

SINFUL BOOK ONE

# THE STAR

ROSIE ALICE

*the star*

# SINFUL BOOK ONE

ROSIE ALICE

*The Star* Copyright © 2022 by Rosie Alice

All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without prior written permission from the author, except in the case of brief quotations in book reviews.

This is a work of fiction. References to real people, places, organizations, events, and products are intended to provide a sense of authenticity and are used fictitiously. All characters, incidents, and dialogue are drawn from the authors imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events, is purely coincidental.

No copyright infringement intended. No claims have been made over artists and/or brands mentioned. All credit goes to the original owners.

Editing by Mackenzie – Nice Girl, Naughty Edits

Cover Design by Rosie Alice

Ebook Formatting by Rosie Alice

Proofreading by Vanessa – Rebel Love Reviews

# *contents*

[Playlist](#)

[Trigger Warning & Author Note](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)

[Chapter 42](#)

[Chapter 43](#)

[Chapter 44](#)

[Chapter 45](#)

[Chapter 46](#)

[Chapter 47](#)

[Chapter 48](#)

[Chapter 49](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Untitled](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Rosie Alice](#)

# *dedication*

*For Sheryl – you saved me.*



# *playlist*

You Get Me So High – The Neighbourhood

Wrong – MAX ft. lil uzi vert

Tunnel Vision – Kodak Black

Slide – Chase Atlantic

Shake Ya Ass – blackbear ft. P-Lo

Seduce – Russ ft. Capella Grey

Sacrificial – Rezz ft. PVRIS

No Role Modelz – J. Cole

I Feel Like I'm Drowning – Two Feet

I Am Not A Woman, I'm A God – Halsey

Hi-lo (Hollow) – Bishop Briggs

Habits – Plested

Gorgeous – blackbear

Get Right or Get Left – G-Eazy ft. Angelika Jelly Joseph

Disparate Youth – Santigold

Bodak Yellow – Cardi B

Better – Khalid

Me, Myself & I – G-Eazy

Good Together – SHY Martin

Friends – Chase Atlantic

All The Time – Jeremih ft. Lil Wayne

## *trigger warning & author note*

*The Star* is book one in a series of forbidden interconnected standalones. The theme of this book is a stepbrother/sistersister relationship.

*Triggers for this book include:* High school age characters in a state where the age of consent is sixteen years old, cheating, bullying, brief dubcon, violence, heavy use of bad language, graphic sexual content, voyeurism, a sexually confident heroine that may be perceived as promiscuous, & brother/sister kink.

If any of that is not your jam – this may not be the book for you.

*prologue*

# LOGAN

## *Eight weeks ago*

Sirens sound all around me, and I would love to say they send a shock wave of panic or alarm through me, but they don't. At this point, I'm very much used to it. Sirens, gunshots, random shouting – all of that – it's usually what I listen to when I'm drifting off at night.

I have ever since I was a little girl.

That's what you get when you live on the wrong side of the train tracks in Franklin. The noises kind of soothe me now, make me drift into sleep like a child's night time story or lullaby.

Tonight, though, the sirens are really loud and extremely close.

"Sounds like they're on your street," my best friend whispers into the darkness of my bedroom from where she lies next to me in bed, the comforter shifting when she rolls over to face me.

I turn to face her as well, her green eyes looking a little worried when my eyes adjust to the darkness. "I wouldn't worry about it, G."

Her neighborhood is hood-adjacent, so she doesn't see as much action as we do over here on Fifth Street. I'm deep in it, making my skin a little thicker than hers. Like I said, I'm used to it.

Her eyes fall closed again, but she doesn't roll back over so I don't either. I think she feels more secure when I'm facing her.

I let my eyes drop closed too, trying to find sleep again.

That is, until I start seeing little flashes beyond my eyelids. I open my eyes again to find my room illuminated with blue,

white, and red lights from the window behind me. My eyebrows pull down, and Giuliana's eyes pop open to look at me.

“What the fuck?”

“I don't know,” I mutter as I sit up to turn around and look through my blinds.

There're two cop cars parked at the curb outside of my house, lighting up the entire street. I sit frozen, with Giuliana looking over my shoulder, and we just wait anxiously to see what's going to happen. I hope from the very pit of my stomach that they're parked there for the neighbors, but I have feeling that's not the case.

That unsettling feeling is screaming deep inside of me, *something is wrong, Logan.*

My chest aches, but I keep my breathing steady so I don't set off the alarms inside Giuliana's mind. She's jumpy, and I'm the rock. I need to keep shit together for her. I don't need her freaking out tonight, since we have to be up for a volunteering event at the park in 5 hours.

Time seems to creep by, almost like we're watching everything happen in slow motion. A cop gets out of each car, both of them stepping onto my lawn and walking toward the front door. *Fuck.*

They leave on the lights from their cars – to tell the whole block who it is they're coming for, like some sort of warning for everyone else.

As for me and Giuliana, we're still frozen at the window when they finally bang on the door.

“*Police!*”

That's the way they knock on someone's door in the hood. You wouldn't find anyone announcing themselves like that across the tracks. They're more sophisticated over there, more respected.

But here? On Fifth and Third? We're trash. Criminals. The ones to watch.

They shoot first and ask questions later, like that'll get them any closer to cleaning the streets of crime and violence.

Giuliana just about jumps out of her skin at the pounding on the front door, so I follow her when she lies back down in bed and curls herself under my comforter like it can protect her.

"It's okay," I say into the multicolor illuminated room, trying to keep my tone compassionate when all I really feel is irritated.

The fear in my gut has dissipated, and now I'm just annoyed that I'm losing sleep.

I hear my dad get out of bed through the thin wall of my bedroom and listen to his footsteps down the hallway, then out through the living room to get the door.

I hold my breath, like that'll make things easier to hear, and wait.

Giuliana holds her breath too. I hear her suck a big lungful of air in before she does, which humors me.

My dad pulls open the front door, the low creak of the hinges giving his actions away, then I hear one of the cops start speaking quietly to him. I can't make out what the cop is saying, and the muffled sound of my father's voice makes it so I can't hear his words either.

But then the front door closes again and my home is back to being silent.

*What the fuck?*

Giuliana doesn't say anything, so neither do I.

I'm sure they had the wrong house when the lights blaring through my window are turned off, and I hear the cars start to pull away.

I blow out the breath I'm holding, then turn over onto my side to get comfortable again. I shake my head to clear my mind, feeling silly for actually being scared moments before. Nothing ever happens in my house; my parents are clean and straight edge. We're just poor. They don't break the law, so

there would be no reason for police to be coming to my house anyways.

“What was that about?” Giuliana asks, turning over to face me again.

“Probably had the wrong house. Go to sleep, we have to be up soon.”

I cuddle down a little bit farther, sticking my arm under my pillow and closing my eyes for the final time tonight. I feel Giuliana nuzzle down too, blowing a heavy breath out when her body goes lax as she lets herself fall to sleep.

I’m drifting, right on the edge of unconsciousness when there’s a tapping at my bedroom door. My eyes snap open, annoyance burning in my chest. “*What?!*”

I’m cranky as fuck.

“Can I come in?” my dad asks from the opposite side of the door, making my best friend wake up next to me as well.

“Yeah, come in,” I snap, sitting up against my headboard.

My door opens slowly, the light from the hall filling my room. I find my dad standing in the open doorway, his face whiter than a sheet. Panic spreads through my system, making me jump forward to stand up to meet him at the door.

“What’s wrong?”

He swallows thickly, his tear-filled eyes finding mine in the dimness of the room. “It’s your mom, honey. There’s been an accident.”

I hear Giuliana sit up in bed behind me, then the blood rushes to my eardrums, cutting me off from the words that continue to spill out of my dad’s mouth. I just get bits and pieces – *accident, car, mom, dead*.

My knees go weak, making it impossible to hold myself up. The floor gets closer and closer, then Giuliana is standing next to me, her arm wrapping around my middle to hold me upright.



The room spins, but I keep my gaze on my father's face. I watch him break, right in front of me, tears finally slipping past his eyes and onto his cheeks.

*one*

# LOGAN

## *Present day*

I'm sitting at our little kitchen table after school, doing homework and tapping my foot to the new Drake album when my father comes barreling through the front door. He's dressed in a suit – he's been wearing suits a lot more lately. I guess he's trying to seem classier than he really is at the job he started last year.

My head snaps up in surprise when his loud laughter fills the space, and I find him holding his phone to his ear. I press pause on the song playing on my phone screen, spinning in my chair to eavesdrop.

“No,” my father says, laughing again – a real throaty sound that I've been hearing a lot more lately. “I'm going to tell her right now.”

My eyes narrow, sensing gossip in the air. *Tell me what?*

His eyes find mine across the room, and he nods at whatever is being said to him over the phone, giving me a huge smile that pulls up his cheeks.

Things have been a lot different around here since my mom passed. Dad was depressed for a while, spending most of his time locked in his bedroom – except for when he was slipping into fancy suits and heading to work. It's some sort of office management type shit. I don't really know. He's always worked low-end jobs in offices, call centers, and small businesses, but apparently, this one is a lot better. Not to mention it's in the next town over, Luxington.

He's spent a lot of time at the office, so I haven't seen him much. I've been keeping myself busy as well, though. I'm working on getting some scholarships for college, and whenever I'm not studying, I spend time with my friends. So, it doesn't really bother me.

Until about two weeks ago, he didn't come home one night. When I asked him about it, he said that he had gotten drinks with some guys from work, then got too drunk and crashed on one of their couches.

*Why couldn't you just Uber home?* Is what I asked him, curiosity and bitterness burning in my veins like they were poisoning me.

I'm not against my father moving on, but it's only been two months... Shouldn't he still be mourning his wife?

*"Jeremy drove my car to his house. He wasn't as drunk, and I didn't want to leave it at the bar overnight,"* is what he answered, defensiveness lacing his tone.

I haven't really spoken to him since. He's spent more than one night out – not coming home – but I haven't questioned him again. I don't want any more answers than the lies he's already told me.

He'll tell me when he's ready, I guess. But I can't help the resentment I'm feeling toward him for moving on so *soon*.

My father finishes up his phone call, ending it with an "I love you too," making my eyebrows shoot to my hairline.

Once he's hit the end button on his phone and slipped it into the pocket of his fancy suit pants, I stand up. "Who was that?"

He steps toward me, grinning, with his arms spread out in front of him like he's going to embrace me. "Hi to you too, Logan."

Then, he pulls me into his arms, hugging me tight like he used to when I was a little girl. I can't help feeling a little annoyed, so I pull back to look at him. "Tell me what?"

He holds me at arms-length, his dark eyes squinting a little in humor. "How was your day?"

I shake my head, blinking hard in frustration. "*Oh my God*, what do you need to tell me?"

He chuckles, dropping his arms to his sides before he rounds the table and takes a seat. "Sit down."

I sigh, then plant my ass in the chair I vacated a minute ago. “Okay.”

I lay my hands on the table and wait for him to speak.

“So,” my father begins, the tone of his voice soft and cautious, “you know I’ve been working in Luxington – at Newman and Michaels.”

He stops talking, so I nod to let him know I’m listening and that he needs to keep going.

“Well, it’s really nice over there, Logan. Nice restaurants, a big mall, really good schools.”

I snort. “Are you their official mascot?”

He rolls his eyes a little, the motion feeling childish but warm. “Well, we’re going to move over there.”

My head rears back, my eyes going wide. “Excuse me?!”

There’s no way he’s serious. We aren’t the type of family that would fit in across the tracks. Not only because we’re poor, but they’re *different* over there, uptight & pretentious.

He presses his lips together in thought, but then continues. “I met someone.”

I laugh humorlessly. “I’m being uprooted out of my life so you can be closer to a piece of pussy?”

“*Logan*. Watch it.” He gives me that *fatherly* look, like it’ll do anything. “I proposed to her, and we’re moving into her home.”

I stand up, shock and rage pulsing through my veins. Pushing my chair out behind me so hard that it falls over with a loud crash, I yell at the top of my lungs. “*Excuse me!?*”

He stands up too, trying to keep control of the situation, but it’s too late. I’m seeing fucking red. I’m ready to burn the house down with him inside.

“You *proposed* to someone!?” My voice cracks as I start to yell again. “*Are you fucking insane!?*”

He slams a hand down on the table. “Enough!”

“*Enough?! You’ve lost your damn mind! Mom died two months ago!*”

He huffs a breath, turning to look in the opposite direction. My chest heaves, my fists balled at my sides as tears fill my eyes from anger.

Anger. Betrayal. Resentment.

I’m overflowing with emotions and none of them are good.

*Hate.* I hate him. I hate him for doing this to me, to us, to my fucking mom.

The room has fallen silent, the only thing to be heard the usual noises from outside and the heaving of my breath. I can feel the tension building as I wait for him to speak again.

“This is going to be good for us, sweetie.” His voice is steady, but he doesn’t turn to look at me while he talks, almost as if he’s ashamed of the words. I hope he can feel the betrayal deep in his gut, the same feeling that’s in mine. “Someone is coming to look at the house tomorrow, so please clean up your room.”

He takes a few steps, heading for his bedroom, but turns his head to look at me one more time over his shoulder. “I love you.”

I huff a laugh, brushing the tears from my burning cheeks and looking away from him.

---

Apparently, homes in my neighborhood are quicker to sell than I thought they would be. After a month, the house sells. It might have something to do with how low my father priced it. I saw a flyer during the open house the realtor held over the weekend, and I was surprised to see that we’re basically giving away my childhood home.

Guess my dad wants to get out of here sooner rather than later.

I haven't spoken to him, and I haven't helped *stage* the house to be homier than it actually is. The realtor tidied up my room while I was at school one day, stuffing the old school Playboys that once lived on my walls underneath my mattress.

No one at school knows I'm leaving yet. I'm waiting for the right time to tell my friends. But when I get home Monday after school, there're flat cardboard boxes wrapped in thick clear plastic sitting in front of my bedroom door, a note pinned to them that says, **PACK**.

Unfortunately, Giuliana is two steps behind me, coming face-to-face with my brand-new nightmare.

"Pack for what?" she asks from over my shoulder, stopping in the hallway to stare at the boxes with me.

I groan loud and long, kicking the boxes with all my strength so they go flying down the hallway and out of my doorway. Pushing my door open, I throw my backpack onto the floor and fall face-first onto my mattress.

"Lo?"

I sigh, rolling over onto my back to stare at the popcorn ceiling of my bedroom. "I'm moving."

She falls down beside me, her head landing right next to mine on the plush surface of my bed. "To where?"

Giuliana and I have been friends since middle school – she's the best friend I've ever had. She's the sweet that balances out my salty, the friendly one that steps in when I'm about to throw fists.

"Across the tracks," I mutter, refusing to look at her.

She pops up like a fucking jack-in-the-box and screeches at the top of her lungs. "*Across the tracks?!?*"

"Luxington." I end my answer with a sigh.

She bends so her face is hovering just above mine. "What the fuck? Why are you so calm?!"

I look at her bugged-out eyes and grief-stricken face, then bust out laughing. I don't know why, because the situation is

definitely not funny. I could possibly be having a manic episode.

“What is so funny?” Giuliana asks, her eyebrows moving so far up her forehead that it almost looks fake.

I take a breath, controlling my laughter. “Nothing is *funny*, G. My dad is marrying some bitch, taking me across the tracks to live a fancy pants-y new life.”

She falls back down next to me, slipping her fingers through mine and squeezing me tight. The gesture tells me exactly what I know she wants to say right now. She’s sorry, she’s pissed, she’s hurting for me.

We lie in silence for a couple of minutes, letting the calming sounds of our breathing fill the space until I feel stable enough to talk again.

As we both turn to face each other on the bed, I spill my guts. I tell her about the conversation with my dad, how he’s sold the house already. I tell her exactly what I’m feeling – that it’s like my father is betraying my mom, like he’s pissing all over the marriage they had. By the time I’m done talking, my throat is dry and my cheeks are wet.

“Are you still going to Franklin?”

I wipe underneath my eyes, my fingers coming back smeared with black mascara. Shaking my head, I meet my best friend’s gaze. “My dad is enrolling me at Luxington High. I start after Labor Day Weekend.”



*two*

## CARSON

Sweat is dripping down my forehead, but I don't stop pushing my legs to keep going. *Forty-four, forty-five, forty-six, forty-seven.* I count the stairs every time my Nike's hit the metal, every time I hear a faint stomp from my foot even through the music blasting through my Beats.

My chest heaves, but I don't stop. I push myself to keep going. I get to the top of the bleachers and turn around to go back down.

*Sixty-two, sixty-three, sixty-four.*

By the time I reach the bottom, I'm deep into the nineties and I feel my head start to spin from the heat. I slow my steps once I'm back on the concrete and walk over to the coolers at the edge of the football field.

Everyone left practice an hour ago, but it's my job to be the best so I stayed – like I always do. Suicides, running, lunges across the field, then finishing with the bleachers, per usual.

It's a routine I can do with my goddamn eyes closed.

But no matter how many times I've punished my body with the extra workout, my veins still bulge under my flesh while my lungs burn from the cool evening air.

I grab my water bottle from the bench, squeezing it just above my mouth until it runs dry.

Hydration is key.

Hydration and pushing your body to the breaking point, I guess.

But it isn't a choice for me, it's my fucking life. I have to be the best, I have to get the attention of scouts if I want to play college ball and eventually go pro like my dad planned.

Even though I'm the best QB Luxington has ever seen, I still need to be *better*.

It's ingrained in my soul – I must be outstanding. Top of the totem pole, first-class, boss, captain and chief.

Best athlete with the hottest cheerleader on my arm, most wanted and most admired. It runs through my veins, burning deep in my chest. I need to be number one because that's what my dad was. *Number fucking one*.

---

“Dude, you look like shit.” Hayden drops down on the couch next to me, an unlit cigarette hanging from his mouth.

“Thanks,” I groan as I stretch my legs out in front of me, resting them on the glass coffee table sitting in the center of my living room.

He snickers, pulling the cigarette from between his lips and sliding it behind his ear. “Hitting training pretty hard, huh?”

I slide my phone from my pocket, unlocking it and clicking on Instagram to mindlessly scroll. “Yep. Where's Levi?”

He stands, a sigh slipping from his mouth as he pulls the cigarette from behind his ear. “Should be here any minute. I'm gonna smoke.”

I flick my eyes to his retreating form. “Don't smoke by the pool again, dude. My mom's gonna kill you.”

He slides out of the patio doors with a careless laugh. “Your mom loves me.”

I roll my eyes to myself and heave a heavy breath, attempting to relax my aching muscles, slouching into the couch like a lifeless doll. My relaxation is short-lived, though, because a moment later, the front door swings open. My mom appears in the doorway, hands filled with shopping bags, and when I don't get up to help her, she calls out to me.

“Carson!” she singsongs, “Honey, could you give me a hand with these bags?”

I lock my phone, throwing it down on the table before I stand to make my way to the foyer. Reaching out to grab the endless amount of bags, I peek inside some of them as curiosity gets the best of me.

“What is all this stuff?” I lug the bags next to the bottom of the staircase, dropping them down on the marble floor.

I meet a set of eyes that are crystal blue and clear, and my mother’s face spreads into a huge smile. “Gary proposed!”

She holds up her left hand, showing me a ring gracing her delicate finger. I blink a few times. “That didn’t really answer my question.”

“Carson!” She gives me a displeased look. “Aren’t you even going to say congratulations?”

I give her a little grin. “Congratulations, Mom.”

She reaches out to hug me, her petite frame colliding with mine as her hands rub along my arms. “Thank you.”

I can almost feel her positive energy radiating through the hug, like she’s so overwhelmed with happiness that she’s infecting the whole world with it. Gary and my mother have been dating for a while now, and I’ve seen him around the house a lot. He’s a good guy – a little different from the lifestyle here – but if she’s happy, then I’m happy for her.

He lives across town, on the rougher side of the county, but he carries himself really well whenever he’s been here. So whatever.

“Anyways,” I say, pulling from her embrace, “what is all this stuff?”

“Oh.” She moves towards the bags. “I got some stuff to set up the guest room for Logan.”

I watch her rifle through the bags, looking for something in particular. “Who’s Logan?”

She looks at me, pausing the task of rummaging through the shopping bags. “I’ve told you about Logan before. Gary’s daughter.”

My eyebrows move up my forehead. “And she’s coming to stay here?!”

My mom clicks her tongue, moving her attention back to the bags. “Gary and Logan will be moving in here during the break. We’ll be a family.”

My mouth hangs open as I watch her, so casual and careless, like she hasn’t just dropped a bomb on me. “Excuse the fuck outta me. They’re moving in here?!”

She huffs at my language, but doesn’t reprimand me, just continues what she’s doing. “Yes, do you not expect me to live with my future husband?”

“Wait, wait, wait. Mom. I’m cool with Gary, but who is this girl? How old is she even?”

“She’s seventeen.” She pops her head up to look at me again, then holds up a packaged sheet set. “Do you think she’ll like this color?”

The sheets are an awful pink, something you would find in a child’s room. “How the fuck should I know, Mom? I don’t know her.”

She gives me a disgusted face. “Your language is foul, Carson Raines.”

“What’s up, Ms. Raines?” Hayden and Levi appear behind me, and my mom gives them a smile. Hayden nods at me. “Caught Levi out back before he had the chance to strip down and dive into the pool.”

Before I can respond, my mom picks up a few bags and holds them toward my friends. “I’m glad you boys are here. Help me carry this stuff up to the guest room, will you?”

Hayden perks an eyebrow when I meet his gaze. “What’s going on?”

“Apparently, I’m getting a new sister,” I grumble.

