hands all over her as he continued to press the gun against her head. “Interrupt me again, and I’ll choose whatever fucking option I want,” he said, spit flying from his mouth as he sneered and snarled at me.

“Let me make this easy for you,” I said, pointing my knife at him as I spoke. “You let her go and you take me. I’m the one you want, right? She’s just the bait you used to get me here.”

“She’s more than bait.” He leant down to speak into Olivia’s ear, saying, “Don’t listen to him. You’re so much more than that.” Then his eyes glazed over with evil intent, and he stared right back at me. “Throw the knife over here,” he demanded, and I shook my head. “Throw me the knife or I’ll throw her over the edge. Don’t fucking test me.” His eyes were manic as he stared at me, and in that moment, I knew. Crazy recognises crazy, and he was capable of anything. He was as fucked up as I was.

“Adam, please,” Olivia pleaded. “Just do it.”

I didn’t want to, but I had to do something to keep her safe. Trying to get into his mind-set and make him think that he was winning was one way to play this. So, I held my knife up in the air and then threw it off the roof of the building. There wasn’t a chance in hell that I’d throw it over to him. If I did, he’d have probably used it on her.

“Not what I wanted, but I suppose it’ll do.” He smirked. “I have to admit, when I found out all about you...” He pointed the gun at me as he spoke and my eyes bored into Olivia’s, willing her to pull away and run, but she just shook her head and mouthed, ‘No,’ to me as he carried on with his pointless ramblings. “There was nothing I wanted more than to be the one to blow your brains out. You think you’re so smart. Thought you could terrorise me in prison, treating me like a fucking puppet.”

“Like you terrorised that little girl?” I snarled back at him.

“No one’s perfect, are they, Adam? I bet your body count far exceeds mine. When we both get to the gates of hell, you’ll be getting a fast-track pass to the main event. Let’s not pretend here. None of us are innocent, are we?”

“She is,” I said, nodding to my Olivia. “So let her go and we can finish this. This is between me and you.”

He laughed then his face turned manic again, his eyes glinting and wide like he was on something.

“She’s not going anywhere, and I’ll have a bullet lodged in her brain before you even get near us, so don’t get any smart ideas. Let’s remember who’s in control here.” He spoke calmly, like this was an everyday transaction and he was letting us all know how it was going to go. Or how he hoped it’d go. But I knew how his mind worked. He wanted to enjoy this, drag it out and revel in every detail. Only thing was, his stalling tactics worked to my advantage. The longer he stood there talking, the more time the other soldiers had to get here. And when they stormed the roof, he’d be totally fucking annihilated.

Soldiers worked together.

We were a team.

They knew where I was, and it was only a matter of time before the odds were back in my favour.

“You want to be in control, fine,” I said, speaking slowly. “You have two options here. You either kill her, and then we kill each other, game over, no one wins. Or...”

“Or?” He cocked his head, waiting for my response.

“Or you let her go. Do whatever the fuck it is you want to do to me, but she walks away.”

“No,” Olivia said through gritted teeth, but it was my turn to shake my head. She needed to do as she was told, trust me and give me the time I needed in this situation to turn things around.

“I do like both options, but I have a third.” Cheslin smiled. “I shoot you,” he pointed the gun at me, and as he did, Olivia

tried to struggle out of his grasp, but he was too strong and he just laughed, pulling her back against him and putting the gun back against her temple. “And she watches you get your brains blown out. Then I get to fuck her before I kill her too. Can’t leave any loose ends behind, can I?”

“You’re not gonna touch her.” I stepped forward, speaking calmly, and her eyes went wide with fear as he cocked the gun, ready to shoot. So, I stopped and held my hands up, trying to buy us both some time. “How about we compromise? Take the gun off her, do whatever you’ve gotta do to me, but let her go.”

“I’m never gonna let her go.” He laughed and then a sinister smile spread across his face. “But I tell you what, I’ll take you up on your offer. I’ll let her move to the side and watch if you take her place. I want you handcuffed though. I can’t trust that you aren’t hiding any more weapons on you.”

I wasn’t, and the realisation of what that meant killed me, but I had a weapon much deadlier than any knife.

Me.

I just needed to plan this out correctly and not lose my head.

He nodded to where a backpack lay a little distance away from us on the ground and added, “In there, you’ll find a pair of handcuffs. Put them on, then walk over to the edge of the roof and kneel down, facing the town you love so much. It’ll be the last thing you see before I send you to hell.”

I didn’t stop to think. I’d run out of all options, and this was the only avenue I could see before me. Taking deep breaths to calm my demons who were howling for me to resist, I slowly walked over to that bag. Olivia begged me not to, but I took the handcuffs out.

“Move away from him, Olivia,” I demanded, holding the cuffs in my hand and staring at them both, waiting for him to release her.

“Not until the cuffs are on,” he said, keeping hold of her in his death-like grip and I gritted my teeth, securing them on one

wrist before locking them onto the other. All the time, I was watching the door, waiting for the back-up.

“Now. Let. Her. Go,” I said in a low, demanding tone, every word spoken with conviction.

Cheslin glanced at Olivia, then back at me. I expected him to refuse and turn the tables, but he moved the gun from her head to point it at me and pushed her onto the ground in front of him, making her stumble and fall.

“Run away, and I’ll shoot you down. I’ll aim for the legs too, so you’ll still be conscious when I fuck you,” he said, winking at her as she lay on the ground, panting and glaring back up at him. Then he put the gun back on her and smirked. “Try me. I think you’ll find I keep my promises.”

“I have four friends who will kill to protect her,” I snarled. “Let’s not kid ourselves. You’re not getting off this roof alive.”

“Or I can just pull this trigger and send her to heaven now,” he added. “I doubt she’ll be joining you in hell, not with a face like that.” He grinned down at Olivia and then turned the gun back on me. “Now kneel on the ledge, Noble, like I fucking told you to.”

I had no choice. I walked over to ledge and kneeled, and Cheslin came over to me, pointing his gun at the back of my head. Time was running out and I scanned the streets below, looking for any sign of the soldiers, but I couldn’t see them. Where the fuck were they? Maybe they weren’t going to stop this after all? Maybe I had to think of another way out? Distract Cheslin so Olivia could run and get as far away as she could. I had to do something. I couldn’t let this play out how he wanted it to.

So, I took that split second to spin round on my knees and try to knock Cheslin down as I shouted, “Run, Olivia. Get out of here.”

But my attempts to overpower Cheslin didn’t go as I’d planned. He had better reflexes than I’d expected, and he swerved my attempts to barrel into him, leaving me writhing and lashing out on the floor as I tried to regain my balance. He

managed to yank me back onto my knees and then shoved me back into position, kicking me as he growled out his anger.

“No more fucking about,” he snarled. “I’m tired of your games. Time’s up, Noble.”

I could hear Olivia crying and I clenched my jaw, squeezing my eyes shut and wishing that I’d done more to help her.

Why hadn’t she run?

Why hadn’t I been able saved her?

What else could I do to stop this?

“Looks like we have our very own Romeo and Juliet right here. I love a good tragedy,” Cheslin said mockingly and then leant down to speak in my ear. “Do you have any last words before you go?”

He pushed the gun into the back of my head, and I heard Olivia start to scream hysterically and cry out, “No, please, no.”

“Get out of here, Olivia. Please,” I begged, with tears trickling down my face. Tears I would never let her see.

But she didn’t listen, only sobbed, and kept repeating, “No, Adam. Please, no.”

“Are those your last words?” Cheslin said, pushing the gun further into my skull and cackling.

“I...” My throat felt raw like razor blades were lodged inside, trying to stop me from saying what I needed to say. My body trembled as I felt the sand in my timer trickling to the very last grain.

Where were they?

Where were the fucking soldiers?

“I love you, Olivia,” I spoke, my voice coarse and aching with all the emotions and the pain that was killing me.

I’d never told her I loved her. But I couldn’t die without letting her know. I didn’t want my last words or my last

thoughts to be filled with hate. I wanted to die with her in my mind and my heart. Her name on my lips as I took my final breath.

My Olivia.

“No,” she wailed. “No. Not like this. I love you, Adam. I fucking love you. Don’t you dare give up! Don’t you fucking leave me...”

There were no soldiers by my side when the gunshot went off. Only Olivia’s screams and then...

Darkness.

Chapter Forty-One



Nothing.
Black, eerie, nothing.

I thought when I died it'd be different. I'd see something. Feel something. Maybe the flames of hell or the screams from the death dungeons that'd keep me prisoner for all eternity. But not this. I'd never expected this mind-numbing, gut-wrenching silence.

I couldn't feel, couldn't hear, couldn't see a thing. But inside my soul there was an ache. An ache that was so unbearably sharp it made me want to tear myself to pieces just to be free from it.

Maybe this was my hell? Being here forever, left with the gnawing pain of what I'd done. I'd left her behind to face him on her own. She was alone, and all I could do now was pray the others got to her in time. Protected her better than I had. I'd failed her. And that was what I had to cope with for all eternity. The hell of knowing I'd left her, lost her, abandoned her to the devil himself.

The only person I'd ever truly loved in my whole pitiful life.

My reason to breath and my nightmare to regret for all time. My heaven and my hell.

My Olivia.

Chapter Forty-Two



I *love you, Olivia.*

Those words slayed me. No one had ever told me they loved me before and it ripped my heart out that it was ending like this. He couldn't go. He couldn't leave me with nothing but a whisper of a memory of what it felt like to be loved and a hollow heart that'd never recover.

Everything happened in slow motion. Time stood still as I screamed out his name, begged him to fight. Pain seared through me but I didn't stop to think, I just acted, launching myself forward and jumping on the guy who was taking everything away from me, forcing him down as the gunshot went off. I could see Adam fall to the ground out of the corner of my eye, but I stayed strong. I had to fight this man with everything I had. I couldn't let Adam's death be for nothing. I owed him everything.

The gun had fallen away, and it lay a few feet from us, just out of reach as we fought, but he was too powerful, and he managed to roll me onto my back with ease, straddling me and then grinning down at me.

"Looks like it's your turn now," he said.

And I kept my focus right on him, my eyes boring into his as Devon leant down slowly to pick up the gun from the floor and then he lifted his arm and with deadly precision, he shot Cheslin in the back of head.

Cheslin fell forward onto me, but I pushed him off, crying as I crawled over to Adam and pulled him into my lap. His shirt was soaked with blood, and I felt it seep through onto my sundress, but I didn't care. I clung to him, rocking with him in my arms as he lay there limp and lifeless. There was a huge gash on the side of his forehead pouring blood down his face, but I still kissed him and whispered in his ear, begging him not to leave me.

“Get a photo of his body then get Gaz over here. We need to get Ad back in the van.”