*three*

## LOGAN

I'm moving one zip code away, but it might as well be another planet. The kids I grew up with don't venture into Luxington – we aren't welcome across the tracks. It's a completely different world over there.

This is my community, my home. It's nothing special to outsiders. We don't have fancy amenities, but we have heart and soul.

And if my dad thinks we'll suddenly be welcome in Luxington, he's delusional. They're going to chew us up and spit us back across the town line where we belong.

The day before we move, the Friday of Labor Day weekend, it still hasn't hit me. I sit at the park with my friends, legs hanging off the side of the picnic table I've sat at since I was ten years old. Only now, we've traded off-brand juice boxes and sandwiches for cans of Natty Light and Swisher Sweets.

Giuliana is plastered to my side, like a tumor. I'm trying to spend as much time with her as I can, but I have other people I need to say goodbye to as well. This party is about me, about saying my temporary goodbyes to the kids I've known my whole life. The kids I've spent nights sneaking into the community pool with, scaled the barbwire fences of Franklin High with so we could break in and play pranks on the teachers.

The boys are setting off bottle rockets fifteen feet from where we're sitting, joints hanging from their mouths as they laugh and play. Giuliana and I watch them for a while, a couple of other girls sitting atop the table with us.

"I'm going to miss you, Lo," Vanessa says from behind me, her arms falling around my shoulders.

"You hoodlums can come visit me in my new fancy town." I chuckle as I put my hands on her forearms to return the

backwards hug.

Giuliana snorts next to me sarcastically but doesn't say anything. I give her a look as if to say, *what?* But she just shakes her head and takes a hit off her cigarette.

“Lo!” Austin calls from where the guys are hanging out, pulling my attention. He waves a hand in a *come here* motion, so I slide from the table and head in their direction.

Once I reach him, he slips his hands around my waist, pulling me flush against his body. “I got you a going away present.”

I laugh. “Oh, yeah?”

He presses his hips into mine. “Oh, *yeah.*”

I laugh harder, my shoulders shaking. I push his arms from around my waist and take a step back, his dark eyes following my every move.

“C'mon, Lo, you're moving away. You're not gonna let me hit it one last time?” He gives me that playboy grin.

“I am.” I step forward again, putting my mouth right at his ear. “Just not here.”

---

“Ready?”

My dad appears from thin air, surprising me as I stand in my empty childhood bedroom. My chest is heavy while I stare at the empty walls where my decorations used to hang, the carpet that has a stain from the night Giuliana and I had Four Lokos for the first time, and the empty closet that once housed my clothes.

I'm sad and overwhelmed – but most of all, I'm angry. Angry that this nightmare has become reality.

“No, but does that matter?” I answer my father, turning to look at him so he can see my watery eyes.



He puts a hand on my shoulder. “This is going to be good for us, Logan. Sara is really excited to meet you. She even decorated your room for you already.”

I don’t say anything else, I just walk past my dad, letting his hand drop from my shoulder and heading outside. I turn to say a silent goodbye to my life, my house, my mom, then I walk to the moving truck and get in the passenger’s seat.

After a quiet and awkward forty minutes, my dad is slowing the truck as we pull up to a guardhouse that sits just before big, black iron gates. My dad rolls the window down, smiling at the pudgy faced guard as he steps out. “Hi, Gary Briar, going to 3211.”

The guard nods. “Welcome back, Mr. Briar. Go right in.”

My dad turns to me as the gate slides open slowly, winking like he’s the coolest dude to ever walk planet earth. I just give him a tight, closed-lipped smile so I don’t rain on his parade.

I put my attention back out my window and watch as mansions pass us by. Jesus Christ, I’m deep in the rich life now. Some of these houses are as big as Franklin High, making my mouth hang open in shock and awe.

I scoff under my breath at one that’s particularly large, but it gets caught in my throat when my dad pulls the truck into the driveway.

“No way,” I whisper, sitting straight up in my seat to look out of the front windshield. My dad either doesn’t hear me, or ignores me, because he doesn’t say anything.

The driveway seems like it goes on for miles, the pavement surrounded by greenery. I try to peek through the breaks in the shrubs and trees, but my head is spinning too fast to catch anything of importance.

We get to the end of the driveway, which comes to a perfect circle around a large fountain with cream stone statues decorating it.

My mind can’t seem to catch up with my eyes, because I’m not comprehending anything that I’m seeing. This can’t be

where we're moving to, unless Sara is like... the president's daughter.

Okay, it isn't *White House* big, but it's definitely not what we're used to in Franklin. The house is a massive cream and black structure. It's modern, making it seem more inviting than I thought it would be.

My dad puts the truck in park once we roll to a stop just outside the front doors, then he turns to look at me with a smile lighting up his face.

"Dad..." I start but fall silent when I catch the look in his eyes.

He's beaming, his eyes filled with hope and joy. I lose the confidence to say what I'm thinking, unable to crush him no matter how angry I may be. It just doesn't feel very nice at this moment.

I give him another forced smile, trying my best to look more confident than I feel. He closes his eyes for a millisecond, then slides his hand to the door handle. "Ready?"

I mirror his motions, pulling on my own handle to pop my door open as well. "Ready."

A woman appears in the doorway of the house the moment my feet hit the bricks of the driveway. She's short and thin, with blonde hair cascading down her shoulders perfectly, and she's dressed in a clean white dress that stops at the knee, paired with heels that are higher than I ever saw my mom wear.

Her lips pull into the same big ass smile that graces my father's face as he jogs across the driveway to pull her into a hug.

I avert my gaze when he presses his lips to hers, his arms wrapped firmly around her waist. I've never seen him with anyone but my mom, and I feel like I'm witnessing something far too personal and intimate to keep my attention on it.

"Logan!"

My father's voice pulls my attention back to the front of the house, and my eyes collide with Sara's. I try to hold in the groan that sits in the back of my throat as I make my way to meet her with a tight-lipped smile.

Once I'm close enough to get a better look at her, my throat starts to swell a little. A wave of anxiety washes over me as I look into her pale blue eyes, so I try to swallow through the feeling.

"Logan," my dad says, "this is Sara."

I clear my throat. "Hi, Sara."

Her face spreads into a huge, welcoming smile. "Logan, it's so nice to finally meet you."

She steps into me, wrapping her arms around me in a hug. I just stand there like a mannequin, unable to move my limbs to return the gesture. I feel a little guilty in my gut, but mainly I'm just overwhelmed.

She pulls back, giving me another good look into her mesmerizing eyes, and I feel a string pull at my heart again. My mom had blue eyes too, but they were darker. More like the depths of a freezing cold ocean, whereas Sara's are crystalized – like a clean river you just want to roll around in.

"Why don't you come inside and see the house. Carson is looking forward to meeting you."

My eyebrows furrow in question. "Carson?"

"I told you about Sara's son," my father says. "Don't you remember?"

I rear my head back, my eyes bugging out. "You definitely didn't mention him, Dad."

"I'm sure I did." He flexes his eyebrows just enough for me to notice, a motion that says *be nice*.

"Well," Sara interjects, still smiling warmly, "you know now. Come in and meet him, Logan."

My stomach turns to lead, making the breakfast I had this morning churn around inside of me. I take a breath, because

what else can I do, and follow Sara and my dad into my new home.

*four*

## LOGAN

I'm not sure why I'm surprised at the interior of the house when the exterior looks the way it does.

But I'm still caught off guard when I walk through the front door.

My gaze trails across every inch of what I can see from the foyer. The floors are a clean white marble with faint black swirls running through each panel, the walls are also a bright shade of white, giving the whole home a modern feel. The foyer opens up to a sitting area with a staircase sitting at the entrance, the steps and railing a deep, black marble.

I swallow through the nerves sitting in my chest, turning to my father with a look. He grins, his cheeks pulling up. He thinks I'm impressed, but he's wrong. I'm just overwhelmed.

I grew up happy, but it hurts to know there're people sitting across town in homes like this when I know so many families in Franklin that are struggling. Imagine how many meals, warm clothes, utility bills, and school supplies could be paid for with the amount of money that was poured into this *one* house.

I shake my head a little at the thought.

"Carson?" Sara calls out. "Come and meet Logan!"

My shoulders lift a little, almost as if I'm getting ready to protect myself. I'm unsure why, but there's a creeping feeling in my bones telling me that this is the beginning of a very, very *unhappily* ever after.

I'm wondering to myself what Carson may look like, how old he is, what his personality might be like, when I hear footsteps coming from my left, down the staircase.

Sara, my father, and I all turn in unison to look when three guys appear on the staircase. They look grown as hell, all of them over six foot and bulky.

“Carson, didn’t we discuss welcoming Gary and Logan *without* your friends here?” Sara’s voice sounds clipped, like she’s trying not to scold him in front of us.

I stand in silence, my eyes trained on them. All three of them are so different, the one at the very top of the staircase is leaner with dark hair, his face contorted into a grin that screams mischief. He’s Michelangelo’s *David*, chiseled from stone and full of secrets.

The one in front of him is more muscular, like he hasn’t missed a day in the gym since he was fresh out of puberty. His deep, tanned skin almost glows under the fluorescent lights of the house, telling me he’s Latin – maybe Cuban or Mexican. His dark hair is shaved down close to his scalp at the sides, and when he turns his head, I can see designs carved into the fade. He studies me with dark eyes, like he’s undressing me and reading me all at once.

“We got caught up watching the game.” My gaze pulls to the last boy, the one that spoke. *Carson*.

He’s the spitting image of Sara – blue eyes and tanned skin, but with curly, sun-kissed blond hair instead of her straight, platinum blonde – that gives him a completely different look to the other two behind him. His expression is mysterious; I can’t get a good read on him. But I do notice that he’s more built than the others, like he must play sports if I’m reading his form correctly. His shoulders are huge, spanning wide and thick.

He runs a hand through his messy hair, his lips turning up into a cocky grin when his eyes finally connect with mine.

“Carson, this is Logan. Your new stepsister.”

I inwardly cringe at the word. “Well, you aren’t married, so we aren’t stepsiblings.”

“*Logan!*” my father hisses under his breath.

I squeeze my eyes shut when I realize what I just said, but Carson laughs from the staircase – his friends echoing.

I open my eyes to look at Sara. “I’m sorry.”

She shakes her head. “Don’t be sorry, Logan. It’s okay.” She returns her attention to her son. “Are you going to come down here and introduce yourself?”

Carson skips the rest of the way down the stairs on light feet, but his friends stay on the staircase, as if to watch the scene unfold. *Because I definitely need an audience for this warm family moment.*

Carson stops five feet in front of me, then sticks his hand out, like he wants me to shake it. I stare at it, confused.

He wiggles his fingers after a moment. “This is usually where you would reach out and grab my hand.”

His deep voice sends a jolt of electricity through my veins, so I reach out to slip my hand in his.

His hand is massive, his fingers wrapping around mine tightly as he shakes. “Welcome to the family, *sis*.”

I find his gaze glued to mine like a magnet when I look at him through my eyelashes, seeing malice and humor swirling in the deep blue depths. The way his eyes bore into mine make the words feel like a threat, and alarms go off in my head.

I pull my hand from his like it’s on fire, unable to find words to say in response to him, so I just give him a small smile and then avert my gaze to my feet.

“Why don’t you say goodbye to your friends, Carson?” Sara puts a hand on Carson’s arm.

The two boys on the staircase take the hint, bounding down the steps and stopping in front of where we’re all standing at the entryway. The one with longer dark hair stands closest to me, and when he turns to me and gives me a playful grin, my stomach falls to my ass.

There’s a cigarette behind his ear, and I can see tattoos peeking out from underneath the collar of his expensive looking shirt. His eyes are so dark they’re almost black, boring into my soul like he’s trying to suck the life from me. “Logan, right?”



I perk an eyebrow, dragging my eyes along every millimeter of his face to try and memorize it. “Yes.”

“I’m Hayden Monroe.”

I smile with venom on my tongue. “Good for you.”

His eyebrows move up his forehead a little, as if I’ve caught him off guard, but he’s quick to mask the gesture, holding himself composed. His eyes narrow, as if in warning, so I just show him my teeth in a smile that tells him exactly how much I am *not* scared of him.

“Levi Valentino.” My attention is pulled from Hayden, finding a hand extended toward me. “Nice to meet you, Logan.”

I study the other guy, trying to decide if he’s also going to be a problem for me, but there’s something about him that radiates warmth. He’s big as fuck, but his smile tells me he isn’t as cold as his friend.

I place my hand in his. “Likewise.”

Once I’ve dropped my hand from his, I turn to give Hayden a grin.

I’m mildly aware that my father and Sara are watching this exchange unfold, but I refuse to drop my shields so early. No way I’ll turn my back to someone who I see as threatening, not in Luxington – not anywhere.

“Goodbye, boys,” Sara singsongs, stepping to the side so they can pass through the doorway.

I don’t miss the shimmer of humor that passes between Hayden and Carson as he steps past him, but I store it away in the back of my mind to take apart later.

Now? Now I need to get to know my new surroundings, and I desperately need a shower.

*five*

## CARSON

There's a knock at my door just as I'm slipping Beats into my ears to focus on some homework, and my mom walks in before I can answer.

"Dinner's ready."

I perk an eyebrow after I've turned in my chair to look at my mom. "Since when do you cook?"

"I don't, but I know how to use the DoorDash app on my phone." She grins.

I snort, pulling my headphones from my ears and putting them back into the charging case. "I'll be right down."

She leaves without another word, and I type out a text to the group chat with Hayden and Levi before I stand up to head downstairs.

*Carson: Need to get fucked up*

Hayden responds almost immediately, and Levi is close behind him.

*Hayden: Come over then*

*Levi: Invite your sister*

*Hayden: Chicks hot*

*Hayden: Even if she is Franklin trash*

*Hayden: I heard girls from Franklin give the best sloppy*

*Levi: you saw them DSLs? she'd suck the soul right outta you like one of them things from harry potter*

*Hayden: and I'd let her*

*Carson: Fuck off.*

*Hayden: Carson is it cool if your sister chokes  
on my dick?*

*Levi: you saw the way she looked at me? its my  
dick hittin her dangly thing*

*Carson: Fuck. Off.*

*Hayden: I think he wants his sis to eat his dick  
for dinner instead*

*Levi: oh shit. C? gonna bang your sister?*

*Carson: Do whatever you want. See you in an  
hour.*

I put my phone on Do Not Disturb and throw it down on my desk, my hands shaking as I grip onto the arms of my chair. Fury burns through me like a raging fire, turning my blood to ash and smoke.

Twelve hours ago, Logan didn't exist. Twelve hours ago, I was under the impression that this little phase would pass my mom by like a bad smell. She's been fucking her assistant for months, but I never imagined he would infiltrate my life like this.

I have a good thing going with my mom. It's been just the two of us for the last ten years, and that's the way I fucking like it. And most of the time it's just me, myself and I – well, and Hayden and Levi.

But now? The fucking sacred ground has been infiltrated.

Infiltrated by white trash.

I blow out a breath, trying to cool the heat inside of me before I have to face them all. I need to get rid of this pent-up aggression, and there're only two ways I know how to do that.

Football or pussy.

I stand up with a grin pulling at my lips and type out one last message to the group chat.

*Carson Raines: Invite the cheer squad*

Slipping my phone into my pocket, I stand up and head downstairs to my very first “family” dinner.

All of them are already seated at the table when I make my way into the dining room, all three heads turning to watch me find my seat. I just grin, pull out my chair, and sit down without a word.

Logan is sitting next to me, her legs crossed so I can see a good amount of her thighs where her shorts have ridden up. I clear my throat and avert my eyes, checking out the food laid out on the table.

“Well, help yourselves.” My mom smiles as she starts dishing food out onto Gary’s plate. The task confuses me because... can’t this motherfucker serve himself?

I ignore the feeling of resentment in my gut and fill my plate with food in silence. Everyone else does the same, and then we all start eating the same way – silently, officially making this the most uncomfortable dinner I’ve ever eaten.

About halfway through, my mom speaks again. “Carson, I told Logan you would show her around school on Monday. Does that work with your schedule?”

My head snaps to the side to look at Logan, who’s sitting there with no emotion gracing her pretty face. “You’re transferring to Luxington?”

She picks at her food with her fork, but doesn’t look at me when she answers. “Apparently.”

I look to my mom, who’s staring daggers at me in warning. “I have football on Monday.”

She speaks through the clench in her jaw. “You have football *after* school.”

I press my lips together, trying not to smirk like an asshole.

“Logan doesn’t have a car yet, so you can drive her, then give her the inside scoop on Luxington. Show her to class and stuff.” My mom smiles, settling into her chair.

I get another forkful of mac and cheese and shove it in my mouth to avoid responding, just giving my mom a nod from across the table. The room falls quiet again and stays that way until we’ve all cleared our plates.

I push my chair out behind me, standing up. “I’m gonna head to Hayden’s.”

My mom shoots daggers in my direction again, making me sigh. “Thank you for dinner, Mom, but I’m not going to force something that doesn’t come organically.”

Her head goes back in surprise, but Gary lays a hand on top of one of hers. “It’s okay, Sara. This is new for everyone. We’ll all warm up.”

I give him a closed-lipped smile in appreciation, even though I want to knock his teeth out, and keep taking steps backwards toward the door, waiting to see if my mom is going to say anything.

“Home by one, Carson.” She meets my eyes with an unreadable expression.

“I’ll just stay at Hayden’s.” I turn and head through the door before she can say anything else, feeling the irritation inside of me growing bigger.

My mother has never given me a curfew before, making me believe she’s just playing the *caring mother* card for our new fucked up family. We have trust, my mom and I, and she’s never needed to enforce that type of shit before because I’ve never disappointed her. I’m careful, I get good grades, I focus on football.

And right now, all I want to do is fuck something up to make a point.

I run to my room, slip my feet into some Nikes, grab my keys, and then jog back down the stairs and out the front door.

---

By midnight, I've consumed enough liquor to paralyze a smaller man, choosing to drown my anger instead of suffocating in it myself.

"You ready to go lay down, Car?" Cassidy whispers in my ear, her ass moving in a circular motion on my lap with the implication that I'll be able to see straight long enough to fuck her.

I also hate that she calls me *Car*. I don't know when the nickname started, but it hasn't grown on me at all in the year and a half I've been dating her.

I squeeze her thigh with my left hand. "I should probably drink some water."

I'm fucked up, but I'm not too fucked up to know that if I don't balance out the liquor in my system, I'll be hungover as shit tomorrow.

I pat her thigh with the same hand, then squeeze at her waist with my other, motioning for her to stand up. She complies, standing on her bare feet to stare at me. I press my mouth to hers, tugging her body flush against mine as I ravage her lips. The room starts to spin a little, so I pull away and open my eyes again. "I'll be back."

She blows me a kiss and falls back down on the couch, winking at me when she presses her tongue to the inside of her cheek a few times. I chuckle as I turn to head to the kitchen.

Cassidy is a good time. She's the cheer captain, meaning we're always paired up for football shit. One night we hooked up at a party and we've been together ever since – I say *together* very loosely. We were dating seriously for a little while, but I never really felt things for her you're supposed to feel in a relationship. But, she likes having the QB on her arm, and she's wild in bed. As an added bonus, since we're just

together for show and quickies, she doesn't mind when I hook up with other people, as long as she gets to keep me. She's more my friend with benefits than anything at this point, but to the outside world, we're the happy little football couple.

I find Hayden and Levi standing at the island when I enter the kitchen. Hayden is rolling a blunt, and Levi is pouring a shot. "What's up, bitches?"

Levi turns to me with bloodshot eyes, a stupid grin pulling at his lips. "Carson, my boy."

I snort, pulling open the fridge to grab a bottle of water. "You good?"

"He's fine, just drunk." Hayden answers for him, a smirk on his face. He holds the blunt to his mouth to lick it, nodding his head. "You want some of this?"

Before I can respond, Levi is smacking me on the back. "Carson, why didn't you bring that hot sister of yours? I have something I need her to sit on."

Hayden barks out a laugh, and I choke on the water I'm pouring into my mouth as laughter bubbles up my throat. I cough through it, my lips permanently curved in humor. "I don't bring trash to the party, gentlemen."

Hayden slips the blunt between his lips, lights it, and then blows smoke out in front of him. "Trash or not, we need to welcome her to Luxington the right way." He flexes his hips to hump the air, then puffs on his blunt again.

I roll my eyes at him, my fist tightening on the bottle of water. My head is starting to clear from the alcohol a little, and irritation is slowly refilling my system like a toxin. "No way would I bring that chick to a party, and neither will you two idiots."

Hayden claps his hands once, laughing through the hold his lips have on the blunt. "Look who's trying to be the alpha, attempting to make rules and shit."

Levi is swaying on his legs, like he's standing on a boat. "Carson, why you so bothered by this?"



I down the rest of my water before I answer him, trying to choose my words as carefully as I can with the film of intoxication over me. “I’m not bothered. I just don’t like the bitch. She shouldn’t be here.”

Hayden passes me the blunt, but I wave him off and he stubs it out on the marble countertop. “Well, we could always play with her.”

My eyebrows go up. “Play with her?”

He shrugs. “Let her know she isn’t welcome here.”

Levi laughs a full belly laugh, pointing at Hayden but speaking to me. “You see that evil look in his eyes? Motherfucker wants to torture her.”

Meeting Hayden’s eyes, I try to read whatever his sick and twisted mind is coming up with, and he flexes his eyebrows once in question.

I grab another bottle of water and down it as I think about Logan, her perfect skin, silky black hair with white pieces framing her face, and deep golden-brown eyes that studied me when we met. Her tight ass and slim waist, taunting me from across the room when she walked upstairs. The cleavage that spilled from the top of her shirt.