I didn't know who was talking and I didn't care. I just sat there, holding my whole world in my arms and praying this wasn't happening. I felt someone put their arms around me and say gently, “We need to get him out of here. He's gonna be fine, but we have to take him home.”

But I shook my head, refusing to let go. He wasn't theirs to take anywhere. He was mine.

“You're not taking him,” I cried, sobbing so hard the tears began to distort my vision. “Please. Make him come back to me.”

I felt one of them kneel down next to me and then he placed his fingers on Adam's neck.

“He's still alive,” he said, and my heart lurched inside my chest.

“Liv, you need to let go. We need to move him.” Another voice spoke frantically, but I refused to let go. I couldn't.

“He needs a hospital,” I begged, knowing they'd disagree. It wasn't how they worked, but I couldn't give a rat's ass what their soldier protocol was right now. All I cared about was getting Adam the medical attention he needed. I needed him to come back to me.

“She's right,” another voice said. “If we wait any longer, he could bleed out.”

“Okay, I agree with you, but you do know we'll have police crawling all over us. It's a fucking gunshot wound and he's wearing handcuffs.”

“And we’ll deal with that when we have to. We have enough strings to pull behind the scenes. Jesus, this is Adam we’re talking about, for fuck’s sake.”

“You’re right. Let’s get him up, get him in the van and get him to the fucking hospital.”

My head was reeling with the whole back and forth between them all, but when they circled me and started to lift Adam out of my arms, I cried and let him go.

One of them put his arms around me and spoke gently, saying, “He’s gonna be okay, Liv. He wouldn’t ever leave you. He loves you too much.” And I wiped my eyes and turned to look at Devon, who was leading me towards the stairwell.

He held me up as we went down the staircase, following the soldiers who were taking each step as fast as they could with Adam in their arms. I don’t think I would have been able to stand if it wasn’t for Devon, and I used him, took comfort from him as he held onto me.

“You’ve changed him,” Devon whispered, trying to soothe me with his words. “You’ve made him a better man. We’ve all noticed. He loves you more than anything.”

I nodded, sniffing—“I love him too”—as we came to the ground floor.

The others barrelled through the doors, forcing it open with their backs as they protected Adam, and Devon hesitated but let go of me to run over and help them, then he darted across to the van parked out the front to open the doors.

“Not in the back,” Devon snapped as they went to place him on the floor of the van. “Put him up front, with Liv. I’ll drive. You lot can go in the back.” And they nodded their agreement without arguing one word.

I got into the van, and they draped Adam’s body over the front seat and partially over me.

“Didn’t want to squash you,” Colton said, then closed the door and ran around to get into the back.

“I’ll drive fast,” Devon told me as he got into the driver’s seat, and then he started the engine and sped off.

“Hold on,” I whispered into Adam’s ear. “It’s gonna be all right. Please, just hold on.”

Chapter Forty-Three



When we got to the entrance to the hospital, Devon drove onto the ambulance lane and then shot out of the van once we were right by the doors. The other three pushed the side door of the van open to free themselves from the back, and I sat there, cradling Adam in my arms, reassuring him that everything was going to be okay.

Devon opened my passenger door and they reached in, taking Adam from me and then they all ran towards the building. I ran too, and when we made it to the reception area, Colton started shouting, “We need help here!”

A group of nurses saw us and ran over, one grabbing a trolley and wheeling it to us so we could place Adam onto it. Then we saw doctors running down the corridor towards us, everyone sparking into action, ready to do whatever they could to save him. I watched, standing still in the middle of the reception area as they ran with the trolley, calling out something about trauma teams. It felt like the whole world had ground to a halt, and here I was, watching life happen as if it was a dream. A really fucking bad dream. Movement, sounds, voices, it was all happening around me, and yet, I couldn’t move, I couldn’t speak.

“Liv? Liv! Are you okay? Talk to me?”

I tried to answer, tried to nod my head, but nothing was working.

“I think she’s going into shock. Liv? Say something. Liv!”

Stars were dancing before my eyes, and I started to feel sick and dizzy.

“We need to get her some help. Sit her down over here.”

I let them carry me and I sank into the chair they were pushing me into. This life didn't seem real to me anymore.

“You're going into shock. Stay with us.”

I jumped as I felt a slap on my cheek and then another. Devon took my face in his hands as he knelt in front of me and he spoke clearly saying, “Look at me. The nurse has gone to get you something, but you need to fight this. Stay strong for Adam. Can you do that for me?” I nodded and then flinched as Colton sat next to me and forced a plastic cup into my hands.

“Drink this. It's shit coffee but it's something.”

I lifted the cup to my lips and sipped the sour liquid, wincing as it burnt a path down my throat. Devon was right. I had to stay strong. I couldn't let this beat me. I had to keep faith that there was a life for me to fight for. A love I couldn't give up on.

Tyler took his hoody off and draped it around my shoulders, and I pushed my arms through the sleeves, welcoming the warmth.

The four of them flanked me like my own personal bodyguards as I kept sipping the coffee and taking deep breaths. When a nurse eventually came over to us, holding some tablets, I shook my head, refusing to be sedated or whatever the hell they were trying to give me. I needed to stay alert in case Adam needed me. I didn't want to be drugged and not feel this.

“I can see why you're Adam's girl,” Will said, folding his arms over his chest. “You're more stubborn than he is.”

The rest of them gave a low, sorrowful laugh, then Colton leant forward to look at Devon and said, “Good luck explaining why you slapped his woman around the face.”

Devon's face paled and he turned to me to gage my reaction, saying, “I did what I had to. I didn't mean to hurt

you. It was all I could think of to do in the moment.”

“It’s fine.” I smiled sadly back at him. “You’ve saved me enough times today. I don’t think you need to apologise for anything.”

Eventually, once the noise and bustle of the main reception area became too much, we moved to a side waiting room. Once in there, all five of us sat, biting our nails, watching the door, desperate for news. Colton thought he could charm the nurses into getting information out of them faster, but it didn’t work. They had a job to do, and as long as they were saving Adam, that’s all that mattered to me.

It didn’t take long for the police to show up, but Colton and Devon took charge and went off with the officers to give their statements. When they came back, they assured me that it was all taken care of. I didn’t need to worry. But the police were the least of my worries. All I cared about was Adam.

After a few hours of us all sitting in relative silence, stuck in our own versions of hell, a doctor came to the door and called out Adam’s name. We all stood up and he looked at us before asking, “Which one of you is next of kin?”

My stomach bottomed out that he was asking that question. Why did he need the next of kin? Had Adam died?

The soldiers shrugged and Devon said, “He doesn’t have any next of kin. We’re his family.”

But I stepped forward and said, “I am.”

The doctor looked me up and down and then asked, “And you are?”

“I’m his fiancée,” I replied proudly.

He frowned and rubbed the back of his neck, then announced, “I suppose that’ll have to do.”

I heard Colton scoff behind me, but I ignored him.

“How is he, doctor? Is he going to be okay?” I felt nervous asking, but at the same time, I wanted to shake the man and tell him to stop stalling and spit it out.

“It might be better if we go to a private room to talk,” the doctor said, but I shook my head.

“No. Can we do this here? Anything you have to say, you can say it in front of all of us.”

The soldiers stood, arms folded, nodding in agreement.

“Okay.” The doctor gestured for us to sit down at some seats in the corner, and he joined us, placing his phone on the table in front of him. “He’s been very lucky today. The bullet went right through his shoulder, and thankfully, a pretty low impact handgun was used, otherwise it could have been a very different outcome. The bullet narrowly missed the subclavian artery and there’s no major damage to the brachial plexus—”

“Woah, woah, woah,” Colton said, holding his hand up. “Doc, can you speak English please? I have no idea what the fuck you’re on about.”

The doctor stuttered out an apology before he carried on.

“Plainly speaking, there was no damage to any main arteries or nerves. He’ll be in a lot of pain for a while and the shoulder will need treating to make sure it doesn’t become infected. I’m not sure what Mr Noble does for a living, but he won’t be able to use that arm for a while. Also, we’ll be keeping him in for observation. The blow he took to the head when he fell knocked him out and left him with a pretty bad concussion.” He saw my eyes go wide and added, “But it’s nothing to worry about. We just need to keep a close eye on him, keep him under observation.” He looked around the table at each one of us. “Do you have any questions?”

“Is he awake?” I asked.

“Not at the moment, no. We have him sedated.”

“When can I see him?” I added, feeling a desperate need to look at him and be near him just so I could convince myself that he was okay, because my mind was still expecting someone to run in and tell me it was all a lie.

“You can come and see him now. But we only allow two at a time at the bed side.”

I glanced at the others and cautiously, I whispered, “Is it okay if I go in on my own for now?”

They didn’t argue and I stood up, ready to follow the doctor to Adam’s room.

We walked down the corridor in silence, me following in his footsteps and him leading the way. When we got to the door of Adam’s room, the doctor pushed it open and stood to the side to let me in. I couldn’t help but gasp quietly to myself when I saw him. Adam lay unconscious in the bed with machines and wires all over the place. His head and shoulder were bandaged, but he looked so peaceful, his face softened as he lay there in rest.

“I’ll leave you alone for a while,” the doctor said. “If you need anything, there’s a buzzer on the wall. A nurse will be in to check on him soon.” And then he closed the door.

I walked over to the side of Adam’s bed and then reached down to kiss him, stroking his cheek as I whispered.

“It’s all over. He’s gone. It’s all gonna be okay.”

Then I pulled a chair closer to the bedside so I could sit and hold Adam’s hand as he slept. The gentle beeps of the machines around us and the dim lighting of the room made the exhaustion I’d been fighting creep back over me, and I lay my head on his arm and closed my eyes, drifting off to sleep.

Chapter Forty-Four



I was woken up by gentle fingers running through my hair, and I lifted my head to see Adam awake and looking at me, concern etched onto his face.

“You’re awake,” I gasped, taking his hand and kissing it as he began to stroke my face.

“Are you okay? Did he... Did he hurt you?” Adam said, visibly struggling to get the words out.

“No.” I shook my head, squeezing his hand to reassure him. “The others came just after he shot you, and Devon, he killed him. It’s all over.”

Adam squeezed his eyes shut and mouthed quietly, “Thank God,” then the back of his head hit the pillow in relief, but he winced as the injury he had reminded him he wasn’t invincible.

“Do you want me to fetch a nurse? Do you need some pain relief?” I asked, trying to get up from my chair, but he stopped me.

“No, I’m fine. You’re here and that’s all I need.”

“Do you want to talk about it?” I held my breath, not really sure why I’d asked him that. The last thing I wanted to do was relive it myself.