I crush the empty bottle and throw it across the room, meeting Hayden’s gaze again. “Let’s do this.”

My friends grin like kids in a candy shop, so I mimic the expression, letting them know I’m looking forward to this just as much as they are.

I turn and leave the kitchen. Cassidy is in the middle of a conversation with some of the other girls, but my aching cock blurs the signal my brain is sending to my mouth, so I just grab her by the arm and pull her up off the couch.

She giggles as she calls after her friends when I start dragging her behind me to the stairs. “Goodnight, ladies.”

I ignore everyone else, just pulling her behind me upstairs until we reach my designated guest room at the end of the hall.

I slam the door behind us, then turn to face her as my breath leaves me in heavy pants. “Take your clothes off.”

She lifts her little tank top over her head, then slips her skirt down her legs, leaving her completely naked in front of me. I groan at the fact she hasn't had underwear on the whole evening, and she sits on the edge bed, propping her feet up and spreading her legs to show me her pussy.

I prowl toward her on heavy feet, unbuttoning my jeans and pulling the zipper down as I go. Dropping to my knees in front of her, I slide my hands up the insides of her open thighs to push them farther apart. Falling face first, I connect with the soft flesh between her legs.

She moans on contact, her back falling down on the bed so she can arch and grind against my mouth. I lick and suck her clit, pressing my fingers inside of her and curling them to hit her G-spot. She moans and whimpers above me, sending electroshocks straight to my balls.

I flick my tongue over her clit again and again as my fingers thrust inside of her, my eyes falling closed. In the darkness, behind my eyelids, I'm met with Logan's face. I force my eyes back open, telling myself it was purely because I met her today, and continue to send Cassidy closer and closer to her release.

Once I feel her start to tighten on my fingers, I move faster. Every time my tongue moves against her slick clit, and every time my fingers impale her, I picture Logan above me, writhing with pleasure instead.

I grind my teeth together in frustration, and once Cassidy's orgasm has subsided, I pull myself from her, standing up and shoving my jeans and boxers down past my ass. I slap her once on the clit, and when she quakes and moans, I smirk at her. “Flip over, Cass.”

She cracks a smile as she complies, turning over onto her stomach to show me her ass. I pull her off the edge of the bed, letting her bend at the waist as I line my cock to her entrance and push inside of her.

She turns her head on the plush surface of the bed to look at me from the corner of her eye as she moans, “*Car.*”

I slowly drag myself out, then slam back inside until my balls smack her clit, making her cry out again. Pressing my hand to her neck, I thread my fingers in her hair and pull her head back so I can't see her face.

Then I thrust inside of her again, picturing my stepsister as I fuck my girlfriend.

*six*

## LOGAN

My bedroom is bare as shit.

I take that back. The room I am being forced to call mine is bare.

There's nothing on the walls except a weird, fancy pants painting of a vase filled with flowers. It's not my style at all, but I'm sure as hell not about to decorate this place. I'm taking a stand, showing my dad that I don't want to be here by not making any part of it personal.

Is that childish? Yes. Do I care? No. Will he notice? Probably not.

I do unpack my clothes, though, hanging them in the closet and filling the drawers of the dresser. I'm stubborn, but I won't let all of my clothes get wrinkled because of it. There's no school Monday, so I still have two days to fill while locked in this house, and I'm planning on spending them closed in this foreign room, complaining on the phone to Giuliana.

After the most awkward dinner yesterday, I promptly slipped a Xanax under my tongue and fell asleep beneath the bright pink sheets Sara had picked out for me.

I don't know why I couldn't just bring my old bedroom stuff, but my father insisted that it all went to the Salvation Army out in Franklin before we left. "*Fresh start, fresh stuff,*" my father had said when I questioned him about my furniture and bedding, to which I rolled my eyes and asked how we would afford all new stuff for me.

Apparently, the room I now call mine was previously a guest bedroom, so the furniture came with it when it was passed off to me. Just like the ugly painting, the furniture isn't my style. It's all white with black accents, matching the common area of the house, except there're pops of pinks all around. The sheets, the painting, the decorations atop the surfaces. All pink.

I pick up a pink elephant figurine that's sitting on the dresser, scan my eyes over it, and then put it back down. Who would buy that?

This entire room screams *money*. Like it was plucked out of a stylish magazine or upscale department store. I'm convinced that it all came together when it was purchased.

My phone buzzing pulls me from the intense stare I have on the dresser, making me realize I've been standing here judging for far too long. I walk back to my bed, plop down, and grab my phone to find a text from Giuliana.

*Giuliana: How's it going? Are you covered in diamonds and gold yet?*

I contemplate what to respond, and after a minute, I decide on something simple.

*Me: Not yet... check back though.*

I switch tabs to Instagram, finding I've been tagged in a photo, so I click on the notification, getting hit with a hurricane of emotions. It's a picture of all my friends sitting on the picnic table at my going away party. We're all gathered together, arms around each other like a family. Tears fill my eyes, so I lock my phone screen before I fall deep into a pit of depression.

Standing up, I throw my phone down on the bed and make my way through the adjoining bathroom door. I turn the shower on scalding hot, then strip out of my clothes. I test the water with my hand before I get in, and it's already hot, because here in Luxington, you don't have the worry that your water heater is going to stop working randomly. As I step into the shower stall, I close the glass door behind me.

I let the water fall over me, curling my head forward to stare at the floor while I try to breathe through the feeling of crying. I miss my friends already; I miss my life. Never did I

think I'd be wishing to head back to the hood, but I even miss the sounds of gunshots and sirens outside my window at night.

“Oh shit.” The voice pulls my attention from the sob that's bubbling inside my chest, making my head snap up to find Carson standing on the other side of the glass door.

He has a grin on his face, and he's doing nothing to turn away from my naked ass in the shower stall. I spin around so he can't see my goodies. “Uh, do you mind?”

He taps a finger on the glass door a few times. “Sorry, I'm not used to anyone else being in here. I should have knocked.”

“Yeah, you should have when you heard the water running,” I snap.

He taps his fingers on the glass again. “Now that I'm here... Mind if I join you? It could be a really nice way for us to bond, little sis.”

I clench my fist at my sides. “Get the fuck out!”

I hear him laugh as he leaves the bathroom, slamming the door behind him. I should have locked the door that connects to his bedroom, but last I heard, he wasn't home. I also refuse to blame myself for this little incident, because once he heard the water going, he should have turned around and left.

Blowing out a breath, I turn back to put myself directly under the shower spray.

Well, I don't feel like crying anymore, so that's a plus. I, however, did not want to get to start this new chapter in life with my stepbrother walking in on me having a breakdown in the shower – whether he noticed or not.

I finish my shower, using the expensive soaps that Sara must have put in here for me and ignoring the manly stuff that is obviously Carson's. I'm still frustrated as a motherfucker by the time I'm stepping out onto the tile of the bathroom floor and wrapping a towel around me. Smirking a little when I look at Carson's bedroom door, I decide to give him the same treatment he gave me.

I twist the knob, barging in unannounced.

But I stop dead in my tracks when I see him. My lungs constrict, and I stop breathing completely when my eyes focus on him. He's sitting in his desk chair, facing the door I just pushed through, his hand wrapped tightly around his dick. I try to tell myself to leave, move my fucking legs and turn around to go back the way I came, but I can't get the muscles to move.

My eyes trail up his body of their own volition, and I take my time to admire the muscles in his stomach and chest that are coated with a light layer of sweat. When I finally reach his face, I find his eyes zeroed in on me while he jerks himself. He doesn't stop, he doesn't say anything, he doesn't shy away from my wandering eyes – he just keeps going. He pulls upwards with his fist, then moves back down slowly, almost like he's teasing himself. I choke on the words sitting in my throat, unable to speak to apologize for intruding.

He groans, and the sound rumbles through me, making my stare catapult back to where he's fucking his hand. He flexes his hips, moving his fist faster.

“Drop the towel, and I'll come for you.” His gravelly voice pulls me from whatever state of shock I'm in, my eyes going wide as they move back to his face. He smirks at me, hand still moving below, and I bolt out through the door I came through, slamming it behind me.

I fall against the closed door, gripping my towel tight against my body as my chest heaves, trying to get as much oxygen I can suck down.

Holy shit, holy shit, holy shit.

I just walked in on my new stepbrother fucking his hand, and I stood there... watching him.

Oh my God. *Oh my God.*

And what's worse? There's a pounding between my legs, tempting me to turn around and straddle him instead.



*seven*

## LOGAN

There's a tap at my door, almost making me jump out of my skin.

*Please don't be Carson, please don't be Carson, please don't be Carson.*

I stand from my bed, padding across the carpet to pull my door open. Sara's smiling face is on the other side, making my chest deflate with relief.

"Hi, Logan. I was wondering if you'd want to go shopping with me? I'm sure you need some new school clothes."

"Oh." The question catches me off guard. "I mean, I don't really know if my dad would be able to afford to revamp my closet again."

I've owned being poor for long enough that the confession normally wouldn't phase me, but standing here staring at this glamorous woman... it makes me feel shameful, humiliated, and those are feelings I've worked hard to get rid of in my seventeen years.

"I don't want you to worry about that, Logan." Her smile turns softer, almost like she's pitying the words that just left my mouth, making me throw up my walls and go on the defense.

"I don't need charity from you."

Her eyebrows pull down. "I wasn't—" She pauses like she's trying to pick her words very carefully. "It isn't charity, Logan. I thought this could be something we could do together... Get to know each other."

Well, great. Now I feel like a dick.

Sucking down a breath, I try to cool the fire burning in my chest. "I don't know if I'm comfortable with you buying me stuff, Sara. I'm sorry."

“Honey,” she says with a gentle tone, taking a step closer to me, “I want you to be happy here, not just for your father, but for you, too. And those little bitches at Luxington are going to eat you alive if you aren’t dressed to the nines in the latest fashion.”

I chuckle, hearing the disgust in her voice for the girls that I’ll be going to school with.

“We can go to the mall, nothing over the top and absolutely *nothing* with glitter.” I grin at her.

“Deal. We’ll leave in ten.” She smiles, winking as she turns and leaves.

I like Sara and I loathe that I want to hate her instead. She hasn’t done anything wrong, and I should give her the benefit of the doubt, right? But there’s this tiny little piece of me, sitting right at the very edge, that just... won’t accept this.

Closing my door, I make sure I lock it, along with the door to the bathroom, before I strip out of my sweats. As I finger through my closet, I wonder what would be acceptable to wear to a mall in Luxington. Then I get annoyed with myself at the thought, because I am not that bitch. I’ve never needed to be accepted, and I’m not starting now. I’ll let Sara buy me some new clothes, but it’ll be stuff I like, not stuff I think they’ll like at fucking Luxington High.

I throw a black t-shirt dress over my head, tie a flannel around my waist, and slip my feet into some knockoff Doc Martens I found at the thrift store out by my old house. I spin in the floor-length mirror a few times, letting the flannel fan out around me, stopping when I feel dizzy. My black hair with white streaks in the front is wavy because I’ve been lying in bed for the last two hours, and there’s not a touch of makeup on my face.

So, I hurry to apply some, just in case I run into Jack Harlow or something - *unlikely, but you never know* - and fluff my hair out around me. Once my eyes are lined with black, and my hair is decent enough, I march my ass downstairs to meet Sara.

I find her standing in the entryway just inside the front door, typing away on her phone. When she sees me coming down the stairs she looks up and smiles. “I asked your dad to finish up some paperwork at the office, but he wanted me to tell you to have a good time.”

I return her smile. “Okay.”

“Carson!” she yells, making me jump a little. “Let’s go, son!”

My face heats. “Carson is coming with us?”

Speak of the devil and he shall appear. The man in question comes stomping down the stairs behind me, so I take the last step and walk to stand next to Sara. I keep my eyes on my feet, unable to face him after what I did earlier – what I walked in on.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, why did I say yes to this?

“Ready, sis?” He throws his arm around my shoulder when he reaches me, his hand dropping onto my collarbone, and I outwardly shudder as I remember the last place I saw that particular hand.

I step out of his embrace, meeting his gaze finally, finding mischief and arrogance twinkling in his blue eyes. I give him a dirty look once Sara has turned to open the front door, and he chuckles from behind me as I follow after her to the car.

Sliding into the front seat of Sara’s Porsche, I let Carson ride bitch in the back and feel a little pleased with myself. God, this is going to be torture.

---

I have thirteen shopping bags in my hands. *Thirteen*. So when Sara pulls me into Anthropologie, I outwardly groan.

“This is the last store, I promise,” she says without turning around to look at me.

Carson is behind me, carrying an influx of shopping bags as well, as he pipes up. “Actually, we still need to go to Louis

Vuitton so I can get a new wallet.”

I turn to give him a dirty look – which I’ve done a thousand times today – and he gives me one of his cocky smiles, paired with a shrug.

“Sara, I really do think I have enough stuff.” I follow after her, but she’s already grabbed a shopping tote and is filling it with various items for me. I notice the loud prints she’s picking out and debate whether I should say something. She’s been fairly accepting so far, letting me pick out whatever I want, but I have a feeling she’s on a mission to dress me like a Luxington princess at least once today.

I decide to humor her, grabbing my own shopping tote just in case I find anything I like in here. Doubtful, since this place seems to be for rich hippies, but maybe I can find some jeans to distress or something.

I’ve learned not to look at price tags, as Sara swipes her card fast enough that it doesn’t matter anyways. I almost passed out when she insisted I needed real Doc Martens, which were \$200 plus tax.

Carson then swiped his very own black card for a \$500 pair of jeans, so I started to feel a little lightheaded and asked if we could get some lunch.

After a meal at an upscale Italian restaurant and avoiding eye contact with my stepbrother while we all made meaningless small talk, Sara went back on the warpath of shopping. It wouldn’t surprise me if she was selling organs on the dark web for huge chunks of change with the amount of money she’s dropped today. As far as I know, she’s an attorney.

I’m uncomfortable, which I voiced – loudly. Of course, Carson laughed, and Sara insisted it was *just a small shopping day*. What the fuck? A small shopping day for me is buying an old band tee at the Goodwill, not buying a two-thousand-dollar backpack.

I end up finding a couple of crop tops in Anthropologie, so I toss them in the shopping tote, then follow Sara back to the

dressing rooms. Carson follows behind, uninterested in anything inside the store, so he's silent, which is nice for a change.

He's been making little inappropriate jokes all day, driving me up the fucking wall. Emphasizing words and making crude gestures afterwards.

*"Do you want to come with me, Logan?"* Eyebrow wiggle. *"Is it okay if I come, Logan?"* Kissy face. Then when Sara had walked away to grab another size for me in a fitting room, he said, *"You'd never guess you have such nice tits under that shirt."* Then he dragged those ocean eyes down my body until I broke out in goosebumps and had to excuse myself.

He's getting under my skin and pissing me off. He's fucking with me, and he knows I can't do anything about it in front of his mom. Little shitbird.

"Okay, hear me out." Sara spins to face me, her expression twisted with excitement and playfulness, making me laugh a little.

"Hit me." I nod my head once and she pulls something loudly floral out of her shopping tote.

"This would be so cute." She shakes it out, holding it up by the straps to show me a tiny dress with blue and white flowers on it. It's not that bad... it just isn't me.

I stare at it, unable to break her very excited heart.

When she starts laughing, I know that the look on my face must be completely giving me away, which makes me laugh as well.

"Just try it on. If you hate it, I'll drop it and shut up. *But...* I think you'll like it." She holds it toward me. "I'm going to keep looking around, but I'll come back and check on you."

She finds a sitting area in the center of the dressing rooms and drops her bags on the floor by one of the armchairs. "Carson, sit here and watch my bags."

He walks on his long legs, swaying his hips in that cool guy way he does, and sits down in one of the chairs, pulling out his phone. Before Sara walks out of the dressing room, she points to the door behind me, a faux stern look on her face to tell me to get moving.

I groan dramatically, causing her to chuckle as she leaves, then push the door open. Closing myself away without a word to Carson, I drop all my shopping bags on the floor and throw my purse down on the bench in the corner. I untie the flannel from my waist, pull my dress over my head, then slip off my boots and kick them to the side. Staring at the dress one more time, I sigh and then slip it over my head. Once I've adjusted the straps and the skirt, I check myself out in the mirror.

It isn't that bad, but I'm not going to tell Sara that. I look like... I don't even know what I look like, but it isn't Logan Briar from Franklin. It's some girl from Luxington. The thought makes my stomach turn sour, because there isn't a chance in hell I'll end up being like someone from Luxington.

There's a tap on the door before I can strip it back over my head, so I take one last look in the mirror before I pull the door open to show Sara. I flip the lock, and as soon as my fingers release the metal latch, the door pushes open with force, and Carson is barging into the room, closing and locking the door behind him.

"Excuse me—" I go on the defense, but he cuts me off.

"Shut up."

I reel back, my face turning angry. But then he's crowding me, making me step backwards until my back hits the wall and he's covering my body with his.

"What are you doing?" I breathe, my courage faltering as he presses forward until his mouth is a hair from mine.

"My mom will be back any minute, and I've been thinking about doing this since I saw you in the shower. Why do you think I came on your little girls shopping trip?" His hands slide up my sides, pushing the dress to my waist until my panties are showing, making my head swim.

“Wait, what?!” My mouth drops open. “Thinking about doing *what?*”

“Logan,” he breathes into my mouth, “I know that you’ve been thinking about it too. I saw it in your eyes when you saw me jerking off. Let’s just get it out of our systems.”

“I don’t—” There’s a knock at the door, and Carson’s hand slams over my mouth to cut my words off.

“Logan?” Sara calls. “I’m going to step out to take a call really quick! I’ll be back to see you in the dress!”

Carson’s eyes expand a little, warning me as his hand slides from my mouth and his eyebrows jump.

“Okay, Sara!” I call back, and Carson smirks as he drops to his knees in front of me.

He lets go of the hold he has on the dress, letting it fall back down. “Hold your dress up, Logan.”

Before I can do as instructed, he’s slipping his hands underneath it and pulling my panties down my legs, leaving them around my ankles and ducking his head under the skirt of my dress. Everything fogs, then his tongue is connecting with my pussy, and I’m pulling my dress up to give him some air.

I pull my leg up, trying to slip my panties off my ankle, but end up just stretching the material. Carson’s hand slides down my leg, creating a fire on every inch he touches until he reaches the lace fabric and slips it over my foot. He slides his hand back up my calf, then lifts my leg and places it on his shoulder so he can get better access to my pussy.

He pushes his tongue inside me, making my head fall back against the wall and my hips gyrate against his face. His tongue flicks inside of me, teasing around my opening, then up to my clit to stroke against the bundle of nerves in circles.

“Jesus Christ,” I moan, threading my fingers into the light hair on his head, but he pulls away to look up at me.

“You need to keep your pretty mouth quiet, Logan, unless you want someone to hear you.” He dives back in, driving his tongue back inside of me again.



I'm too turned on to protest, and I find myself covering my mouth with my forearm when he flicks his tongue against my clit over and over. His hand slips from my calf, then two fingers quickly replace his tongue. I can hear how wet I am when he starts thrusting the digits while his tongue attacks my clit, making me bite down on the flesh of my arm to stop myself from crying out.

My hand tightens in his hair when I feel my orgasm heading toward me like a truck going full speed, my hips grinding against him, so he knows not to stop. He reads the motion, fucking me harder with his fingers and licking me faster.

I fall over the edge, a sound making its way through the suffocating pressure I have on my mouth with my arm, but he doesn't pull away again to silence me, he just keeps going until I'm fully sated and sagging against the wall.

Once he leans back, I watch him push my leg off his shoulder so he can stand up. He presses close to me again, making my body tingle with need, and sticks his fingers in his mouth to suck my release off. His eyes connect with mine as he moans deep in his throat.

"Never thought pussy from the slums of Franklin would taste so good."

My nostrils flare as my face goes hot, and I push him away from me with both hands. I hear him laugh as he steps across the room, but then Sara is knocking on the door.

"Logan, do you have it on?" she singsongs in her cheery voice, and my eyes fly to Carson in a panic.

He waves a hand at me, making me look down to see my panties still hanging off one ankle. "Yeah, Sara. One sec." I pull my panties up, shaking the dress down to cover myself, then walk toward the door. I shove Carson in the chest, pushing him so the door will open in front of him, and then I flip the lock and pull the door open.

Stepping into the doorway, I press the door all the way open so Carson is covered, and hold an arm out to put myself

on display for Sara.

“Oh my God!” She slaps a hand over her mouth. “I’m buying that for you.”

The thought of owning the dress that my stepbrother ate me out in sends nausea spiraling through my gut, so I shake my head. “It’s not really my style, Sara. I’m sorry.”

I want to add, “*Plus, if you bring this into the house, I’ll likely set fire to it.*” But I don’t. I just give her a sad smile and hope she drops it.

“Oh, well, okay.” She turns around to look behind her, but I don’t miss the defeat in her tone. “Where did Carson go? I asked him to watch my bags.”

She rushes to her bags, checking them over.

“Oh, I think he went to the bathroom. I found these little crop tops I like. Do you want to pay while I change out of this dress?” I change the subject to avoid any more questions about Carson and pick up my shopping tote to hand to Sara. “It’ll take me two seconds. I’m sure Carson will be back by the time you’re done.”

She nods, picking up her shopping bags and juggling them with the two totes that hold our purchases. “I’ll meet you at the front.”

“Sounds good.” I close the dressing room door, coming face-to-face with Carson’s cocky, smug ass smirk. I roll my eyes at him without a word and rip the dress over my head. He’s seen all of me by now, so I don’t even think twice about changing in front of him.