“Not really. He’s dead. Good riddance. As long as you’re okay, that’s all that matters to me.” Adam kept his hand in

mine, but his head remained stuck to the pillow. He was in more pain than he wanted to let on.

“The police have been. Colton and Devon sorted it though.” Just as I was about to give him a rundown of everything the doctor had said, the door burst open and in strolled Colton, Will, Tyler and then Devon.

“Finally!” Colton said, raising his hands up. “You’re awake. It was not comfortable sleeping in a plastic chair all night, I can tell you.”

“You’ve been here all night?” I asked.

“Where else would we be?” Devon answered then turned to look at Adam lying in the bed. “Are you okay, mate?”

“I’m just fucking brilliant,” Adam replied, not even opening his eyes to look at them.

“Nice to see that near-death experience didn’t spoil your chirpy mood.” Colton smiled and sat in the chair on the other side of the bed.

“I thought they said only two visitors?” I frowned, looking at all four of them.

“Do we look like the kind of visitors that play by the rules?” Colton replied, narrowing his eyes at me.

“I’m tired,” Adam snapped. “As you can see, I’m fine. You can go home now. Tyson will need feeding anyway.” Adam rubbed his forehead then hissed at the pain he felt from his shoulder.

“Adam, don’t be rude,” I said. “These guys have spent all night in this hospital, waiting to hear if you were going to be okay. You wouldn’t even be here if it wasn’t for them. They took you off that roof, put you in the van, and then carried you into this bloody hospital. I couldn’t have done that. And I wouldn’t be here too if they hadn’t turned up when they did. They saved my ass. Devon shot the guy for fuck’s sake.”

“Fastest kill I’ve ever seen him do too,” Tyler chipped in.

“Fuck.” Adam sighed, leaning forward to try and sit up, and I shot out of my seat to help him. “I’m sorry. Thank you.

Thank you for saving her.”

They all nodded and mumbled in acknowledgement and then Adam asked, “Has anyone been in contact with the father?”

I had no idea what they were talking about, but I didn’t question them about it. My head was scrambled enough with what’d happened and I really didn’t want to know anymore.

“Yeah, we got a photo and emailed it to him. He’s sent a bonus too, said he was happy with our work,” Devon said.

They all stayed quiet and then Colton darted up from his chair, announcing, “Now that we’ve seen you’re still alive with our own eyes, we’ll go. Things to do and all that.”

Adam gave the hint of a smile and then Devon walked slowly over to the bed and said, “I’m glad you’re okay. Things took a scary turn back there and we’re used to crazy shit, but not like that. Please don’t do that to us again.”

“Yeah, don’t ever run out on us,” Will piped up. “Soldiers work together. That’s the last time you go rogue. We’re a team. A family.”

Adam smiled but didn’t say a word, he didn’t need to. They all understood each other, and they knew how he was feeling.

In turn, they each came over to the bed, shook his hand, and then they left us alone, shutting the door quietly to lock us back into our world.

Adam took another long deep sigh when it was just the two of us again, and he lifted my hand to kiss the back as he looked deep into my eyes.

“I meant what I said, back there on that roof,” he whispered.

I took a deep breath. My heart was beating out of my chest as we sat staring at one another. Lost in each other.

“I love you, Olivia. I always have and I always will.”

“I love you too.” I sniffed and leant over him to kiss him. “I thought you’d left me, and it killed me. I couldn’t bear to think about a life without you in it,” I said, sobbing over my words.

“You’ll never have to,” he added, shushing me and stroking my hair as he kissed me softly.

“I do have to know one thing though.” He grabbed my collar and yanked gently, grimacing. “Whose hoody are you wearing?”

I laughed and leant back, looking down at the hoody that was swamping me.

“It’s Tyler’s. He gave it to me to keep me warm and cover up the mess on my dress.” I dreaded to think what I must look like, sitting with my hair all matted and a dress stained in blood.

“Tyler actually gave something away? That’s a first. He usually only takes stuff, he never gives it out,” Adam stated, referring to Tyler’s reputation as ‘the thief’ of the group. “He must like you.”

“He was doing a nice thing,” I said, patting Adam on the chest to reassure him.

“Yeah, well, I don’t like seeing you in another man’s clothes, but I’ll let it slide this time.”

“You’ll let it slide?” I laughed, poking him in his good arm. “Stuck in a bed with a gunshot wound and you’re still playing the caveman role.”

He didn’t see the funny side though.

“I always will when it comes to you.”

“I suppose we’ll both have to learn to let some things slide. And other times maybe not.” I wasn’t about to become a pushover. I had my way of doing things and he’d have to learn to live with it. But I knew one thing, life with him would certainly be interesting.

“I know I’m not the easiest guy to love, and I’m bound to make more than my fair share of mistakes. But I need you to

know I'm not going anywhere. This is it for me. You are it for me."

His words were like a balm to my soul. Fuel to the flames in my heart. I never thought I'd ever experience a love like the ones in the romance novels that Effy and Em were always sending my way. But this? It was better. It was better because it was raw and real, gritty and honest, and it was mine. I didn't need to read about love in books or watch it on T.V. because for me, reality was far better than the fantasy.

"I feel the same way," I said, settling my head next to his as I gently climbed onto the side of the bed.

"Good."

We lay for a moment, me listening to his quiet breaths and him smoothing down my hair. Then I chuckled to myself and looked up into his eyes.

"You do realise I'm a bit of a handful, don't you?" I said, giving him a teasing, cheeky wink.