I throw the dress down on the bench, slide my own dress over my head, tie my flannel around my waist, then sit down to put my boots back on. I don’t glance his way for even a millisecond, just go about my business and then pick up all my shopping bags off the floor.

“Come out in a minute. This never happened, dickhead.”

Pulling the dressing room door open, I let it hit him as it swings back.

I hear him chuckle as I'm walking out. "Whatever you say, sis."

*eight*

## CARSON

Tuesday morning, I wake up with a raging boner, just like yesterday and the day before. I'm almost annoyed as I slip my hand into my boxers to relieve the pressure. I've never been a morning masturbator. I usually jerk off in the shower because it's neater, easier, but ever since I was between Logan's legs, eating her like a gourmet meal, I've woken up hard as a rock.

I can still taste her, which I'm 100% sure is a hallucination because I've brushed my teeth five times since then, but I swear to God, her cum left a permanent impression on my tongue. Not that I'm complaining. Her pussy was the best thing I've eaten since I discovered truffle infused French fries.

Once I've dirtied yet another pair of Versace boxer briefs with my jizz, I slip them down my legs and toss them across the room to my laundry basket.

Note to self: avoid the cleaning lady's eye on laundry day.

Stretching as I stand from bed, I listen for the shower, just in case Logan is already in there. I don't hear anything as I pad toward the bathroom door, but I knock a few times with my knuckle before I open it anyway.

I start the shower, stepping under the spray and going about my routine. I catch a glimpse of the feminine shampoos that sit next to mine now, resulting in another boner.

*Jesus Christ, am I thirteen again?*

I ignore my cock, finish my shower, and by the time I'm stepping out into the bathroom again, it's deflated. I towel off my hair in the mirror, then wipe down my body before I flip the locks on both doors and go back to my room.

This morning, I have no choice but to see Logan. I've been hiding out ever since the dressing room incident because I knew if I ran into her in the house, I would shove my dick

down her throat. But today, I have to drive her to school. All by ourselves.

*Pull it the fuck together, Raines. She's your stepsister - and you don't like her.*

I need to focus on the part of me that resents her, or I'll completely fly off the handle. I can't slip up again, no matter how tempting her thick ass and hips are. She's trash – and Raines don't fuck with trash.

I shoot a text to Hayden and Levi once I'm dressed, letting them take the reins on *Operation: Torture Logan*. Hayden's evil, and Levi is funny, so I'm sure they can be creative as fuck about it. If I handle things, I'll just fuck her against my locker or something. I don't add that part to my message, because it's my intention to never share the things I'm feeling for Logan with anyone. Including my best friends.

Logan and my mom are sitting at the table when I go down to the kitchen to grab some breakfast, both of them eating pancakes.

“Good morning, Carson.” My mom greets me, and I don't miss the fact that Logan doesn't look up from her food to do the same.

“Morning, Mom.”

I grab a bowl from the cabinet, fill it with cereal, and then pour milk in it until it's almost overflowing, because nothing is better than the cereal flavored milk at the end. I take a seat next to my mom, ignoring Logan altogether, and we fall into silence as we eat our food.

Logan cleans up her plate, putting it into the dishwasher before she turns to look at where me and my mom are still sitting. “What time are we leaving, Carson?”

I grin as I flick my eyes up to hers. “Ten minutes.”

She nods, then turns around to go upstairs, and I take the opportunity to check out her ass in her jeans, because I'm only human.

*nine*

## LOGAN

A car honks outside, and when I look out my bedroom window, I see Carson sitting in the driver's seat of his Jeep. Asshole couldn't even tell me he was walking out the door, instead deciding to honk his fucking horn at me?

I take my time collecting my belongings, just to spite him. Then, once my backpack is over my shoulders, I head downstairs and go to the kitchen to make some coffee.

He'll learn very quickly that I'm not that bitch. I will be petty right alongside him.

I take a sip from the iced coffee I make to make sure it's creamy enough, and once I'm satisfied, I head outside.

I walk leisurely down the driveway to where his brand-new Jeep is parked on the road, so he honks his horn at me again. I stop in my tracks, my gaze connecting with his through the windshield. After a few heartbeats, he throws his hands up in question. My mouth kicks up in humor, knowing I've hit a nerve, so I walk the rest of the way to the passenger's seat and get in.

"Take your fucking time, why don't you?" he growls as I'm pulling on my seatbelt.

"Don't be fucking rude, dickhead."

He laughs. "Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed."

I don't respond as he pulls out onto the road, his arm thrown over the steering wheel like he's the biggest douchebag in the entire universe. I snicker under my breath, then pull my phone from my pocket to keep me occupied.

"What's funny?" he asks, dragging my attention back to him. His hand has slid onto the leather steering wheel, his grip so tight that I can see all the veins in his forearm bulging. My



stomach flutters a little, making me gulp down the saliva in my mouth.

“Nothing.” I return to my phone, scrolling aimlessly through Instagram to keep myself busy.

The car falls into silence, and after about five minutes, he speaks again.

“Are you excited for your first day?”

I look at him from the corner of my eye, sarcasm dripping from my lips. “Overjoyed.”

“Bet it’ll be a lot different than you’re used to, huh?”

I turn to look at him, confusion swimming in my eyes. “Why are you making small talk with me?”

He looks at me for a second, then returns his attention to the road. “I don’t know.”

I snort. “We’ll have plenty of time to bond while you show me around campus.”

“I’m not showing you around shit.” His tone has turned sour again, making me roll my eyes. God, this guy is moodier than anyone I’ve ever met.

I don’t say anything else the entire ride, annoyed beyond belief at the rollercoaster this jackass is taking me on. One second, he’s playful and nice, and the next, he’s talking to me like the dirt stuck to his over-priced shoes.

He parks next to a shiny, black Maserati in the student parking lot, and my stomach swims with nerves and disgust. Most kids at my old school still take the school bus, but here they drive brand new sports cars.

He gets out of the car without a word, slamming the door behind him. I take a breath, looking down at my lap to ready myself for the day, but nothing helps calm the panic running in my veins. Nothing cools the anger burning inside of me at the fact that this is my reality.

I take one more long breath, blowing it out through my mouth, and then look out the window. Carson is leaning

against the Maserati, his two dickhead friends next to him – and they’re all staring at me, watching with predatory gazes.

I laugh a little under my breath, slap on my bad bitch face, and swing my door open.

“Good morning, Logan.” Hayden addresses me first, giving me the telltale sign that he’s the alpha.

I slide from my seat, dropping onto the concrete in my new Doc Martens. “Good morning...” I let myself trail off, my head turning to the side in confusion as I drag my gaze over him. “What’s your name again?”

His face is a mask of calm, and it would be frightening if I was a weaker girl, but I grew up in the hood. There’s nothing this privileged motherfucker can do that will scare me.

I grin as I stare at his emotionless face, and he blinks a few times before his mouth splits into a threatening smile. “You’ll learn it.”

Huffing a laugh, I turn to Levi. “Good morning, Levi. Would you like to try to intimidate me as well?”

Might as well just lay it all out on the table, right?

He chuckles, dimples popping into his cheeks. “No, but I’d be down for a quickie before first period.”

I roll my eyes at him, turn to close the door of the Jeep, and then walk past them toward the school without another word.

---

I wasn’t prepared for Luxington High School.

Calling it a public high school is a big stretch. It’s more like an exclusive training camp for the children of rich kids, but with less rules. I have yet to spot a teacher, whereas at Franklin, they always monitored the halls.

The pale cream walls and dark wooden floors inside the building make it look like a museum, and there’s even fancy

light fixtures hanging throughout instead of regular fluorescent lighting. The lockers lining the walls in the first corridor I go down are a deep onyx, the locks electronic. It's unnecessary, at best.

Students don't pay me any attention as I wander around looking for the office, most of them treating me like I'm completely invisible. You'd think seeing someone who is so clearly lost would entice at least one person to offer a helping hand, but they don't. Cliques gather around lockers and large seating areas, laughing and playing on their phones, ignoring anything else that's happening.

Checking my watch, I notice I have twenty minutes until the first bell and decide to ask for help.

I assess my options, running my judgmental gaze over a few people before deciding to ask a girl who's standing alone at her locker.

"Excuse me?" She turns her head to look at me. "I was wondering if you could tell me where the administration office is?"

She stares at me with malice in her features, like I'm stupid. "Do I look like a tour guide?"

I curl my lip, then decide to continue walking past her so I don't knock her out. I should have read the perfect hairstyle, flawless makeup, and high heels. She's probably one of the popular girls.

A groan works its way up my throat while I keep wandering, holding the straps of my backpack tight. After another ten minutes, I stop walking and lean against the wall with a sigh, officially giving up. What's even worse is I left my coffee in Carson's Jeep – so I'm not only cranky, I'm also not caffeinated.

I slip my phone out of my pocket, ready to call the number I have for the school and ask for fucking directions, when a voice pulls my head up.

"Need some help?"

*Hayden.*

His tattooed fingers are tapping against each other in front of his chest, his dark eyes fixed on me in a sinister way that makes my metaphorical walls slam up.

“Nope.” I pop the *P*, returning to my phone.

“I could show you to the office.” When I look back at him, he’s taken two steps toward me and is grinning like the cat that got the fucking cream. As if I’ve fallen right into his trap.

“Pass.” I give him a dirty look.

“C’mon, Franklin. You’ll be standing here all day. No one else is going to help you.” He takes another step toward me, slowly.

I tilt my head to the side. “What’s your deal?”

His eyebrows flex. “My deal?”

I hum in confirmation. “You’ve been trying to intimidate me since we met at my house, so why don’t you tell me what the issue is so you can leave me the fuck alone.”

His eyes narrow, and he crosses his arms over his chest. “Are you always so reluctant to trust people, Logan?”

I show him my teeth. “Only Luxington dicks.”

The bell rings overhead, making me groan. Hayden gives me a grin. “I’m going to the office. Follow me if you want.”

Alarms go off in my head, and when he turns around and starts walking down the corridor, I panic. I begrudgingly follow after him on light feet, as if he won’t realize I’m behind him. Although, I have a feeling Hayden Monroe has eyes in the back of his head, and there’s nothing he doesn’t see.

I keep my distance, leaving at least six feet between us as he swaggers down the hall – back the way I just came – hopefully toward the office.

After a minute of silence, and what feels like creeping on the balls of my feet, he looks over his shoulder. “What’re you doing?”

I stop in my tracks. “What do you mean?”

He turns, sliding his hands into the front pockets of his jeans. “You’re stalking behind me like a scared little mouse.”

“No, I’m not.”

His gaze is full of humor when he grins. “Are you scared of me?”

I narrow my eyes. “What’s there to be scared of, pretty boy?”

He smiles wolfishly, stepping toward me. “You think I’m pretty?” He cocks his jaw arrogantly, like I’ve just shown him all the cards in my hands.

I wave a hand up and down his body. “I’m not blind.”

He takes another step, making a chill run down my spine. “I think you’re pretty, too.”

I purse my lips. “Good for you, can we go?”

He wags his eyebrows once, then turns around to keep walking down the hallway. I follow, watching his ass sway in his jeans, and when he stops walking, I flick my eyes back up, looking around for the office.

“Right through there.” He points to a door to his right – a door with no windows and no plaque saying it’s the office.

I heave a sigh, officially pissed off. “What the fuck is this?”

The door swings open before he can answer, Levi popping out and rushing me. He wraps his arms around my waist, throwing me over his shoulder like a caveman. I yell, swinging my legs manically to try and get my freedom back. “Put me down!”

I catch the evil look in Hayden’s eyes as Levi walks us through the open door, and I grit my teeth when he follows close behind us, then shuts the door. I’m slipped back down Levi’s body, placed on my shaky feet and pushed against the wall of the – I look around, trying to get my bearings – fucking janitor’s closet.

The two boys stand away from me, backs against the closed door with neutral looks gracing their faces. I press my lips together, my nostrils flaring. I consider throwing punches, but something in their eyes is telling me that's a bad idea.

“What do you want?” I cross my arms over my chest.

Levi chuckles, but it's Hayden who speaks. “For you to know your place.”

I scoff. “Okay, Tweedledee and Tweedledum, why don't you tell me where that is?”

I can see how my attitude is affecting Hayden when his marble features twitch, steam about to blow from his ears and nose like in a cartoon. He comes closer, and my stomach flutters a little, but I keep my back ramrod straight so he knows I'm not afraid of him.

“Your place is wherever the fuck I want you, Logan.”

I smirk. “And where do you want me?”

He doesn't show any emotion in his features, instead taking another step toward me while cocking his head to the side. His eyes flick to mine, then he drags them down my body and back up.

My fight-or-flight kicks in, and I'm not one to flee a fishy situation, so I grin to myself when I figure out how I can fight these fools. I'm smarter than them, and they don't know what they're getting into right now. Everything comes easy for them; I can smell it from a mile away with their perfectly pressed clothes and carefree attitudes. But they've probably never met someone like me before, never crossed the town line to Franklin and gotten involved with a bad bitch.

I can play the game better than them, and I'll be ten steps ahead of them the entire time.

When Hayden has taken another step, putting his chest just inches from mine, I arch my back to graze him with my tits, letting my teeth slip out to bite down on my bottom lip.

“Is that how you distract people, Franklin?” He slides a hand to my waist. “With your pussy?”

My nostrils flare in anger, but I just stare at him, unbothered, my skin heating where his hand is laid.

He presses forward, putting his mouth a centimeter from mine. “Even if I think you’re pretty, I wouldn’t fuck your white trash pussy if you were the last bitch on earth.”

I crack a smile, flicking my gaze to where Levi is still standing against the door. “And you?”

He checks me out. “I’m down, ma.”

He has a twang to his voice. It isn’t polished like Carson’s and Hayden’s. He sounds like he isn’t from Luxington, almost like he’s from across the tracks. His Gucci graphic tee gives him away, though. He’s money through and through, just like the rest of them. *Fake.*

Hayden’s grip tightens on my waist. “No one’s going to touch you here. You’ll be lucky if anyone speaks to you.”

Remembering the fact his best friend was tongue deep in my pussy a few days ago makes a smile kick up my lips again, but I don’t give him the satisfaction of answering. I drop my shoulders a little, meeting his dark eyes again. “So, what’s the plan?”

The casual tempo to my voice has him gritting his jaw and taking a step back. “I’m watching you.”

I laugh, throwing my head back against the wall. “Ooooh, I’m *terrified.*”

I hear Levi snicker under his breath, amused by the fact I’m pushing his friend back. I’m positive now that they aren’t used to it, they’re used to people bending at the knee and worshipping them.

*Wrong bitch.*

Hayden’s gaze stays on mine, so I speak again. “Where’s Tweedledickhead? Aren’t there normally three of you?”

He smirks. “Carson had some things to take care of this morning.”

I drop my mouth open, putting a hand on my chest in mock offense. “More important than me? I’m hurt.”

“Watch your back, Franklin.” Hayden sneers.

I whisper with sarcasm lacing my voice. “Okay, *Luxington*.”

Levi pulls the door open, and they both leave without another word, slamming the door behind them. I sag forward once I’m alone, my heart racing and my chest heaving once my body catches up with my mind.

They’re going to be a problem, I can feel it.



*ten*

## LOGAN

I do end up finding the office, but by the time I get there, first period is almost over, thanks to my little run in with Hayden and Levi. The woman at the desk is less than impressed with my tardiness but *lets me off with a warning this time* and gives me my class schedule, as well as a map of campus.

Looking at the professionally done drawing of the school, I'm annoyed beyond belief with myself. I went the wrong way when I came in the front doors this morning, and the office was about fifteen feet from where I started. The entire beginning of my day could have been avoided if someone had given me a map before I came here.

My second class of the day is gym, so I follow the corridors I hope match up to the map until I'm outside the entrance to the gym. I wait the twenty minutes left in first period, then when students are pouring out of the doors, I push in to find the teacher.

Once I find the office door in the back of the gym, I realize that the gym teacher is also the football coach. *Great.* Probably Carson's biggest fan.

There's a framed football jersey hanging above the door, the letters printed on the back reading RAINES. I look closer to read the golden plaque that hangs below it, and scoff once I've absorbed the words.

### **CARSON RAINES, VARSITY QB.**

I knock on the door, and it swings open on the third rap of my knuckles, a middle-aged man appearing in the doorway. "Yes?"

"Hi." I hold my hand up in greeting. "I'm Logan Briar. It's my first day."

"Okay?"

I blink a few times. “I was told to see you for some gym clothes.”

“Right.” He turns and walks into his office again, so I follow him. There’re trophies lining the shelving behind his desk, every single one for football. I know from the last couple of years at Franklin that Luxington leads in football, but I never really gave a shit. Not that I do now, the fact that Carson is on the team doesn’t change anything.

Coach Anderson digs around in a box under his desk, then pops back up to hand me the gym clothes I’ll need to wear for class. I take them, nodding in thanks before I turn around to leave the office.

“Coach?” Carson’s head pops in the doorway as I’m nearing it, catching me off guard. He ignores me, looking through me like I’m invisible. “You got a second?”

I curl my lip as I sidestep him, but it’s the coach’s voice that catches my attention again. “Carson, this is Logan.”

Turning, I quirk an eyebrow at the coach. Carson chuckles. “Yeah, she’s my stepsister.”

“I’m not your stepsister.” I find myself snapping, but quickly correct myself. “Our parents are dating.”

His eyes go wide with humor. “Right.” He addresses the coach again. “She lives in my house.”

“Can you show her to the locker room please, Carson?” Coach asks.

I answer before Carson can, holding up my map. “I’m good, Coach. I can find it without him.”

“Suit yourself,” Coach Anderson mutters, then gives his attention to Carson.

I don’t stay long enough to hear what comes next of their conversation, instead heading back out into the general area of the gym. I look at my map, sighing at the fact I look the part of the lost new girl before spinning to head in the opposite side of the space where the map says the locker rooms sit.

The doors are labeled, thank God, or else I would probably wander into the boys' locker room on accident. I push open the right door, and I'm hit with the sweet, sickly scent of body spray and teen hormones.

I keep moving forward, finding the locker room filled with girls already, all of them changing into their gym uniform. There're showers at the back, separate stalls versus the prison style strip of showers we had at Franklin, and I say a silent thank you to the boujee gods in Luxington for that perk.

A few heads turn to look at me as I walk through the slim space lined with lockers, but I keep my eyes facing forward until I reach the very end, where there's a group of lockers unattended. I pop the lock, reading the combination that's taped on the inside and hoping I remember it at the end of class, then stuff my backpack inside.

I check out the clothes the coach gave me, realizing they're pretty decent. The tee is plain black with a Luxington Athletics logo, and there's matching basketball shorts to go with it. I put them on the bottom ledge of the locker, then strip from my street clothes. Once I've put my own shirt and jeans inside the locker on top of my backpack, I slip my legs into the shorts.

"You're Logan, right?" The sudden voice makes me jump, clutching the t-shirt over my bra. I find a girl standing behind me, a few other girls scattered around, watching.

"Yeah," I answer her, assessing her for threats.

"I'm Cassidy." She smiles, the blonde hair that hangs almost to her ass swaying as she puts her hands on her hips.

"Cool," I answer, turning back around to face my locker.

She taps me on the bare shoulder. "Did you not hear me? I'm *Cassidy*."

I turn again, studying her face and trying to place her. Am I supposed to know who the fuck this chick is? Have I met her and I'm totally spacing?

"I'm sorry." I give her a tight, closed-lipped smile. "I don't know who you are."

She blinks at me, her pretty face scrunching up in disgust. “I’m Carson’s *girlfriend*.”

My stomach bottoms out. Oh, shit. Oh, shit. Ohhhh, shit. She knows about the dressing room... that’s what this is, right? She’s going to tell everyone that my stepbrother had dinner between my legs, and I’m gonna have to beat her ass in this locker room. On my very first day.

She speaks again before I can throw hands. “You’re his new sister, right? The guys were telling me about you.”

My eyebrows pull down. The guys? Carson and his band of dumbasses were talking about me?

“Oh.” Nothing else pops in my head to say to this girl, because it isn’t like Carson and I are the best of buddies – most of the time we ignore each other. And I won’t even get started on Hayden and Levi.

I realize I’m still gripping my shirt to my chest, so I shake it out and then slip it on. By the time my shirt has given birth to my head, Cassidy is talking again.

“I just wanted to introduce myself, welcome you to Luxington and all that. I’m the cheer captain, so it wouldn’t hurt to have me as your friend.” She winks, like a movie star, because of course she does.

I don’t trust a word that comes out of this chick’s mouth, because there’s no way Carson and his friends said good things about me, and there’s no way little miss cheer captain wants to be my friend. I’m like the stray dog these people leave in the backyard because they don’t want it to dirty up the house, all while their purebred puppy sleeps on the couch.

“Oh, well thanks. It’s nice to meet you.” I try to get the words out as soon as I can, but by the look that graces her face for a flash, she can see right through my fake bullshit.

I give her a smile, hoping it comes off genuine, and she turns around to go back to the other side of the room. I blow out a breath once she’s out of earshot, spinning around to check my phone before I head out to class.

There's a text from Giuliana, with a photo attached of all my friends standing in the courtyard at Franklin High. The message just says, *we miss you*.

I suck down a breath, lock my phone, and throw it into the locker.

I'm past the point of feeling sad about this. I'm just angry now. I miss my friends, I miss my life, I miss my fucking normalcy. As I look around the locker room, with its LED lighting and plush seating area at the end, I want to scream. I miss my old, moldy locker room that only had cold water and bad smells.

Slamming the locker closed, I walk through the locker room to go out into the gym. Maybe some physical activity will make me feel better – hopefully it's dodgeball day.

*eleven*

## CARSON

“Hey, babe.” Cassidy plops down next to me on the wooden bleacher, making me jump in surprise and pulling my attention from where Logan is stretching in a boys PE uniform.