"That's why I've got two hands, Olivia. Whatever you throw my way, I'll take it. It's my job, as your boyfriend."

I liked the sound of that, and I sighed, settling back into his warmth. Then, a thought struck me.

"Yeah, about that. If any of the staff ask, I'm your fiancée."

"Okay," he replied. No questions. No, 'What are you talking about, Olivia?' Just, 'Okay.'

"Don't you want to know why?" I asked.

"Not really. Girlfriend, fiancée, it's all the same to me. You're mine and that's all there is to it. Everything else is just... details."

"Details?"

"Yes, details. And we'll talk about it more when I get out of here."

I considered arguing with him, or pushing him on what he was talking about, but I decided against it. We'd just been

through the worst day of our lives, and all I wanted to do now was lay with him, be with him, love him. Like I'd said before, we both had to learn to let things slide sometimes, and now? Now I wanted nothing more than to hold onto this moment and him. To appreciate the fact that we were here, together, safe, and nothing was ever going to take him away from me ever again.

Chapter Forty-Five



One Month Later

We sat in the bridal shop, me and Effy on the sofas on one side of the curtain as Emily chatted to us from the other side while she put her wedding dress on. It was just the three of us today. Emily had wanted it that way. Three best friends who'd been through everything together, school, boyfriends, family dramas that beggared belief. But today, we were here because Emily wanted us to be the first to see the wedding dress she'd chosen. This was a special moment for her, for all of us really.

“If you hate it, you will tell me, won't you?” she asked as we heard the swishing sounds of the fabric as she climbed into her dress.

“As if you'd ever choose something we wouldn't love,” I told her.

“You look beautiful in everything you wear,” Effy added, and we both smiled at each other.

“Okay, well, here goes nothing.”

The sales lady opened the curtain and we both gasped at Emily stood in front of us, wearing the most stunning wedding dress I'd ever seen. It was perfect, and so her. The strapless bodice fit her like a glove, and pearls and crystals shone as she swayed from side to side. The skirt was full and billowing, making her look like a Disney princess, and on her head, she

had the most stunning diamond tiara that twinkled and complemented her long chocolate-brown curls perfectly.

I heard Effy start to sniffle and she reached down to her handbag to grab a tissue. I wasn't one to cry on occasions like this, or so I thought, but even I had a tear in my eye. I was so proud of my best friend. So honoured that she'd asked us both to come here today and share this special moment with her. No one else, just us. And watching her tear up too and smile, seeing the love radiate from her, it was everything. She'd been through so much; she'd fought like all of us had to get to her happy ever after and I couldn't be more pleased for her. It all meant so much to Emily, to be the first one to fall in love, the first to become engaged, and now, she was going to be the first one to get married.

Only, she wasn't.

Because yesterday, Adam and I had stood in front of a registrar and said our own vows. Me, wearing a silk white sundress, and him in a suit for the first time ever. He'd told me I could invite my friends to our wedding, but I said no. I told him he could have the soldiers to stand with him, but he refused. The day was ours, and even though I missed my best friends being there—and I felt guilty that I hadn't told them—I didn't regret my decision. If they'd been there, I'd have heard whispers of, 'Does she know what she's doing?' or, 'Is he really right for her?' and I didn't need to hear that, because he was right for me. He was the one. There'd never be anyone else, and even though they didn't particularly like Adam, it didn't bother me. They didn't know him like I did. Maybe one day they'd get to know him better. But the history he had with the guys, Emily's fiancé, Ryan, and Effy's boyfriend, Finn, it was complicated, and I couldn't see that changing anytime soon.

Maybe one day, Adam and I would tell people what we'd done. Or maybe we'd just throw a massive wedding of our own in a few months and pretend it was our first time. Whatever we did, it didn't matter. All that mattered was that we were each other's world, and yesterday, we'd made it official.

Liv Cooper didn't exist anymore.

I was Olivia Noble, and I couldn't be more proud to have that name.

I put my hand on my chest, feeling my wedding ring that sat on the same chain as my shell pendant, hidden underneath the high neck of my sweater, and I blinked back my tears. What kind of friend would I be if I blurted out my news and took the shine off my best friend on a day that meant so much to her? Because what were friends for if not to lift you up? I would never dull her sparkle. This was her day and she deserved this.

"Em, you look stunning," I said, fighting back my tears. "If I were to trawl through these racks and look at every wedding dress in this shop, I wouldn't find a single one that'd suit you better. He is going to lose his shit when he sees you walk down the aisle in that."

"Do you really think so?" she asked.

"I know so," I replied, cocking my head to the side and giving her my 'you-know-I-always-speak-the-truth' look.

She smoothed her hands down the front of her dress and then sighed, shaking her hips gently like a little girl and smiling to herself as she watched the skirt swirl around her.

"I can't wait to walk down that aisle." She looked up at us and grinned. "I can't wait to be Mrs Hardy, and you two will look amazing in your bridesmaid dresses too."

"Hell yeah we will," I said, smirking as I bumped my shoulder into Effy's.

"You can invite Adam to come to the wedding... if you're still together," Em said sheepishly, and the fact she'd insinuated that we might've broken up by then made my back go up, but I didn't show it.

Instead, I sat back, smiled and said, "I don't think Ryan, Brandon, or Finn are going to want to see Adam there. But it's fine, he'll find a way to sneak in and watch from a corner, somewhere hidden, so he doesn't upset anyone."

“That doesn’t sound like much fun for you though?” Emily said, frowning. “Maybe we can start laying down some groundwork, talking to the lads about accepting the fact that you and Adam are a thing now? Who knows, we might actually get them all in the same room together without wanting to kill each other.”

“Meh.” I shrugged. “I can’t see that happening anytime soon, but it’s a nice thought. Thanks, Em.”

Emily nodded and went back to staring down at her dress in a daze. Effy put her hand on my knee then leant into me and whispered, “I know Adam and Finn have a bad history, and I know what Adam did to Finn was awful. But if it makes you feel any better, I know Finn doesn’t hold grudges. He’s the most forgiving person I know, and in time, he’ll let it pass. If Adam is the one, we’ll be here for you.”

That tear I’d been holding back fell free now, trickling down my cheek as I put my hand over Effy’s.

“Thank you, Eff. That means a lot. And yes, he is the one.”

She gave me a knowing smile.

“I thought so. I’ve never seen you look so happy. You’re glowing just as much as Emily is today.”

And I bit my tongue, desperately wanting to tell her why I was glowing, but knowing I couldn’t.

A warmth spread through me as I held my best friend’s hand and watched my other best friend as she danced in front of us, lost in her little bubble of happiness.

Emily and Ryan had a love that looked perfect, idyllic to everyone on the outside. But love meant different things to different people. It wasn’t always picture perfect, sunshine and rainbows. Sometimes, it was chaos and confusion. Passion that tore out your soul. Love could be beautiful, but it could also be messy, ugly, and hard fucking work, but boy was it worth it, because waking up every day, knowing that you’re going to spend the rest of your life with your soul mate, that was the stuff of dreams. That was priceless.

Our story wasn't like the movies or the books. It was rough around the edges and came with more ups and downs than most rollercoasters, but it was our story and I loved it. From broken shells and a broken boy, to a psycho who thought he could wear me down. A stalker who watched my every move, to a man who knew me and saw me for who I really was. I found my happy ever after. My crazy, insane, slightly psychotic and ridiculously overbearing, but totally heart-stopping, soul-crushing, fit as fuck man was all I'd ever need. He was mine forever.

My Adam.

My husband.

My life.

The End.

Until the next soldier's story...

However, if you'd like to be the third witness at Adam and Olivia's secret wedding, then read on for the added **bonus chapter** at the end of this story.



BONUS CHAPTER





Epilogue

When I told my mum and dad, on the day they returned home from their holidays, that I was moving out to go and live with my boyfriend, their elation that I'd finally found a man turned to apprehension that it was all happening so quickly, then panic at the thought of the live-in childcare not being freely available anymore.

When I told them that he was from Brinton Manor, that panic turned to sheer mortification and outright despair at the shame I was bringing on my family. Apparently, it was bad enough that my friends were with boys from 'that side' of Sandland, but I had to go one step further and dredge through the filth that was Brinton to find my match, and that was their verdict before they'd even met him. Thinking what it'd be like when I eventually got my parents and Adam in the same room together one day filled me with dread. That was a meeting I wasn't going to be arranging anytime soon. But I didn't let my parents' prejudices affect me or my feelings for Adam. I loved him. I always would. They'd just have to learn to live with it.

I left the house with a few bags packed and gave my brothers a hug, letting them know they'd be coming for a sleepover with us as soon as possible. I knew that when they eventually met Adam, they'd hero worship him. Adam had already told me he wanted to go and support them at their football practices and take them to watch United play. He'd be the perfect older brother. At least two members of my family would be happy for me.

But I had to admit, I felt a little guilty as I wandered down the steps of my childhood home, wearing a simple silk full-length white sundress with delicate straps over my shoulders. Knowing what I was about to do today made me tingle with excitement, and yet, there was a slight regret that I hadn't invited my brothers or my friends for that matter. But I took a deep breath as I opened the car door and reminded myself that this day was our day. A day for Adam and I. No distractions, no drama, just us letting each other know how much we loved and cherished one another. Forever.

I closed the car door and glanced at the small white bouquet that sat on the passenger seat beside me. My hair was down but I had pinned it up at sides, and I reached across to pick a few of the smaller flowers out of the arrangement, then using my car mirror, I tucked them into my hair. I might not have a fancy tiara, but the flowers made me feel special.

I drove the short distance to the Sandland registry office in town and parked up right opposite the building. When I saw him leaning up against the wall, dressed in his black suit, crisp white shirt, and black tie, with his hands in his trouser pockets, my heart flipped. The fire that always burned inside of me whenever I saw him burst into uncontrollable flames. He looked fucking gorgeous, and I couldn't believe that he was all mine.

I stayed in my car, watching him. The stalker had become the stalked, and I studied the way he hung his head, trying to look inconspicuous but still scanning the street, watching and noticing everything. The way his leg shook slightly with nervous energy, as if he couldn't ever stay totally relaxed, there was always an edge to him. And then he pulled out his mobile and grinned, lifting his head to look straight at me. That smile, the one meant just for me, made my stomach roll over with excitement. This was it. I was about to make him mine forever. No get-out clause. And I couldn't wait another minute.

I got out of the car, holding my small bouquet and my clutch bag and headed over to him. Both of us not breaking eye contact as I crossed the street then stood in front of him.

“You look beautiful.” He brushed his fingers through the strands of my hair and smiled, then he cupped my cheek and leant in to kiss me delicately on the lips. “You always look beautiful, but today you’re stunning.”