“Hey.” I kiss her cheek. “We good?”

She slides Logan’s phone from her bra, slipping it into my hand. “You know I always got you, Car.”

She winks in that way that says, *I know you’re impressed with me*, but I just slide Logan’s phone into my pocket and stand up. “I’ll be back before class ends.”

“Kay.” She stands too, going in the opposite direction to where students are gathering for class to start. I make my way out of the gym to the bathroom down the hall, then lock myself in a stall.

There’s something about Logan that I can’t put my finger on, and after hearing how she acted this morning when Hayden and Levi cornered her, I have more questions than answers.

They said she wasn’t intimidated by them in the slightest, which I believe about Levi, but Hayden? He’s an evil motherfucker. He has venom in his veins instead of blood, and there isn’t a soul I’ve met that isn’t intimidated by the skinny, tattooed demon.

I mean, except me and Levi. We know him well enough to see past his whole *bad boy* vibe. We all grew up together, so we remember the Hayden that wasn’t jaded and fucked in the head.

I hit the power button on Logan’s phone, my back leaning against the closed door behind me, eager to find out something about her that’s deeper than surface level.



I try a few different passwords before 0000 unlocks the phone, I laugh under my breath at her stupidity, but my attention is quickly pulled when I hit the messages app.

There're only new notifications, like she's deleted all her old messages already. I grit my teeth in annoyance, clicking on the first message from someone saved in her phone as the letter G.

*G: You good, Lo?*

'Lo'... I like that. *Jesus.*

I go to the next message from someone named Austin.

*Austin: weird without you here to give me  
sloppy before lunch :(*

My jaw clenches, the image of Logan with some dude's dick down her throat flashing in my head, turning my skin hot. I delete that message; she doesn't need to be talking to any of her old boyfriends.

I realize that's crazy, but as far as I'm concerned, Logan is mine to play with, no one else's. And that's something she'll learn quickly.

Swiping out of the messages, I head for Instagram next. Her profile is private, so I wasn't able to snoop on my own account, but that's about to change.

I pull my phone from my pocket with my other hand, opening Instagram and searching her name. I send a follow request, then slip my phone back into my pocket.

On her phone, I accept my request, giving me all access to her profile after today.

I scroll through her posts, my tongue coming out to wet my lips when I come across a post of her in a bikini. She's

delectable, no other way to put it. Her waist is slim, her thighs are thick, and her tits are each a perfect handful.

Adjusting my inflating dick in my pants, I scroll back up and click her tagged photos. The first picture is one of her and a group of people, and I make it bigger to assess who she hangs out with.

Logan sits in the middle of a group of 7, a cute girl on one side of her and a guy on the other with his arm wrapped around her middle. His hand sits at her hip, gripping her tight enough that I know his touch is a familiar one.

My nostrils flare when I click on his tag, and his profile opens up. Austin. The *sloppy* guy. I have the idea to block him off her account, but that would probably give away the fact I have her phone. Instead, I click on the message button, pulling up their DMs.

What I find makes my stomach curl, sending nausea swirling through my body.

*Fucking sext messages.*

I scroll for a second, reading through some of them.

*Austin: thinkin bout that tight lil pussy Lo. cant wait til 2night need u now*

*Logan: wanna meet in the bathroom in 10? I could use an orgasm to get me thru the day*

*Austin: u wet thinkin bout sittin on this big dick?*

*Logan: meet me NOW*

I close out of the conversation when my hands start shaking. This shouldn't make me feel anything; she's nothing to me, but the thought of her having sex with someone else makes me jealous as fuck. And I don't like it one bit.

Swiping up on her phone, I close all of her apps to remove any trace I've been here and then lock her phone.

Giving up on my search for information, I put her phone back in my pocket and leave the bathroom to head back to the gym.

The class is playing basketball when I walk in, and Coach Anderson nods his head at me in greeting from across the hardwood. I nod back, making my way to the locker room to meet up with Cassidy.

I drop my ass on a bench, leaning back against the wall to wait for her. I check my phone, but the only notification I have is the one telling me that Logan accepted my follow request. Shooting a text to Hayden, I let him know the plan has changed. If his scary ass can't intimidate her, we'll have to switch things up.

Cassidy comes through the door, swinging her hips as she walks toward where I'm sitting in the back.

I slide Logan's phone from my pocket, holding it out to her, but she pushes my hand to the side and throws her legs over either side of my hips to straddle me.

"There's still a half hour till class ends. You want to hook up really quick?" she mumbles as she kisses along my neck.

Nothing sounds worse, after seeing what I saw on Logan's phone, so I grip at the outside of her thighs. "Nah, I need to get across campus."

She pulls from my neck, pouting. I give her my best convincing grin, pinching her bottom lip between my thumb and finger. "Tonight?"

Her lips curve into a smile as she slides off my lap to stand up. "Sounds good. Meet me after practice?"

I nod, kissing her lips once, then cocking an eyebrow at her. "There's something you can do for me."

She grins, sensing the tone of my voice, and puts her hands on her hips to receive instruction.

*twelve*

## LOGAN

I sit alone at lunch, and no one speaks to me in any of my classes for the entire day – almost as if on purpose. By the time the final bell rings for the day, my body is aching from the sheer fact that my muscles have been clenched in anxiety all day. I was constantly looking over my shoulder, waiting for something to happen. But what I’m noticing about Luxington High is that it is nowhere near what I’m used to.

Franklin was pure chaos – yelling, fights, laughter, high energy. But Luxington? The students walk around like robots, going from one place to the next without even an ounce of excitement or *fun*.

It’s boring, and I find myself feeling bad for the upper class in this moment. Sure, they have money and dope amenities, but where’s the thrill? Where’s the joy?

Unless I’m thinking too hard into this, and they’re just dedicated to their education. But we’re in high school, aren’t we supposed to be having fun? Causing chaos and letting our hair down?

I wait by Carson’s Jeep after school, but when most of the students have already pulled out of the student parking lot, I start to feel nervous that I’m trapped here. I pull my phone from my pocket to see if my dad can pick me up, then I spot Hayden and Levi sauntering toward the Maserati next to me.

“Oh, Christ,” I mutter under my breath, crossing my arms over my chest and leaning against Carson’s Jeep.

Hayden steps in front of me, pulling open the driver’s side door of his Maserati before addressing me. “He has football till 7.”

I heave a sigh. “Great.”

He takes a step back, opening the back door of his car. “Get in.”

“I’d rather choke on my tongue.” I snort.

“Logan!” Levi calls from the opposite side, and when I direct my attention to him, his mouth spreads into a huge smile. “I got something you can choke on instead.”

I hold up finger guns. “Hard pass.”

Hayden throws his arm on top of the open back door, leaning so he’s at my level. “How are you going to get home?”

I slice my eyes. “I’ll wait for Carson.”

He laughs. “He goes out with Cass after practice.”

“So I’ll call a fucking Uber,” I snap.

He sighs, stepping around the open door and moving closer to me. “Just get in the car, Logan. I promise not to murder you.”

I don’t have any money for an Uber, and when my phone goes off with a text from my dad saying he’s stuck at work, I start to feel helpless. I don’t like it. I always had things handled in Franklin, was always self-sufficient. I either took the city bus, or I walked. But in Luxington, everything is so far apart, and I have no idea where anything is.

It’s looking like this cocky fuckboy is my only option.

I hold up my phone. “Do something shady, and I’m calling 911.”

He rolls his eyes a little as he slips into the driver’s seat and starts the engine, closing his door behind him. Levi follows suit, dropping into the passenger’s seat. I shoot my dad a text, telling him I found a ride, then slide into Hayden’s backseat.

I’d be a dumb bitch not to appreciate the butter smooth leather with red accents, the vibration underneath me of the engine and the clean, new-car smell. I don’t say anything, though, I just strap myself in with the seatbelt while Hayden reverses out of the spot.

Levi turns around in his seat once we’re speeding through the parking lot. “Whatcha wanna listen to, mami?”

“Where are you from?” The question leaves my mouth before I have a second to think about it, catching even myself off guard.

Levi chuckles. “A li’l bit of everywhere.”

My eyebrows pull down in confusion, but before I can probe any more, he’s turning back around to face forward and swiping through a playlist on his phone.

21 Savage blasts through the speakers, making my seat vibrate. My lips tip up at the side at the familiarity of the song, making me feel a little more at home. When I hear Hayden start rapping along with the artist, I lean forward to look at him.

My eyes sparkle with humor. “You know 21 Savage?”

He looks at me from the corner of his eye while he drives. “You don’t have to live in Franklin to like hip hop.”

I roll my eyes. “I know that, but you seem so…” I try to choose my words very carefully, but Levi cuts me off with a deep belly laugh.

“Like he’s got a stick up his ass or sits in a dark room, listening to emo?”

I laugh, dropping back in my seat. “Yeah.”

Hayden’s eyes find mine in his rear-view mirror, but he doesn’t say anything, he just gives me an ominous look before he returns his attention to the road.

After five minutes, I lean forward in my seat again. “What’s with all the tattoos?”

Hayden turns his head to look at me. “What’s with all the curiosity?”

I fall back in my seat again. “Just trying to figure you out.”

Levi laughs, switching the song so the car falls silent for a moment. “Impossible, my guy.”

I spend the rest of the ride silent, kicking myself for feeling overconfident for a moment with them. I need to keep my guard up, stay ahead of them. I observe them from the

backseat. Levi is constantly typing away on his phone, laughing and kicking his feet up on the dash of the expensive car like he doesn't have a care in the world. He raps with his hands to Young Thug, Lil Baby, and Gucci Mane, like the culture runs deep in him.

Hayden sings along sometimes but doesn't give away any mannerisms that I can pinpoint his character – he's a mystery. He does grip the steering wheel hard every time I make a noise from the back and drives like a maniac, like he isn't scared of getting pulled over or wrecking. I catch the speedometer at 95 through my new neighborhood, making me shake my head. He's... *fearless*. Carefree like Levi, but still made of stone. He doesn't have fun, but he takes the risk given the opportunity.

I store the information away for the future, just in case I need it.

Thankfully, neither of them gets out to open my door or something when we've come to a halt in the driveway of my house. I open it and step out, poking my head back in to say thank you. Levi is looking at me, but Hayden hasn't turned to address me. I can feel him paying attention, but his eyes never find mine.

“Thanks for the ride.”

“See you tomorrow, ma.” Levi waves a hand, and when I look at the back of Hayden's head, I get the urge to shake him and request he have some manners.

I give him a dirty look, even though he still isn't looking at me, then close the door. He speeds off before I even reach the front door, his tires squealing.

“Dick,” I mumble to myself as I push the front door open and step into the heat.

“Logan!” Sara yells the second I've closed the door behind me, making me jump. I hadn't expected her to be home, thinking she would be at work.

She comes around the corner on bare feet, holding up the skirts of what looks like a fucking wedding dress, so she doesn't step on it. Her hair is twisted into a messy bun on top



of her head, and her face is spread into a huge smile, but all I can focus on is the dress she's wearing.

"Thank God you're home!" She freezes in front of me, dropping the skirt of the dress. "Is Carson with you?"

I can't remove my stare from the dress, the blood starting to rush into my ears. I swallow thickly, feeling tears prick at the back of my eyes. They got engaged five minutes ago, so why is she wearing a wedding dress? There's no way they're getting married yet... aren't engagements usually long? Or at least medium length? Or longer than a few fucking weeks?

"Logan?" I snap back to reality, so I meet her gaze.

"What?"

"I asked if Carson was with you?" Her voice is soft, like she's unsure what's happening.

"Oh." I clear my throat. "He's at football."

Her eyebrows pull down. "Did you walk?"

I shake my head, slipping my hands under the straps of my backpack so I have something to do. "Hayden drove me home."

Her face drops a little. "That boy is trouble. We'll get you a car soon, so you don't have to rely on Carson and his friends."

I want to protest, but I skip right over the fact she just told me she's going to buy me a car and go right to business, pointing a finger at her dress. "What are you doing?"

Her mouth spreads into her genuine, wide smile again. "Don't you love it?!" She spins, letting the thick lace skirts of the dress fan around her.

I can feel the need to be snotty bubbling up inside of me, like I need to go on the defense because I've been caught off guard. But I take a second to recognize the feelings and swallow them back down. "Why are you wearing a wedding dress?"

“Oh.” She stills. “The seamstress is here doing a fitting, just making sure it will be perfect for the day of.”

“The day of...”

She looks at me a little confused. “The wedding? It’s coming fast.”

I blink and shake my head through my own confusion, unable to find the words I’m looking for, so I just stand there silent, as if she’s going to be able to read my mind or something.

“Your father did tell you we set a date, right?”

I want to scream, “*Does it fucking look like he told me?!*” But I just shake my head, a little frown kissing my lips as I meet her blue gaze.

“I’m so sorry...” She trails off, pressing her lips together for a moment before she continues. “I thought he had told you already. I thought you could help with the dress fitting. God, I’m stupid.”

She presses the back of her hand to her cheek, but I take a step forward. “No, you’re not stupid. He should have told me, and he should have told you that he hadn’t.”

She nods. “Yeah.”

The room falls silent and awkward, like cut the tension with a knife type awkward. So, once again, I push myself to be the bigger person and try to make things better. “When is it?”

She perks up a little, her eyes sparkling with moisture but still giving a happy vibe. “The beginning of November.”

My chest caves, my stomach bottoms out, and my mouth dries up. That’s only six weeks from now...

I open my mouth to speak, but nothing comes out, so I just shut it again. I take a little step backwards, looking down at the floor. Sara doesn’t say anything, she just waits for me to make a move. I’m sure she has no idea how I’m going to react, and I don’t blame her.

I clear my throat. “I need a minute.”

Rushing to my room as fast as I can, I'm eager to shut myself away so Sara doesn't see how affected I am by all of this. I don't want anyone to see me cry, to see me clam up and break down. I've never been comfortable showing weakness, and I'm definitely not going to start in fucking Luxington with strangers.

*thirteen*

## CARSON

Every muscle in my body is on fire by the time I get home from practice. I ended up ditching Cassidy because all I want to do is lie in bed and watch a movie, maybe take an hour-long shower.

I throw my Jeep into park, and by the time my feet are hitting the pavement, my mom is running out the front door, a chaotic smile on her face and a garment bag in her hands.

“Carson!” she yells, like I would have missed her insane energy sprinting toward me.

“You look like you’re about to annoy me,” I grumble, closing the car door.

“Well, isn’t someone a grumpy boy this evening!”

“I just got my ass beat in football,” I answer, rounding the Jeep and heading away from her to the front door. “So, get on with it.”

She chases after me. “I got you a suit!”

I turn to look at her as I’m reaching for the door handle. “For what?”

She sighs. “The wedding, Carson. You’re my Maid of Honor!”

I rub a hand down my face. “Can you at least say *Man* of Honor or something?”

She laughs, wagging the garment bag in the air. “Try it on for me?”

I crack a smile. “Come on, then.”

She squeals like a schoolgirl, excitement flowing through her entire atmosphere as I push the front door open and head inside. She speeds past me, leading me into the living room, where she has completely transformed the room into some sort

of bridal convention. There're tables set up on the far wall, covered from edge to edge with different flowers. She has a rack set up with endless amounts of garment bags hanging on it, magazines and all sorts of shit is spread out on the carpet in the center of the room.

“Wow.” I throw my backpack down on the couch. “Sure you want to go this big, mom? This is your second wedding.”

She gives me a disapproving look, but then shoves the garment bag into my chest. “Change.”

If I didn't love my mom so much, I could be laid out in bed right now, watching some shitty movie and relaxing my aching muscles. Instead, I am heading to the guest bathroom to put on a three-piece suit. Being a mama's boy has its downfalls, for sure.

Once I'm shut in the bathroom, I hang the bag on the back of the door and unzip it. The suit and vest are a dark heather grey, and the shirt is a crisp white that has been freshly pressed. I go about slipping my clothes off, then peel the suit from the hanger.

The shirt fits like a glove, and I'm not surprised that the suit has already been tailored to fit my big shoulders and thighs – it's not my mom's first time buying me a suit.

Once I'm dressed, my shirt tucked in and the suit jacket fastened in front of me with one button, I take a look in the mirror. I look fresh as hell, like someone's daddy on Wall Street. I almost want to ditch the jacket and roll the sleeves of my button-down to show off the muscles in my forearms.

But I don't. I muss my hair, which is freshly washed but unstyled from my shower in the locker room after practice, then head out to show my mom.

I collide with Logan as I'm crossing through the kitchen toward the living room, so I grab her by the shoulders on instinct to stop her from falling on her ass.

Once she's stable on her legs again, she takes a step back and runs her eyes over me. “Holy. Shit.”

My lips twist into a smirk. “Like what you see?”

“You look like you’re going to court,” she deadpans, making me laugh as I slip my hands into the pockets of my dress slacks.

“Is your mouth watering, baby sister?” I take a step closer to her.

She blinks a few times, sliding her gaze slowly up my body until she meets my eyes, then she snaps out of her daze. Her face twists into that bitchy scowl, and she scoffs a laugh. “Does it hurt your neck to carry around such a big head all the time?”

I shrug, playing along. “I’ve gotten used to it.”

She rolls her eyes, pushing past me to continue through the kitchen.

I take a step toward the living room, but then I stop and turn my head to look at her. “Don’t you dare look at my delicious ass when I walk out of this room, Logan.”

She pulls the fridge open roughly, ignoring me. I laugh as I leave, pleased with myself.

When I come into my mom’s line of sight, she slaps her hand against her mouth but speaks through the cover. “Carson, you look so handsome!”

I give her a spin, then grin once I’m facing her again. “You sure you want me to wear this? I might upstage you on your special day.”

She puts her hands on her hips. “You won’t.”

I put a hand to my chest in mock hurt. “You wound me.”

She steps up to me, brushing her hands down the front of my jacket as she inspects the suit. She hums as she straightens the collar of my shirt, then brushes down my arms. “Should we get you a tie?”

“I think I’m okay without one.” I pop an eyebrow.

“I’ll get one just in case.” She looks me over again. “You’ll obviously need a belt, and some new shoes. I can pick

some up tomorrow.” I accept that she’s not really talking to me, just speaking out loud, so I just nod along.

“Maybe a pocket square,” she hums again, running her eyes along me.

I nod, letting her do her thing.

“Okay, you can take it off.” She steps back to smile at me. “Make sure you hang it up right.”

“You got it, Mom.” I turn to head out of the room.

“Oh.” Her voice makes me stop and look back at her. “I got Levi a suit, just plain black.”

I tilt my head. “You didn’t have to do that.”

She waves me off. “It was no trouble. Hayden can get his own, though.”

I chuckle. “Thank you, Mom.”



*fourteen*

## LOGAN

**B**alancing a bowl of strawberries in one hand, and a can of some fizzy water shit in the other, I settle down in bed.

I skipped dinner, unable to look my dad in the face when he came home from work. I just need time to process... Time to figure out everything I'm feeling. He doesn't deserve the anger I'm carrying, but he also doesn't deserve to get off scot-free, so I'm trying to figure out how to approach the situation.

I put the can on my bedside table, grabbing the remote to my TV. Popping a strawberry in my mouth, I hit the Netflix button and wait for the app to load.

God, Carson in a suit is a whole new type of sexy. Those wide shoulders, his powerful legs, his slim waist. Not to mention he had the top button undone, so I was able to admire the column of his thick throat, his Adam's apple moving seductively every time he spoke to me.

Then getting to experience the playful side of Carson?

Stick a fork in me, I am done.

My stomach vibrates with butterflies as I remember the way he grinned at me, the way he held himself when I was openly checking him out, the way he slid his big hands into the pockets of his pants. He's cocky, and I like it.

I bite down on my bottom lip as my eyes roll back.

He's hot. I'm allowed to appreciate that. There's nothing wrong with that, right?

I mean, except for the fact he'll be my stepbrother soon. And that he's a complete dick to me for no reason. And he's a spoiled pretty boy who gets on my every nerve.

I could keep going.

Okay, so there *is* something wrong with it. Whatever.

A knock at my door pulls me from the insane thoughts about my housemate, and by the time my eyes are flicking to the door, my dad is poking his head in. “You busy?”

I hold my remote up, even though there still isn’t anything playing on my TV. “Yup.”

He takes a step into my room, sighing, “Logan.”

“I don’t want to talk, Dad.” I return my attention to the TV, a gesture I assume he will understand as the cold shoulder.

He closes my bedroom door, then continues to walk toward me. “We have to talk about it. You can’t keep pushing me away. I’ve barely seen you since we moved.”

“And whose fault is that?!” I snap.

Taking a seat on my bed, he sighs as he leans his head to the side to look at me. “I know I’ve been working a lot.”

“So much that you couldn’t even tell me I’m getting a new mommy in November,” I grumble under my breath, rolling my eyes.

He puts a hand on my arm, softening his voice. “No one will ever replace your mom, honey.”

I snap my head up, meeting his gaze. “Why didn’t you tell me? I got ambushed by Sara. I should have found out from you.”

He nods. “I know... I know. I’m so sorry.”

“You know...” I shake my head as I look down into my lap. “Mom died, and everything changed. It’s like you turned into a different person.” I blow out a breath, trying to calm the tears I feel licking at the back of my eyelids. “You move me here, with barely any warning, and I didn’t put up a fight. I just... did it. I just left my home, my friends, my school. Everything. You propose to someone *two months* after Mom dies, and I jump on board to make you happy. But what about me, Dad? What about what I want?”

He sighs sadly, and I can feel how my words have hit home – right in his chest, exactly where I wanted them to land. “What is it that you want, Logan?”