“You don’t look too bad yourself,” I said, staring up into his eyes and getting lost there for a moment.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” he asked, and when he saw my eyes widen slightly, he added, “I mean without your friends. Are you sure you want it to be just us?”

“It’s always been about us. I don’t want it any other way,” I reassured him.

He nodded and then reached into his trouser pocket, pulled out his closed fist and held it out in front of him. Then when he turned it over, I saw a single shell in the palm of his hand.

“What is this?” I laughed, taking it from him. “Don’t tell me you kept one of my shells from all those years ago.”

“No.” He shook his head and I saw a slight blush appear in his cheeks. That was new. Was he embarrassed? I’d never seen Adam like this before.

“I got it this morning,” he told me. “I wanted to give you something to remind you that I think you’re a badass too.” My heart—that was already beating double time—did a little back flip at his words. “It’s not Tiffany, but—”

“It’s better than Tiffany’s,” I butted in. “It’s you. Nothing fancy, no frills, just you. That’s what I love about you. What you see is what you get.”

“Damn right,” he said, putting his arms around me and pulling me to him. “I’ll never change.”

“I hope not. I love you for you. I’d marry you in rags with a plastic ring if I had to.”

He pulled back slightly to kiss me and said, “I have gold bands for both of us. No need to pretend on that score. Everything about today is real.”

“In that case...” I reached into my clutch and pulled out the single white carnation I had in there and pinned it to the

lapel of his suit jacket. “Gotta have both of us looking the part.”

We held hands as we walked up the steps of Sandland registry office, ready to say our vows. I didn't feel a single doubt in my heart as we headed through the main reception area to the room we were going to get married in. We'd already told the registrar that we weren't bringing any guests, so when we got there, we saw the witnesses that they'd organised for us sat in the designated seats. I didn't walk down the aisle to music as a nervous Adam looked on. Instead, we walked down together, holding hands. United in our promises to one another even before we'd made it official. I'd always be standing at his side, and he'd always be at mine. Today was no different.

The registrar started the service, and even though we could hear his voice, we didn't look at anyone else, only each other. As he asked Adam to repeat the words after him, telling him to state that he solemnly declared that there was no lawful impediment why he couldn't marry me, Adam repeated every word with love and conviction burning in his eyes. I never knew love could feel so all-consuming until Adam. I'd die for this man stood in front of me, holding both my hands in his and saying his vows like they were the last words he'd ever speak.

When my turn came, I repeated my vows back to him, squeezing his hands in mine as I did and taking deep breaths as I felt the tears sting my eyes. When it came time to exchange rings, we were both shaking from the intensity of the moment. I placed my ring on his finger and he smiled and then placed his ring on mine. Then we threaded our fingers together, both of us looking down at our hands and feeling the surge of love flow through us.

“I now pronounce you husband and wife,” the registrar announced.

“Thank fuck for that,” Adam answered and took my face in both of his hands, kissing me like a starving man.

The witnesses clapped and I laughed into the kiss as we both stood there with our arms wrapped around each other like we were the only ones in the room.

We signed all the paperwork that was necessary, and Adam put it all into the inside pocket of his suit jacket.

“Come on then, Mrs Noble.” He smirked as he threw his arm around my shoulders and led me to the exit. “Let’s go and consummate the fuck out of this marriage.”

I laughed back at him. This was a night I was never going to forget.

“Are we going straight back to the asylum?” I asked him. We had agreed to move into his room until we could find an apartment of our own.

“Nope. I’ve booked the honeymoon suite for the next few days at the Park Avenue Hotel.” He glanced down at me and added, “Did you really think I’d spend my wedding night with those four fuckers back home lurking about outside? Not a fucking chance.”

“What about your shoulder?” I asked, furrowing my brow at the arm that was still bandaged underneath his shirt.

“I’ve taken enough painkillers to numb that fucker for the time being. Don’t worry, Mrs Noble, I’m good to go. Your needs are my upmost priority from now on.”

“I like the idea of that.” I winked, then when we got to the bottom of the steps, I stopped and turned to face him. “Don’t ever stop loving me, Adam Noble, because I swear to God, if you do, I’ll make your stalking look like child’s play. You’re my whole fucking world. I hope you know that.”

He sighed and took a step to me, wrapping his arms around my waist and resting his forehead against mine.

“I will love you in this life and the next. I’ll always love you. You’re my Olivia. The only person in this goddamn world that I ever have and ever will love. It’s you. It’s always been you. It will always be you. Always and forever.”

“Damn, you always say the right things.” I sighed, leaning into him and closing my eyes.

“Not always. I’ve made enough mistakes in my life, but you? You’re the one thing I got right.” He placed a gentle kiss on the end of my nose that made me wrinkle it and give a soft sigh. “Now come on, Mrs Noble. We have the rest of our lives for all this soppy shit. I have a bottle of champagne waiting for us, a king size bed that needs to be christened, and—”

“And you wait and see what presents I packed for us in my suitcase.” I winked and grabbed his hand, pulling him towards the car. I threw my car keys at him, and he caught them. “You can drive,” I stated. “I like you in the driving seat.”

He smacked my ass as I got into the car and then he closed the door for me and walked round to the driver’s side.

“I’ll always be in the driving seat. Buckle up.” He winked across at me as he started the engine. “Life’s about to get exciting.”

The End...

Want more Adam and Olivia? Then follow me on these links for news of my upcoming releases.

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Lots of Love

Nikki x