A tear finally slips from my eye, rolling down my cheek as I look up at him. “I want my life back.”

He presses his lips together. “If I could bring your mom back for you, Logan, I would. I would give anything to heal the hole that was left inside of you when she died. But I can’t, and it kills me.”

“It isn’t even just about Mom! It’s this.” I wave my arms around. “This room, this house, this *place*. I don’t belong in Luxington, and a few months ago, you didn’t either. We aren’t like these people.”

A smile touches his lips. “It doesn’t matter where we are, we will always be us. And Franklin isn’t that far away. You can go visit and invite your friends here. But here? In Luxington? You will have a better future than I would be able to give you in Franklin.” He stands up, putting a hand on my shoulder as he looks into my eyes. “You will always be *you*, Logan. Changing your zip code won’t change that.”

He leaves the room without another word, and I don’t say anything either. I just watch him walk out, closing the door behind him and shutting me back into the black hole of despair I’ve now climbed into.

Tears stream from my eyes the second I’m faced with the big, wide, empty open space of my bedroom. I’m silent as the salty liquid falls from my eyes, running streaks down my cheeks relentlessly. I pick at the hem of my shirt, so I have something to do with my hands, otherwise I’ll probably slam my fists into the wall.

I hate crying. It’s weak, it’s not *me*. And the fact something as stupid as the situation I’ve been forced into is making me weak and fucking brittle makes me angrier.

I suck down oxygen until my lungs feel like they’re going to burst, then blow it out slowly to try and stop the tears.

This isn’t how I’m going down.

*fifteen*

## LOGAN

The rest of the week goes about the same. I ride to school with Carson in silence, spend the day sitting in classes by myself, eat lunch by myself, then come home and watch TV by myself. I'm starting to feel a little stir crazy.

I was social in Franklin. I've always been a really social person to be honest. Always had a ton of different friends, fitting into almost every circle. But here it feels like all the circles are closed, like I couldn't find a way in even if I tried.

I definitely won't fit in with the people dubbed *cool* – like Cassidy and her friends. They don't pay me any attention anyways, not that I really want them to. No one in Luxington has caught my attention long enough to make me want to befriend them. Maybe that's shitty on my part, but these just aren't my people. Whereas everything in Franklin seemed to move in vibrations, everything in Luxington feels slower... More dull.

Besides the random little flirtations with Carson and his friends – plus the dressing room incident, I've been relatively bored here.

I have binged the entirety of Parks and Recreation for the thousandth time, though, so I guess that's something.

I'm halfway through the second season of The Office when I hear Carson stomping up the stairs, down the hallway, then finally into his bedroom. I keep my eyes on the TV as I half-listen to the insanities of Michael Scott while still trying to eavesdrop through the wall on my stepbrother. I don't know why... maybe I'm just itching for something interesting to happen after a boring week in Luxington.

I hear some noises as he walks around his room, then the bathroom door opens, and I see the light turn on through the little crack under my door. The shower starts to run, and I bite

down on my bottom lip as I imagine him stripping out of his clothes to get in.

God, I need to get a life.

The door connecting my room to the bathroom opens, only a crack, and Carson's head pops through. "I'm gonna take a shower. You wanna join me?"

He smirks, his blue eyes sparkling with humor.

"Do you know how to knock?" I sass, rolling my eyes.

"So... No?" He blinks a few times.

"No," I answer, giving him a dirty look.

"C'mon, Franklin." He pushes the door open, walking through the gap. He's naked from the waist up, his lower half only covered by a tight pair of boxer briefs that leave nothing to the imagination. "I'm sore from the game. You could give me a massage, loosen some of the knots."

I cringe the best I can, even as my body is filled with the urge to climb him like an oak tree. Keeping my gaze on his, I puff my lips a little. "There's a 100-mile-long list of things I would rather do than take a shower with you. Do you want to hear it?"

He laughs, sliding his hand down the front of his stomach and through the trail of hair there before it slips into the front of his boxers. "Fine." He turns around, heading back through the door. "You know where I am if you change your mind."

---

I ride to school with Carson again the following Monday, rolling my window down to feel the breeze coming off the Atlantic to the east. Carson doesn't complain, rolling his window down too, and we ride in silence until we pull into the school parking lot, slipping into the space next to Hayden again.

I ignore the stares from Hayden and Levi as I slide out of the Jeep, landing on the soles of my Doc Martens with a slap

on the concrete. They shout out *good mornings*, but I just walk away, assuming they're talking to Carson.

Carson doesn't say goodbye, and I don't meet his gaze long enough to expect one. We're better as strangers that live in the same house, it seems, regardless of how hot my skin turns when I catch him observing me wordlessly from across the kitchen table or when we bump into each other in the hall.

I'm the first to arrive to economics, so I slip into a seat in the back row and pull my backpack on top of the desk to get my notebook. The teacher eyes me from her desk but doesn't say anything to me. She's older, with graying hair that sits tight on top of her head in a ballerina bun, pulling the skin on her forehead tight. She seems intense, so I keep my eyes on the blank notebook on my desk.

By the time the bell rings, the class has filled with students. No one makes an effort to talk to me, and I don't make one right back. I think the way I'm going to get through Luxington High School is by keeping my head down, not engaging, and just focusing on my work.

At least that's what I think until Levi drops into the seat next to me, pulling my attention like a moth to a flame.

"Sup, ma?" He grins that fool's grin he seems to have coined, his playful exterior shining bright, as he leans back in his seat and kicks his spread legs out in front of him.

I give him a closed-lipped smile, but don't offer up anything else in the form of a greeting. His lip pulls down in a fake pout at my silence. "Mad at me?"

I trace my gaze along his face for a few heartbeats. "Aren't you the dude that trapped me in a janitor's closet?"

He laughs, and the sound runs through me, making me shift in my seat. "Nah, that was Hayden."

I twist my mouth to the side, humming like I'm deep in thought, then drop my face back to business. "I remember you throwing me over your shoulder to kidnap me, actually."

He waves a hand in dismissal. "Semantics."



I laugh at that, his nonchalant demeanor amusing as hell. He's different than Hayden, and definitely different from Carson. I just can't put my finger on it. I study his face, and he studies mine, like we're both trying to see through the bullshit we're putting on as a mask in this place. As I open my mouth to speak, the teacher cuts off my train of thought.

"Alright, let's get started." She steps up to the whiteboard, but before she has a chance to turn and write anything down, Levi's hand flies in the air.

She sighs. "Yes, Mr. Valentino?"

He points at me with a finger gun. "We have a new student."

"Yes, Mr. Valentino, she's been here a week."

She turns to the whiteboard, dismissing him, but he pipes up again. "I wasn't in class last week. I had a little run-in with the headmistress, had to do some in school suspension. You understand. Can we have our new student introduce herself?"

I snap my head to look at him, and he's grinning like a comedian, clearly amused with himself. I cock an eyebrow at him, but before I can tell him how *incredibly* hilarious he is, the teacher speaks again. "Mr. Valentino-"

Levi cuts her off, "Mrs. Justice, how many times have I told you... we're close enough that you can call me Levi."

I am embarrassed for him, feel it burning through me. A couple of students laugh, entertained by this menace of a boy sitting next to me.

"Mr. Valentino, do you need to see the headmistress?" Mrs. Justice snaps.

He curves his mouth, waving a hand. "Nah. Been there, done that."

Mrs. Justice's voice reaches a whole new octave. "Then please let me teach my class with your mouth closed."

When Mrs. Justice has turned toward the whiteboard and started to write, I shift to look at Levi with my mouth hanging open, because this is *not* the behavior I made up in my head

when I imagined students at Luxington. This is playful, childish, love-your-life, have-a-good-time behavior that I wasn't expecting. "You're a troublemaker."

He smiles. "You like it?"

I click my tongue, turning back to my desk to pay attention to the class, but I don't miss the chuckle that comes from him.

---

I find my way to my locker after class to switch out some books and spot Carson standing with Cassidy at the opposite end of the hall. When he catches my eye, I turn, typing the combination into my locker and pretending I'm busy.

After a minute, I look at them out of the corner of my eye, finding Carson still watching me. He gives me a little smirk, then presses into Cassidy and pulls her mouth to his with one of his big hands.

Air gets caught in my throat, so I quickly look back to my locker to get my books so I can get the hell outta here and head to class. Something that feels a hell of a lot like *jealousy* swims through my gut, making my jaw clench with anger. Anger because I am *not* jealous.

I have no reason to be jealous.

Carson is an arrogant, cocky, annoying asshole who gets on my nerves – *and he's going to be my stepbrother*. I could never even imagine... *No*. I stop that train of thought before it crashes and destroys the entire town – because me and Carson? Never going to happen.

Maybe I need to get laid. It's been a minute. I mean, the last person to touch my lady parts was Carson, and that's probably why I'm feeling some type of way about seeing him with another girl. His girlfriend. Who he cheated on. With me. His almost-stepsister.

I slam my locker closed, leaving this entire train of thought in there with my discarded gym clothes.

Unfortunately for me, my next class is in the direction of where they're standing, so I'm forced to walk past them to get there.

Pulling my phone from my back pocket, I put my attention on the screen as I use my peripheral vision to guide me down the hallway – every girl's way of making themselves unavailable and distracted.

I catch a brief glimpse of Carson and Cassidy as I walk past them, and then everything moves in slow motion. My phone goes flying from my hand and I'm sailing through the air toward the wood floors.

I fall to the ground with a crash, my backpack flying forward on my back and pushing me down even farther.

What the fuck did I just trip over?

I turn, putting my ass on the ground to look behind me, but instead of an obstacle, I catch Cassidy laughing against her locker, and Carson with a big ass, shit-eating smile on his face.

You've *got* to be kidding me.

I slip my backpack off my arms as I stand up, then take the three steps over to them. I cock my head as I address Cassidy. "Did you just trip me?"

She giggles, slipping her arm through Carson's. "Welcome to Luxington."

My eyebrows shoot up my head. "You're kidding, right?"

Her mouth presses into a satisfied smile, then she shrugs.

I huff a laugh, cocking my jaw to the side and looking at Carson. I find his eyes swirling with mischief, and after a few heartbeats, he flicks his eyebrows at me, as if to say, *what're you gonna do?*

That makes the anger burn hotter, my skin flush with heat, and my vision spot with red. I step forward quickly, grabbing Cassidy by the jaw with one hand and shoving her back into the closed locker behind her with a bang.

I press my face to hers. “Since you’re welcoming me to Luxington and all, it would be smart for you to remember that I’m not from here, and we deal with things a little differently across the tracks than what you’re probably used to.”

Her eyes slice like she’s trying to intimidate me, but I don’t miss the twitch to her lips that shows me she’s afraid. We stand there staring at each other for a moment, the world around us blurring away.

“Don’t fuck with me.” I speak clearly, driving my point home with another shove to her jaw so her head knocks into the locker again before I let my grip fall as I turn away.

As I bend down to pick up my backpack, I hear her giggle again, and I swear to God every nerve in my body ignites with fire. I drop the hold I have on my backpack, spin around and throw my fist.

I make impact right at her jaw, making her head fly backwards and slam into the lockers. My hand throbs, so I shake it out as I watch her coil back to look at me.

She shakes her head a little. “I’m going to kill you.”

I laugh, and she runs for me, throwing her hands out in front of her in tiny little fists that have probably never hit someone in their life. I block the blow she tries to throw to my face with my forearm, then slam my fist into her mouth. She falls back, landing on her ass on the shiny wooden floors, and I dive on her.

I deliver blow after blow, and when I feel blood spurt from her nose onto my skin, I pull back and stand up. She lies on the floor, helpless and crying, so I turn to look at Carson.

He grins, crossing his arms over his chest, but doesn’t speak to me. He just stares at me, his ocean eyes connecting with mine as I huff and heave.

“Carson!” Cassidy cries from the ground, and his gaze finally disconnects from mine to look at her.

He bends down to lift her up from underneath her arms, then leans her against the lockers to inspect her face. I watch

him as he strokes along the redness on her cheeks, then wipes at the blood streaming from her left nostril.

Carson turns to look at me. “You can go.”

His head turns back to his girlfriend, and my gut flips. I feel moisture lick at the back of my eyelids, so I quickly bend to pick up my backpack and rush from the scene of my crime.

*sixteen*

## CARSON

Cassidy's face is fucked up. She's going to need industrial strength concealer for the football game on Friday, that's for sure.

I watch Logan walk away, heading in the direction of the bathrooms at the end of the hall. There's a sense of triumph deep inside of me, but right now, I have to play the part of doting boyfriend since this was my idea in the first place.

"Did you know she would do that?!" Cassidy whispers through gritted teeth as she holds her busted nose.

I shake my head to say no, when really all I want to say is yes. Of course, I knew Logan would react that way. That's why I orchestrated the whole thing. I wanted to see that mean, tough streak vibrate and illuminate inside of her.

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a little turned on.

It was hot, watching Logan roll her sleeves up and beat the shit out of someone. She's tough, she's fierce, and she's wild. Like a lioness when she spots a helpless little gazelle.

Although I don't think lions give a warning before they rip the gazelle to shreds. It was admirable that Logan warned Cass beforehand, I'll give her that. I didn't expect Cassidy to push it, to be bold and laugh in her face again. But here we are. One girl with a bloody face, and another hiding out in the bathrooms, probably wishing she had some ice for her knuckles.

I brush my fingers across Cassidy's cheek, which is starting to bloom with black and blue. "Let's get you cleaned up."

I take her to the locker rooms in the gym, where I know there's a first aid kit. I avoid the mirrors, because I don't think my eardrums would survive the scream my girlfriend would let out if she saw what she looked like right now. Sitting her

down on the chair just outside the shower stalls, I kiss her forehead before I run to get the first aid kit. “I’ll be back.”

She sniffles, tears still streaming down her pretty face, but she nods at me, trusting me to take care of her.

Once I’ve grabbed the first aid kit from the closet, I go back to Cassidy and crouch down in front of her. I use a wet paper towel to get the blood off of her face, and she hisses and moans the whole time.

After her skin is clean, I put some alcohol on the gash on her cheek and then stick a Band-Aid over it. There isn’t much I can do for her nose, so I just look it over.

I press a kiss to the tip of her nose softly. “It doesn’t look broken. Maybe you should head home for the day, get some rest.”

Her watery eyes peer down at me, her bottom lip twitching. “Will you come with me?”

“You know I can’t leave. I have practice after school.” I thread my fingers through hers. “C’mon, I’ll walk you out.”

---

Once Cassidy’s shiny red Beamer is pulling out of the parking lot, I rush back inside.

Hayden and Levi are waiting for me just inside the doors. Levi is tapping away on his phone, but his face is spread into a big smile. Hayden looks bored, leaning against the wall with a cigarette hanging loosely from his lips as he picks at his fingernails.

“Well?” I ask in greeting.

“Sending it now, bro,” Levi answers, his attention on his phone.

Hayden’s dark eyes flick up to me as he pulls the cigarette from his lips and slides it behind his ear. “What was the point of this?”



I cock my head. “You’re the one that wants to show her who’s in charge, this is step one.”

“By getting her expelled?”

“She’ll get detention at most. My mom is on the school board.” I press my lips together. “Let’s go find her.”

Levi slips his phone in his pocket, then rubs his hands together, but Hayden just stays leaning against the wall, uninterested. “For what?”

I step up to him, putting a hand on his shoulder. “Now, my emo friend, we play.”

I watch the gears turn in his fucked-up head, and his mouth slowly spreads into the classic, evil smirk he’s coined.

*seventeen*

## LOGAN

Running my hand under the cold water is the closest I'm going to get to icing my knuckles, so it'll have to do. The bell rang long ago, making me officially late for class, but I'm in too much pain and my anger is still burning too hot for me to join my classmates right now. I need to calm down, get the blood flow back in my knuckles, and relax for a little bit.

Lucky for me, the bathrooms in Luxington High are basically spas, so it isn't a burden to be trapped in here for a while.

My hand starts to go numb under the cold water, so I turn the tap off and carefully wipe the water off my skin with a paper towel.

Staring at myself in the mirror, I take a deep breath. Week two and I've already shown my truest fucking colors. *Wonderful.*

Any minute now, they'll be calling me to the office to tell me I'm dead and gone, expelled from Luxington.

My dad is going to kill me.

But hey, maybe I'll get to go back to Franklin. This could be a good thing, after all.

I hear the door open, making me spin and head into a stall, locking the door behind me. I press my hand against the wooden door, waiting and listening to who it is.

"Logan?"

My eyebrows pull down. I unlock the door and open it to look at him. "Levi? What are you doing here?"

The side of his mouth kicks up in a smirk. "I wanted to make sure you're okay."

I step past him to the sink, placing my hands on the counter to stare at myself in the mirror. "I'm fine, not the first

time I've beat some girl's ass."

He walks to stand next to me, putting his back against the counter I'm leaning on and crossing his arms over his chest. I look at him from the corner of my eye, finding him staring at me with that deep, dark brown gaze.

I turn to him. "Was there something else?"

His lips spread into a smile, the dimples in his cheeks popping out. He takes a step toward me, putting himself a foot from me. "Is there anything I can do to make you feel better?"

His voice is a whisper, and there's a sparkle to his eyes that makes me want to give in to him, makes me want to trust him. Which is stupid, because this nice guy act is just that – an act. He's the same as his twisted friends, just playing the goofy, friendly part to get me to trust him.

I know this game; I've known this game forever. And it may work on the naïve girls that were born in Luxington, raised with silver spoons in their mouths, but it won't work on me. I'm the player, not the one that gets played.

I grin at him, flicking my eyes up and down his body before I finally give him my gaze again. "What could you do to make me feel better, Levi?"

He shakes his head a little, his voice a husky whisper. "You'd be surprised the things I could do to you, ma."

I get a rush inside of me, telling me to give in, just for this moment. Play the game with him, get what you need, and then never let him close again. *Use him.*

I take a step forward, my nose a hair from his. "Show me, then."

One of his eyebrows raises, the slit that's shaved through it making the motion stand out on his face even more, and then he presses into me. His mouth lands on my neck, his thick lips suctioning on my flesh as his tongue slides across my skin. I put my head back, giving him better access, and moan when his big hands grab onto my hips to lift me.

He puts my ass on the edge of the counter, sliding his hands down my thighs and pulling them apart so he can fit himself between my legs, his mouth never leaving my neck.

He kisses around and up the column of my throat to my chin, then to my lips. His mouth angles on mine as his hips move forward so he can press his erection against me. My hands move to him automatically, slipping between us to unbuckle his belt as we kiss furiously.

I lift my ass up when his hands slide under my waistband, so he can pull my pants down. He rips them down, stepping over them when they're fastened around my ankles just above my boots. I pop the button to his jeans once his belt is undone, then pull the zipper down so he can shimmy them enough to free his cock.

I pull back. "Do you have a condom?"

He leans forward, kissing down my throat again until he reaches the edge of my shirt.

"Take this off," Levi growls, pulling at the material hard enough to stretch it out. I wish I cared, but I don't. I just rip it over my head and throw it down on the counter next to me. He yanks down one of the cups of my bra, groaning.

When his mouth connects with my nipple, I cry out, circling my hips against his to get friction.

"Levi," I breathe. "Condom."

He pulls back with a pop, slipping his hand into the pocket of his jeans to take out his wallet. While he flips open the billfold, I slip my hand in between us to grip his cock, using my other hand to push his jeans down past his hips.

He groans deep in the back of his throat at the contact, pulling a condom from the inside pocket of his wallet. He rips it open with his teeth, and as soon as I see the latex, I snatch it from his hand.

I stare down at his dick as I slowly roll the condom on, the vein down his shaft pulsing as I run my hand over it. I clench as I feel moisture pooling between my legs, using my free hand to grab his back and pull him toward me.

“Fuck me.”

He lifts my legs, making me sit back on the counter more as his dick finally slides into me. My head goes back, falling against the mirror behind me as he pushes in to the hilt.

His head falls onto my bare chest as he groans, “*Jesus, ma.*”

I grind my hips, creating friction between us as his dick hits me deep, right where I need him.

When he pulls out and slams back in, I moan loud, digging my fingers into his flesh to keep myself steady.

He’s slow and torturous with his thrusts, circling his hips in a way that creates a burning in my core so hot I want to explode around him already. My eyes press closed as he teases me with his dick, his hand sliding up my body to my throat, where he grabs me with just enough force that breathing is a task.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” I moan, letting him know exactly what he’s doing between my legs. “Faster. Harder. More.”

He chuckles at my incoherent pleas, speeding his hips up so he impales me over and over again.

He presses his mouth to my ear. “You’re hot when you get bossy, ma.”

“She really is.” My eyes fly open at the voice, finding Hayden leaning against the wall on the other side of the room, watching us with a grin spread across his face. My eyes go wide, but Levi speeds up his thrusts again, making his hips slap against mine even harder.

“Oh, fuck.” My head falls back, not caring about Hayden in this moment, but when I hear the door to the bathroom open in between moans, my neck bends to see who it is.

Carson appears in the doorway, quickly closing it behind him and flipping the lock. Alarms go off in my head, and every muscle in my body tightens in defense.

Levi groans, but I freeze my thrusts. “Stop.”

He pulls back a little, his dark eyes connecting with mine like he's trying to read between the lines of my words. His hand slides between us to rub my clit, and I moan at the contact.

“You don't want me to stop, Logan.”

He presses on my clit harder, making me cry out. “Levi.”

He feels so good, I can't even stick to my guns. I just spread my legs farther and gyrate my hips against his cock and fingers.

Leaning forward again, he captures my bottom lip between his teeth for a second before he speaks again. “You don't want me to stop, you want to come all over my dick in front of Carson and Hayden.”

I shake my head a little. “No.”

But my words are useless, because he can feel how much I want him between my legs when I start to fall over the edge. His fingers speed up on my clit, and he pushes inside of me as far as he can, like he wants me to swallow down his cock as I climax.

“Yes, yes, yes,” I breathe, my orgasm hitting me at a million miles an hour. His hips piston, and he falls over the edge with me, his dick swelling inside of me as he comes.

I lean back against the mirror as I come down, Levi's hips slowing between my legs as he grunts out the last of his orgasm. I find Carson's gaze across the room, a thunderstorm in the sky blue of his eyes. Levi pulls from me, stepping over my leggings once more as he tugs the condom off, tosses it into the trashcan, and tucks his dick back into his pants.

Hayden takes a step toward me as I bend to pull my leggings back up, and my heart pounds in my chest. Like cold water, my orgasm brought me back to reality to the fact I'm sitting half-naked in the school bathroom. In front of Carson and his friends.

He quirks an eyebrow, taking another step. “My turn?”

I laugh, sliding down to stand up so I can pull my pants over my hips. Fixing my bra so my tit is covered, I look at him. “You wish.”

He grins wolfishly. “C’mon, just a little taste.”

I put my hand on my hip to address him. “Thought you hated me?”

He steps closer. “There’s a fine line.”

I turn to grab my shirt from the counter and when I turn back around, Hayden is only a foot away from me, and there’s a manic look in his eyes that makes a chill run down my spine.

“What about Carson?”

I tilt my head in confusion. “What *about* Carson?”

He presses his lips together, then turns to look at the man in question. “C’mon.”

Levi chuckles where he’s taken up residence against the wall, and Carson steps forward to join me and Hayden.

Carson’s hand reaches out to trace along my jaw. “Will you let me?”

I snort, shaking off his touch. “I just beat your girlfriend’s ass, and now you want to fuck me?”

Hayden smirks, mischief dancing in his eyes. “C’mon, Franklin. Let your big brother in that tight little cunt of yours.”

I slip my shirt over my head, threading my arms through the holes. “Pass.”

Bending to grab my backpack, I slip it on, then step around the two boys to look at Levi. “Thanks for the dick.”

I wink at him when he chuckles, stepping across the room to the door to leave. I flip the lock, but before I pull the door open, I turn to look at where Hayden and Carson are standing frozen in front of the sinks. “See you later.”

I leave without another word, heading to my next class.



*eighteen*

## LOGAN

I got fifteen minutes into my next class period before I was called to the office.

Headmistress Rothchild is sitting across the desk from me now, staring at me like I'm the biggest disappointment to ever sit in this chair.

"Miss Briar." She finally speaks, placing both palms flat on her desk. "I want to show you something."

My eyebrows furrow. "Okay?"

She pulls her computer monitor around so it's facing me, and I suck in a breath when I see the freeze-frame of the video that's on the screen.

She clears her throat, then presses play.

The video starts with my fist barreling toward Cassidy's face – and I must say, I have great form – but when Cassidy's head slams into the lockers behind her, I cringe. She runs at me then, but she doesn't make it very far before I'm slamming my fist into her face again. And again. Annnnd... Again.

*Big fucking yikes. I'm dead.*

The video stops with laughter booming through the microphone, and it's a laugh I recognize. I grit my teeth.

That motherfucker.

That motherfucker with his goofy laugh, his playful grin, and stupid fucking dimples. He took a video of me beating Cassidy's ass, sent it to the headmistress, and then fucked me on the bathroom counter.

I shake my head, anger simmering through every single fucking inch of my body, but Headmistress Rothchild's voice cuts through the film hazing over my thoughts, pulling my focus. "Miss Briar, I'm sure you can understand why I've called you in here now?"

I clench my jaw, my nostrils flaring. “Yes.”

She gives me a soft smile, pressing her palms to the desk once more, “Listen, I know you’re new here... And I know things were different at your last school. Franklin is a lot different. I get that. But here, at Luxington, we have a no bullying policy.”

My eyebrows shoot up my head. “Bullying?! I was *defending* myself.”

She sighs a little as she presses her lips together. “It looks to me that you threw the first punch, Logan.”

I sit up straighter. “Only because she tripped me. If anyone’s a bully, it’s Cassidy!”

I normally wouldn’t narc on someone, but I don’t owe that bitch anything, and it’s every man for themselves right now.

“Logan, it’s your second week, and you’re already getting into problems with other students. Can you see why that worries me?”

I nod a little, defeat in my tone. “Yeah.”

“I’m going to let you off with a warning, and hope that this video doesn’t get into the hands of anyone else. Do you have any idea who might have taken it?”

I chuckle under my breath, but shake my head. “Nope.”

I’ll handle Levi fucking Valentino myself, I don’t need the principal getting involved. I’ll be able to come up with a much more creative punishment for him.

“Okay.” She stands up, rounding the desk. “I don’t want to see you back in here again, okay? Get to class.”

Getting up, I leave her office without another word. I don’t want to open my big fat mouth and get myself expelled or something. I make my way back to class, but the second my ass hits the chair, there’s an announcement over the loudspeaker.

“All juniors please report to the auditorium for a mandatory assembly.”

There's a collective groan through the classroom, but the teacher waves a hand toward the door to usher us out. I'm the last person through the classroom door, and I follow the herd of students to the auditorium since I wouldn't be able to find it by myself.

I spot Carson, Hayden and Levi sitting in the back once I'm through the double doors, and opt to sit on the opposite side of the massive room right down front.

Most of the seats are already filled by the time I've made my way across the auditorium, so I sit down next to a small guy who's reading a book.

Headmistress Rothchild makes her way across the stage, making the room drop into silence. She doesn't waste a second, just steps up to the podium and speaks clearly into the microphone.

"Good afternoon, students. As your headmistress here at Luxington, it is my duty to monitor each and every one of you, and ensure you are safe. I wanted to call you all in here to give you one simple reminder: there will be absolutely no tolerance for bullying, of any kind, within the four walls of my school."

The kid next to me still has his nose in his book, but he snorts once she's paused to look around the room. He speaks to himself, under his breath. "Unless your parent is on the school board."

My eyebrows pull down, and I turn to look at him. He meets my eyes at the movement, readjusts his glasses and curls his lip at me.

Confusion pulls at my features, but he just turns back to give his attention to the headmistress when she starts speaking again.

"Any report of bullying, aggressive behavior, or violence will be dealt with in one way. Expulsion. Here at Luxington, we believe in lifting one another up. I hope my words will resonate with you, and make you rethink behaviors before you act foolishly in the future."

It feels as if Headmistress Rothchild is speaking to me directly, and I'm sure everyone in the room knows it when a few heads turn to look at me. I slide down in my chair a little, feeling insecure under their gazes.

Curiosity flows through me. Why didn't I get expelled? If the headmistress made anything clear, it's that my actions today should have resulted in an expulsion. So why didn't they?

I turn to the kid next to me. "Hey, what did you mean by that?"

He looks at me. "My bullies are sitting in the back row."

"Your bullies?"

He flicks his head a little. "Hayden Monroe, Carson Raines, and Levi Valentino."

I reel back a little, feeling angry at the thought that those dickheads would bully anyone, but it doesn't surprise me in the slightest. They're horrible people, popular asses that get whatever they want.

The kid next to me scoffs a little. "Hayden and Carson both have parents on the board. They're untouchable."

I perk an eyebrow. "And Levi?"

"Headmistress Rothchild would never kick out our resident charity case." He rolls his eyes.

*Charity case?* What is that supposed to mean?

He turns away from me to pay attention to the assembly again, leaving me with more questions than I started with. I lean closer to him, keeping my voice low. "They'll get what's coming to them one day."

He looks at me from the corner of his eye. "Yeah. They will."

*nineteen*

## CARSON

Friday is my favorite day of the week, like most high school students. But for me, it's not because it's the start of the weekend; an excuse to go to a party, get wasted, and get a handy in someone's hot tub. No, for me it's because of football.

It's another day to crush another school. Another day of adoring fans screaming out my name in the bleachers, wearing my jersey number painted on their cheeks, and cheering me on with handmade signs.

On Friday, I am God.

I'm the leader of our team, guiding them toward another win, another notch in the metaphorical belt that leads us to championships.

We're a good team, the best in the state, and that's because of me.

Can I take all the credit? No, but without me, they would be nothing. I'm the playmaker, the leader, the QB, the fucking captain. I built our defense and offense from scratch, handpicking this year's line-up with Coach Anderson, and teaching each and every one of them how to work with me to become the best.

This Friday is no different.

We're going head-to-head with Hale High, who has the weakest defensive line I've seen all year. Getting through them for the last three quarters has been like sliding in between statues glued to the fucking grass. They're slow, and none of them are in sync.

Making my job just that much easier.

My team? We're completely in sync. They clear the field for me to get the touchdown, exactly how we've practiced.

That's why we're 57-0 going into the fourth quarter.

Coach doesn't even bother calling a huddle, just points at me and lets me pick the play. It's been working so far, so why fuck with perfection?

"Let's go, Carson!" Cassidy screams from the sidelines, where she's lined up with cheerleaders on either side of her, jumping around with her blue and white pom-poms shaking in the air. I give her a wink through my helmet, even if she can't see my eyes.

She's a trooper. If it was anyone else that got their shit rocked a few days ago, they would have sat out the game to ice their swollen face. But not Cass. She's dedicated, just like me.

We run out the rest of the game, scoring another two times and ending the night with a complete victory against Hale.

Once the whole team has surrounded me, jumping in the air yelling like apes at our win, the cheer squad and coaches pour onto the field as well. I rip my helmet off, a big ass grin pulling my cheeks, when Coach Anderson claps me on the back. "Nice work out there, son."

I give him a nod. "Thanks, coach."

Cassidy's body collides with mine, her pom-poms smacking me in the face. She screams loud, celebrating another victory for Luxington High.

My helmet drops to my feet as my arms move to her waist, holding her up when she wraps her legs around me, clinging on like a spider monkey.

I smash my lips to hers, just like I always do after a win, giving the crowd exactly what they want to see. The perfect little football couple. QB & head cheerleader.

We're a fucking Hallmark movie.

Her hands thread into my hair. "You did great, Car."

I grin. "Thanks, Cass."



Cassidy kisses me once more before dropping onto her spotless, white sneakers again. “Go shower. I’ll meet you by your truck after.”

My face falls, my body freezing when behind Cassidy’s head, I spot Logan sitting on the bleachers. Not only that, but she’s sitting with Levi. Laughing, with her head thrown back like he just told the world’s funniest joke. Cassidy follows my line of sight, then snaps her head back to look at me. “What is *she* doing here?!”

My face heats. Bending to pick up my helmet, I catch Cassidy’s eye. “Go change. I’ll find out.”

Taking long strides across the field, I accept pats on the back and various “*congratulations*” from students, teachers, and parents on my way to confront them.

I pull at Logan’s arm once I reach her. “What the fuck are you doing here?”

Levi takes a step toward us. “Chill.”

Logan grins, showing me all her teeth. “Good game, Carson.”

I squint my eyes at her. “Shut up.”

She laughs a little. “Someone’s moody tonight.”

Levi laughs too, slapping a hand down on my shoulder. “Dude, relax. Logan is going to come to the party tonight.”

“The *fuck* she is.”

I grit my teeth when Logan laughs a little louder, then takes a step around me. “See you guys later.”

I grab her arm, pulling her back. “No, you won’t.”

She faux pouts. “Why not, big brother?”

Levi laughs so hard that he buckles over and slaps his hands down on his thighs. I ignore him, staring into Logan’s golden eyes. “No one wants you there.”

She hums through twisted lips, like she’s thinking over my words. “Levi does.”

“Levi just wants you to spread your legs for him again,” I growl.

She drops open her mouth with her lips curling up at the sides and takes a step toward me. “What makes you think that’s not what I want too?”

I grip her arm tighter, but she doesn’t flinch, just stares at me. Levi slaps a hand down on my arm. “As warm and cute as this little moment is between siblings, I think you should stop having a stare-off in front of the entire school.”

Dropping my hold on her, I clear my throat as I turn to face Levi. “Take care of this. She isn’t coming.”

I stalk off before he can respond, hoping my words resonated enough to show him how serious I am. The last thing I want is for Logan to buzzkill my after-game party. Especially if she’s going to be a little slut with my best friend again.

*twenty*

## LOGAN

Boys are idiots.

Levi Valentino especially.

He actually thinks he has another shot with me, actually believes I am going to give it up at this party.

He couldn't be more wrong.

Playing nice and flirty is easy as fuck, and I deserve an award because Levi is crossing lines that Carson is trying to draw between us. I'm getting in the middle of them, causing waves in their friendship.

Idiots.

Boys will do anything for pussy. It's been proven for thousands of years, but I'm watching it firsthand.

Hayden pulls his Maserati up to his house, which is somehow bigger than the one I live in, and Levi literally *jumps* out to open my door for me. I resist the urge to laugh at him, instead peering up at the dark house once I've climbed from the backseat.

*Jesus.* If Sara is rich, then Hayden's parents must be *loaded*.

The front of the house is all glass, thick black pillars holding each panel together and giving everything a creepy vibe since there're no lights on inside. There're also no cars on the cement except for Hayden's, but there's an industrial sized garage on the opposite end of the driveway that is probably full.

Cars pull in behind us, filling up the large driveway, and after a few minutes, there's a crowd of teenagers following Hayden and Levi into the house.

The party gets going in no time, with music turned on and bottles set up on the kitchen island. I stand back and watch it

all unfold, since 1. I have no friends, and 2. it's pretty entertaining. It's like watching a rich kid episode of Euphoria or something. Girls dancing, boys watching. Drinks poured, smoke puffed.

I find myself holding a cup filled to the brim with beer when Levi slides up next to me, leaning against the wall I've called my own for the last half hour.

“Sup, ma?”

I tip my drink at him. “Sup.”

My plan tonight is to find some way to get my revenge on Levi. I just need to find a sweet spot between beer goggles and white girl wasted so I don't accidentally fuck it up.

“You just gonna stand here all night?” He takes a mouthful of whatever's in his cup, then gives me that dimpled grin I'm starting to get sick of.

I wave my cup toward the kids around me enjoying themselves. “I'm observing.”

He moves even closer to me, trailing a hand up my arm. “I know something more fun we could do.”

I laugh a little. “Oh, yeah?”

He nods, his eyes dilating as he takes another step. He's close enough now that I can smell the alcohol on his breath and feel the steady inhales and exhales from his nostrils on my face.

I lean forward, pressing my lips to his lightly, and then pulling back. His lips are so thick and soft that I almost go back for more, but that little voice inside of me reminds me that we hate him, so I don't.

He hums in appreciation. “Let's go, Logan.”

I smirk. “Let me finish my drink.”

I need more time to think of a plan, since I'm really just winging this shit. I don't have any idea how I'm going to torture this boy tonight, but I need to figure it out quick before

he realizes I didn't come here tonight to take another ride on the train in his pants.

Putting my lips to my cup, it sloshes over the rim and splashes me in the face when someone jerks me to the side by my forearm. I pull it back, dribbling beer onto the floor and finding Carson's stormy gaze on me as he pulls me away from his friend.

"Hey!" I yell, trying to dig my heels into the floor so he can't keep dragging me across the house. "Let go of me!"

"Walk or I'll throw you over my shoulder."

His face is a mask of calm, but I can see in his eyes that he's drowning in anger and fury.

I shake my arm from his grasp. "What the fuck?!"

He presses his face to mine, so I take a small step backwards. "I'm taking you home."

I laugh. "I'm not going home."

He grabs my arm again. "Yes. You are."

He tries to pull me behind him again, but I press down on my feet to keep myself in place. When he can't get me to move, he spins around, dives down, and throws me over his shoulder in a swift movement, making my beer pour onto the floor.

I drop the cup, since it's empty anyways, and wiggle my body to try and get free. "Get. Off. Of. Me."

He smacks a hand down on the back of my bare thighs as he walks across the house and out the front door. "Shut up, Logan."

"God, you're annoying." I relax my body to the point where I'm essentially a corpse, trying to make it harder for him to carry me, but he doesn't show any indication that I've made this process more difficult.

Of course, because his muscles have muscles.

He finally drops me on my feet, making my back fall against the passenger's side door of his jeep. "Get in."

I meet his gaze. “No.”

He slams his hand on the glass behind me, making me jump a little. “Logan, don’t push me.”

I wait a heartbeat, studying his face as it flexes in anger. There’s something else behind his features – sadness or confusion or... something. Something I can’t put my finger on, but it looks like he’s struggling, like he’s plagued with something.

“Why are you doing this?” I ask, meeting his eyes once more.

His hand curls into a fist against the window behind my head, then he presses his eyes closed and lets out a small breath through his dropped-open lips.

“I don’t want you here.”

“Yesterday you were asking to fuck me.” He snaps his eyes open at my words, so I continue. “And today, you’re throwing me out of a party. Pick a fucking lane, dude.”

He leans forward, close enough that I can feel his breath when he speaks. “I don’t want you mixed into my life, I don’t want you at my best friend’s house, and I don’t want you in my fucking friend group.”

“You aren’t my fucking keeper, *brother*. I can be friends with whoever I want,” I snap.

He presses closer, almost close enough that his nose touches mine. “Not Levi.”

I huff a laugh. “I can fuck whoever I want.”

His nostrils flare and his gaze flicks down to my mouth for a heartbeat before he takes a step back. “Get in the car, Logan.”

I follow him, stepping forward to slap a hand on his chest. “Are you jealous? Is that what this is? Some caveman, bang on your chest bullshit to show some sort of ownership over me?”

He scoffs. “I don’t think anyone could own you even if they tried.”

I grin. "But you want to."

He looks at me, really fucking looks at me, and presses his lips together as he thinks over my words. Standing there, we stare at each other, and something clicks inside me. Carson is plagued with the fact that he wants me. I can see it now... I can feel it.

And maybe there's a part of me that wants him right back, even if just for tonight.

"Can we go somewhere?" I breathe.

"Get in."



*twenty-one*

## CARSON

With all the windows down and the music blaring, I make the fifteen-minute drive out to the beach.

Logan is in my passenger's seat, her legs kicked up on the dash of my Jeep like she owns the place, and usually I would tell her to get her feet off my interior, but I don't care right now. I don't care because she's singing under her breath, her hand hanging out the open window as she feels the rush of the wind passing us by, her hair fanning out around her.

We don't speak for the entire ride, just let the music consume the atmosphere as I drive. I keep glancing at her out of the corner of my eye, but she's never looking at me when I do. It's like nothing exists around her, like nothing can touch her. She's carefree, and that's something I've wanted for myself for so long.

She carries herself as if nothing can reach her, nothing can penetrate the surface, nothing matters. She just lives, and I envy that about her.

I drive through the dark streets of the North Carolina Outerbanks until I'm pulling my truck onto the side of the road at one of the private beaches on the south end of the island – someplace I've never brought anyone before.

I turn off the ignition, and without a word, she pushes her door open and drops out onto the dirt. I slip my shoes off, rolling up the ends of my jeans and then follow her.

"I've never been out here before." She breaks the film of our silence, and I admire the way she studies her surroundings, like she's trying to absorb it all.

"Really?"

She cocks her jaw in a little grin. "We don't have private beaches in Franklin."

“C’mon.” I lead her through the makeshift path, through the bushes, away from the streetlights and houses and out to the beachfront.

When it gets so dark that I can’t even see where my feet are stepping, she grips onto the back of my shirt as she follows me. I chuckle. “Afraid I’m going to run away?”

“I can’t see anything, asshole,” she grumbles, tightening her fingers on my shirt.

My eyes adjust to the darkness, the moon the only thing that’s illuminating the sand. I take a breath, filling my lungs with the fresh, salty air. When the sand goes softer, I walk another couple of feet, then stop, dropping to the ground. Logan stands next to me, peering down at me.

“Sit.”

She does, landing on her ass beside me. “What are we doing out here?”

I lie back, letting the cold sand radiate through my clothes as I sigh. “Just shut up and let the ocean talk to you.”

She lies back too, turning her head to look at me. “You know, you tell me to shut up a lot.”

I snort. “And you never listen.”

“I’m not very obedient,” she mumbles, turning away and staring up at the sky.

“I’ve noticed.” I sigh, relaxing my body to listen to the waves of the ocean and stare up at the starry night sky. This is my favorite place – over everywhere else. It always has been, since I was little. There’s just something about the soft sand, the smells of the beach, the sounds of the waves crashing against the shore that breathes life into me.

It calms all the storms inside of my head, all the nerves that stand at attention all week long, all the stresses of my life. When I’m out here, alone with my mind and soul, letting the calmness of the night consume me... that’s when I’m the safest.

But it's also the wonder of the darkness, the possibility that anything could happen out here, and no one would ever know. I could cry, scream, laugh, yell, whatever – and no one would care. The beach is my escape.

Logan and I lie in silence for a while, and I find myself feeling more relaxed than I ever have out here, like having her here grounds me a little bit more. I wonder what she's thinking about as she lies next to me, staring up at the dark sky.

Like she's read my mind, she turns her head to look at me. "It's really pretty out here."

I hum to agree, keeping my gaze on the sky.

"Why did you bring me here?" she asks, and I finally meet her eyes.

"Why not?"

She chuckles. "Feels super intimate."

I roll my eyes at her and turn my head back to the sky. "Shut up, Logan."

"There you go again, telling me to shut up." She turns so she's lying on her stomach, putting her elbows on the ground so she can put her head in her hands. "Why did you bring me here, Carson?"

I bend my arms behind my head. "You said you wanted to go somewhere."

"So why here?" she questions.

"I like it out here." She stays silent, and when I meet her gaze, I find curiosity in her golden eyes. I sigh and continue. "I used to come out here a lot with my dad. After he died, I kept coming by myself."

"Why'd you bring *me* here?" she pushes, but her gaze grows softer as she looks at me.

I roll to my side to face her better. "I come out here when I'm feeling overwhelmed, or just need to get away from the bullshit. You seemed like you could use a break from reality."

She seems pleased with my answer, her mouth twitching in a little grin. “You’re a nice guy underneath, aren’t you?”

“No.” I curl an eyebrow. “Now lie down and appreciate the gift I’ve given you.”

She laughs, rolling back onto her back to stare at the sky once more.

*twenty-two*

## LOGAN

It's been a while since we've said anything. Carson and I have just been lying in silence, listening to the crashing of the Atlantic ocean against the shore. He's not wrong; being out here is like letting reality slip away. I've run through a lot of subjects in my head in the last however long we've been out here.

His presence reminds me that I'm not alone, even in the darkness of the night. It's... *nice*.

I have this little flutter in my gut, like I'm going to throw up. *Butterflies*, I assume.

I need to get some blood flow going, remind myself I'm alive or something. Sitting up, I wrap my arms around my knees as I stare out at the ocean. It's black, dark blue in the parts that the moon illuminates.

"What's wrong?" Carson mumbles from where he's lying in the sand behind me.

"Nothing." I speak into the night, keeping my gaze on the water.

His hand slides against my back, creating goosebumps on every millimeter he touches. "What're you thinking?"

I turn to face him, his hand landing in my lap when I spin around on the sand. "I don't know."

He sits up with me, moving closer so he can tuck my hair behind my ear. The gesture is so fucking intimate that the butterflies in my stomach start flapping their wings harder. I swallow, then take a deep breath.

"Everything is fucked up."

He watches the gears turn in my head in silence, letting me speak when I'm ready to.

“I live in Luxington.” I laugh a little under my breath. “And my dad is getting married. And my stepbrother ate me out.”

He chuckles, a husky sound that runs all over my body, but lets me continue.

“I miss my friends, I miss my mom—” My voice cracks, and his hand rubs up my arm to comfort me.

I clear my throat. “I don’t know how I got here.”

“I’m glad you are.”

His words catch me off guard, so I chuckle a little as I meet his gaze. “Except you’ve been trying to get rid of me since I got here.”

“Yeah,” he agrees. “Because you’re a kink in the wires.”

“Why’d you barge into my dressing room?” I question, changing the subject.

He shrugs, snapping his mask back into place. “I was horny.”

I hum between my lips. “But you didn’t get off, you just gave me head.”

There’s a twinkle in his eyes before he gives me a mischievous smile. “Want me to do it again?”

“I want to know why you did it,” I deadpan.

He leans forward, shuffling on his ass so he can get closer to me. Putting his face in my neck, he licks across the skin of my throat before he answers. “Because I wanted to.”

He kisses around my neck, making heat bloom inside my chest. I put my head back, giving him more room to assault me with his mouth. He nibbles on my skin, wrapping his hands around my waist as he pulls me onto his lap.

Moaning in the back of my throat, I thread my hands into his soft hair, pulling on the strands to bring his mouth to mine so I can kiss him. His tongue slides against mine, making my core flutter. Pulling back, I speak against his mouth.



“So what if this time...” I run my hand down his back, around his hip and across his abs. “You let me make you come instead.”

He slips his tongue through the seam of my lips and flicks it against my own, making my stomach clench. My whole body ignites into little vibrating fireworks, and part of me wants to just use him for an orgasm again, but the other part... the part that's self-assured and confident, the part that desires his pleasure... she wants me to show him exactly what I can do.

I pull back, grinning as I slip off his lap back onto the sand. “Take your shirt off.”

He slips the thin fabric of his t-shirt over his head, dropping it onto the sand next to us. Running my gaze across his bare chest and stomach, I can't help but groan. He's hot – there's really no other way to put it. Carson Raines is stacked, built like a fucking marble statue, with creases and crevices of muscle covering his body.

As much as I want to take my time – run my tongue along every single fucking inch of his bare skin – I pop the button on his jeans, then slide the zipper down in eagerness. Because more than I want to taste his skin, I want to hear him groan in pleasure. I want to make him sweat, make him fall over the edge and lose control. I want to see Carson unhinged, taken over by his own pleasure that he has no control.

He lifts his hips, letting me shuffle his jeans down past his ass so I can free his cock and take it in my hand. Wrapping my fingers around him, I squeeze him and brush my thumb over the notch in the end. He lets out a groan, making me look up from his dick back to his face.

His mouth is dropped open a little, and when I slide my hand downwards on his shaft, he presses his teeth into his lip.

Our gazes are magnetic, even when I lower my head to suction around the head of his cock. I keep his gaze, swirling my tongue around the tip as I pump my hand a few times. His nostrils flare, his tongue coming out to wet his lips. I tell myself not to drop the stare first, letting him know exactly

who's in control, and when his eyes finally fall closed from pleasure, I release my hand and slide my mouth down until I gag.

“*Jesus,*” he breathes, threading his fingers into my hair to holding it up and out of my face. I slide back up, then drop my head down again as I hollow my cheeks and suck him deep into my throat.

He flexes his hips, pressing into the back of my throat harder as his fist tightens in my hair for a second before he loosens the hold again. I pull back, letting him slide out of my mouth with a pop.

“Don’t hold back.” I look up at him. “If you want to fuck my mouth, fuck my mouth.”

I flatten my tongue, taking him back down my throat in one swallow.

He groans, squeezing his fist in my hair and using it to move my head the way he wants me. I suction on him, letting him control my mouth with his hand as he bucks upwards with his hips.

“You like the way your big brother fucks your mouth, Logan?” he growls, thrusting deep in my throat and making me gag. I can’t help but moan around him as he continues, his filthy words turning my panties wet.

I start to feel his cock swell, so I hold my breath as he yanks on my hair harder, making my scalp burn as need flows through my veins. He moans loud, bucking up into me and knocking my jaw with his hips, then his come is spraying down my throat. I swallow him down over and over, unwilling to waste even a drop of the release I just pulled out of him.

His hand drops from my hair, letting it fall down and fan around my face as I move my head on my own now. He falls back against the sand as he rides out the rest of his orgasm, and I slip my hand around to grab his balls as it starts to slow – rewarding me with a clench of his hips and loud groan from his mouth.

When he's done spilling into my mouth, I slowly pull from him, letting my tongue trace along his shaft and around the head of his cock so I can collect the rest of his release.

His chest is rising and falling quickly above me when I finally look up at him, so I climb on top of him to kiss up his stomach. I reward myself for my hard work with finally being able to trace those abs with my tongue, and his hands wrap around my back to squeeze my flesh.

"Logan," he groans.

I suck the skin of his ribs into my mouth, biting down on him a little before I move the rest of the way up his body to align my chest with his.

His hands slide to my ass, and he squeezes the globes hard enough that I squeal.

He kisses my lips once, pulling back with a heavy breath. "I've never come that fast before."

I smirk, nipping at his bottom lip. "I've never gotten so wet from a blowjob before."

His eyebrow perks. "Oh?"

I nod, humming between my lips.

One of his hands slides around my ass, then dips into the front of my shorts. When he slips his fingers into the front of my panties, downward to my entrance, he groans deep in his throat at what he finds.

I'm soaked through, so turned on that I might combust with a few swipes of his fingers.

He slides two fingers into me quickly, his other hand coming up to thread through my hair once more. He pushes my head down into his neck, then starts fucking me with his hand. My entire body lights up, going tense and tightening as he jackhammers the digits inside me.

"*Oh, fuck,*" I cry into his neck, pressing my teeth to his skin as he plunges inside of my pussy, his mouth finding my ear.

“Don’t make me wait for it, Logan.” He presses his thumb to my clit as his fingers continue to slam in and out of me. “Let me feel you come on my fingers again.”

My hips grind the best they can as moans fall from my mouth into the flesh of his neck.

“*Carson,*” I cry, falling over the edge. My pussy tightens on his fingers, his thumb pressing heavy circles against the bud of nerves between my legs, making my orgasm steal my voice and breath as my body shakes.

*twenty-three*

## CARSON

The clock on the dashboard of my Jeep reads 3:42am when we finally head home. I don't put on any music this time, just in case Logan wants to go to sleep or something on the ride, but she doesn't lean her head down or anything. She just sits there, watching the road in front of us, like the streetlights are the most captivating thing she's ever seen.

After ten minutes of silence, she finally breaks it. "What happens now?"

I turn my head for a second to find her staring at me. "What do you mean?"

With my attention back on the road, she throws her legs up on the dash and sighs a little. "I mean, are you going to go back to being a dick to me, or what?"

I grip the steering wheel, considering her question as I make a left turn. Words escape me, because I don't have the answer she's looking for. I don't know if I can say the things she wants to hear.

I take a breath. "I don't know."

"Okay." She pulls her phone from her lap and hits the Bluetooth button on my stereo. "I think we should just go back to ignoring each other."

My eyebrows pull down, not liking that response, even though mine was no better. "Oh?"

"Yup." She pops the *P*, pressing a button on her phone to turn on some music. "I mean, we don't really like each other anyways, right?"

I stop at a red light, and finally get the opportunity to look at her to see if her body language matches up with her words. I'm disappointed when she's sat casually in the seat, scrolling through her phone. She doesn't seem to be bullshitting me. If she is, then she's really good at it.

The light turns green, so I face the road again as I pull through the intersection, finally answering her. “Right.”

“I’m glad you agree.” She leans forward, and I catch her grinning as she turns the knob on the stereo to turn the music up, officially ending our conversation.

Fucking message received.

Ten minutes later, I pull into my parking spot in our driveway and turn off the ignition. We both sit in the dark, silent car for a few heartbeats before she finally speaks.

“Thanks for tonight.” She looks at me, a smile lighting up her whole face. “You were right, I needed it.”

I give her a closed-lipped smile. “I’m always right.”

She rolls her eyes, huffing a laugh. “Look, our parents are getting married soon. Not to mention, you have a girlfriend, and things are really complicated right now in my life. So let’s just try to be civil.”

I give her a confused look. “Was me taking you to my secret beach spot and making you come tonight not me being civil?”

“Now that you mention it, we probably shouldn’t hook up again. Complicated, and all that, you know?”

I pull the keys from the ignition. “You’re being weird, go inside.”

“Carson.” She puts a hand on my arm before I can push my door open and get out. “I’m being serious, no more hooking up.”

“Don’t hook up with my friends, then.” I flash her a smile.

“Who am I supposed to hook up with?” she asks.

“No one.” I speak before thinking, showing my entire hand of cards.

She gives me that shit-eating smile. “There’s the caveman again.”

I groan, waving a hand toward the house. “Let’s go inside, pretend like none of this ever happened, and stay out of each other’s way.”

A look flashes across her face, but before I can pinpoint what she’s feeling, she’s masking herself again. “Okay.”

She pushes her door open and drops out of the car onto the driveway, so I mimic her and follow her into the house.

---

Logan is gone the next morning when I wake up, and when I inquire about her whereabouts, my mom she says she’s staying in Franklin for the weekend. The first thing that crosses my mind is the messages I read on her phone – *Austin*.

Gripping my hands into fists, I stalk back to my room and slam the door.

I pull up Instagram on my phone as soon as I’ve dropped down on my bed, going straight to Logan’s profile to creep. She hasn’t posted anything, and neither have any of her friends. I catch the time on the top corner of my phone, realizing it’s probably too early for this.

I can either spend the day torturing myself with this, or I can find something to do. I decide on the latter, turning on the TV and settling for a movie marathon to distract myself. That’s what I need. Distraction from my obsession with my stepsister and her tight little pussy.



*twenty-four*

## LOGAN

“I’ve missed you.” Giuliana leans her head on my shoulder, keeping her attention on the TV.

“I missed you too, G.” I lay my head on top of hers.

I needed to get out of there, so I jumped at the first opportunity to head to Franklin this morning when my dad offered to drive me to see my friends. Being in that house, with Carson on the other side of the wall, was making my skin itchy. He’s too close, his looming presence inside my home making last night very *real*. When I need it to be forgotten, need to stop thinking about the softer sides of him I saw, need to stop thinking about how smooth and pillowy his lips are against mine. I need to stop thinking about his long, talented fingers inside of me.

After tossing and turning all night, I crawled out of bed early this morning with bags under my eyes and ran for my life. Ran back to Franklin in some last-ditch attempt at getting him off my mind.

So we’ve been here, on Giuliana’s couch, watching TV all day.

“Are you going to tell me what’s going on?” Giuliana questions, turning her head up to look at me.

I sigh. “No.”

She nods, turning back to look at the TV, knowing not to push.

“Well...” I start, making her head perk up to look at me again. “It’s Carson.”

Her eyebrow curls. “The stepbrother?”

I don’t want to say the words that are sitting on the tip of my tongue. I don’t want to speak them into existence, because once I do, they’re alive and they’re breathing. They’re real.

Deep in my head, I can tell myself that I'm feeling something for Carson fucking Raines, and it's just me, it's just thoughts. But once I say it, there's no taking it back. There's no erasing it.

I sigh again, leaning my head back against the couch and groaning. "Luxington sucks."

"You sound like such a little bitch right now." She clicks her tongue, humor in her smile. "Where's my bad ass best friend that makes the best of every situation? Where's the girl that is always up for a challenge?"

I scrunch my face up. "Shut up."

She slaps my arm. "I mean it!"

I groan. "I know. I need to pull it together."

"Yes, you do." She stands up and holds a hand out to me. "Get up, we're going out."

I grin at her, slipping my hand into hers so she can pull me up off the couch.

---

It isn't until my second can of beer that I start feeling a little looser, a little more relaxed and calm. Giuliana and I are swaying to the loud music in Austin's living room, clouds filling the small space and making my head lighter. I needed this, I needed the familiarity of Franklin, my friends with their knockoff shirts instead of the designer ones I see in the halls of Luxington High. I needed the comfortability of my friends, the kids I grew up with.

I feel safe here, like this is exactly where I belong.

Giuliana holds her phone up to take a selfie, so I lean my head on her shoulder and puff my lips. When she turns it around to look at it, she makes a satisfied sound through her lips. "We're hot."

I tip my beer. "That we are."

I suck down the rest of the can, then crush it in my fist. I stand on my boots, but before I can tell Giuliana I'm going to get a refill, Austin steps into me and grips me by the hips. "Dance with me."

I throw the can down on the floor, batting my eyelashes. "Okay."

He drags me out to the middle of the room, and when the beat of the song picks up, he spins me around and pulls my ass into his front. I grind my hips, creating friction between us as he shimmies against me from behind. My blood rushes, so I drop my head back against his shoulder and let the music take me away.

I allow all my worries fall to the side, letting them fade into the background as the music flows through me. Austin's hands stay on my waist, gripping at my flesh through my shirt as we dance. The familiarity of his touch, his smell, his everything makes me feel secure and safe, like the last few months of my life never happened.

My mom never died, I never moved to Luxington, I never met Carson.

Everything is back the way it was before – I'm in Franklin with my friends, getting tipsy and hooking up with my friend with benefits.

A few songs pass as we dance and kiss and laugh, and when my throat is dry, we make our way to the kitchen to get something to drink.

I jump onto the counter, letting my legs hang down the side of the cabinet as Austin pulls two cans of beer from the fridge, handing me one and leaning against the counter. "Missed you, Lo."

I pop the tab on my can, taking a big drink and sliding my hand through the braids on top of his head. "Missed you."

My phone buzzes in my pocket, so I pull my hand from Austin and slip it out. It's a number that isn't saved, so I ignore the call and put my phone on the counter.

“We smashin’ tonight?” Austin asks, but my phone starts buzzing with another call, so my attention pulls back to it. It’s the same number from before, though, so I hit ignore again and look back at Austin.

“Maybe.” I grin, taking another mouthful of beer.

He turns, sliding between my legs in front of me. “Maybe?”

He leans forward, putting his face in my neck as his hands slide up the sides of my thighs. “C’mon, Lo.”

I chuckle a little, but it’s interrupted by my phone buzzing with another phone call.

“Oh my God!” I groan in frustration, grabbing my phone from the counter to see the same unsaved number calling me. I answer it on the second ring, officially annoyed. “What?!”

“Are you thinking about me while he touches you?”

My gut falls to my ass, my throat clamming up when I open my mouth to try to answer him. Nothing comes out, and then Carson chuckles through the receiver of the phone. “Answer me, *Lo*.”

I grit my teeth, pushing Austin away from me and sliding off the kitchen counter back onto my feet. Austin gives me a look, but I hold a hand up to tell him to hold on and make my way back through the living room to try to find somewhere quiet.

“Logan,” Carson growls through the phone.

Making my way into a bedroom at the end of the hallway off the edge of the living room, I’m pleasantly surprised that it’s empty and dark when I push inside.

“Are you watching me?!” I ask breathlessly as I press my back against the closed door.

“Answer my question,” he demands, his words clipped like he’s biting down on the inside of his cheek in frustration.

I huff a laugh. “No.”

“No, you won’t answer my question; or no, you aren’t thinking of me?” he asks, and I picture the cocky grin that’s most likely gracing his face as he does.

“No, I’m not thinking of you,” I answer.

I hear him let out a breath. “You’re lying.”

I search my mind for a retort, but I’m so completely caught off guard by the entire situation I find myself in, that I can’t find anything smart to say. There’s a part of me that wants to tell him how arrogant and frustrating he is, how he drives me absolutely crazy thinking that he’s the center of the universe, but the other part of me wants to tell him how much I really was thinking about him all night, that maybe lately it feels like he *is* right in the center of my universe, using his own magnetic pull to make the earth continue to turn for me.

“Did you kiss him?” he asks, malice lacing his tone.

I don’t answer, my head still floating around the room as my chest heaves and my palms sweat.

“Did you fuck him?” He continues. “Let him inside that tight pussy of yours?”

I press my lips together, dropping my eyelids closed as my back sags against the door at my back.

“Did you think about me while he slipped inside you? Did you think about my tongue on your clit in the dressing room?” Carson breathes, making my stomach fill with bubbles like I’ve downed an entire bottle of soda. “Did you imagine it was my dick in that sweet mouth?”

My mouth falls open, my breath coming out in shallow pants. “Carson.”

“Tell me, Logan. Did you come as hard with him as you do with me?” His voice is tight, like he’s holding himself on a leash as he presses the phone close to his face.

“Did you think about how good it will feel when I finally fuck you? When I finally bury myself so deep inside of you that you’ll feel it for a week?”

My teeth bite down on my bottom lip as my clit pulses, his words going straight to my core and heating me from the inside out. I hold back the groan that's sitting at the back of my throat, not willing to show him how he's affecting me.

"Talk to me," he growls once more. "Tell me."

I swallow through the lump in my throat. "I don't know what you're talking about."

He chuckles. "Don't play coy with me now, Logan."

"How do you know what I'm doing?" I breathe.

I hear him shift, like he's getting himself comfortable. "You can't hide from me."

"Wanna bet?" I respond, humor in my voice, then I hang up. Shutting my phone off, I can't help the grin stretching across my face. Even though I'm frustrated and annoyed by his caveman bullshit, I know that it gives me all the goddamn power.

Boys are easy, and if Carson Raines thinks he's even the least bit smarter than me, or better at playing the game than me, he's dumber than I initially thought.

*twenty-five*



## CARSON

When I was a kid, my dad used to take me out to the beach in the middle of the night. We would sit down on the sand and stare out at the ocean or up at the sky in complete silence. We did this for months before I finally asked why. *Why do you come out here, Dad? Why do you bring me?*

He looked at me, stubble lining his youthful face and said, *“I want you to know peace, Carson.”*

I didn't know at the time, but my father had never known peace, even out on the beach with me. Even as his face went calm and he let the ocean breathe for him, he wasn't filled with peace. He was struggling, plagued with everything in his life that he hid from me and my mother.

It's funny, though, because I did find peace in the serenity that my dad was showing me – even if he didn't – I found peace within the beach, the ocean, the sand, the stars.

Even as a child, someone who hadn't even started really living yet, the peace I found out on the beach grounded me in ways that have helped me every single day of my life. Even after my father killed himself, even after the scandals that followed his death, even when I watched my mother spiral down a hole of depression.

I became the man of the house, and I was able to do that because of the tranquility my father introduced me to out on the private strip of beach I grew to love.

I don't want to mislead anyone. Yes, I became the man of the house, but I was still very privileged. We had chefs and housekeepers to take care of things, I had platinum cards with my own name on them by the time I was twelve, and everything was served to me on a very shiny and silver platter. My mom had family money, and we had my dad's money to cushion us as well.

I was lucky. A lot of people aren't put into similar situations when they lose a parent. Some kids really do have to step up, take care of things, learn to cook, and all that. And I'm still lucky. I got through my dad's suicide with little-to-no severe emotional scarring. Sure, it was sad. It was confusing and life altering, but I'm okay. I'm not curled in a ball wondering why he did it.

I know why he did it.

There was never any question from me why he did it. There was never any question from *anyone*.

My dad was really special, but he was dark and clouded.

But he gave me the beach. He gave me my peace, and that's a part of him I'll forever cherish.

Even as rage burns through my veins while I let the sand fall through my fingers, I still cherish the calmness that's flowing over me under the full moon and shining stars. Even as my mind is filled with the things Logan is probably doing right now.

I clench my fist, sand spraying out from the edges as wrath and vengeance fill me again. I want to get in my truck and drive into Franklin, throw her over my shoulder and show her exactly who's in fucking charge. Show her that she can't just run away from me and spread her legs for someone else.

She's fucking mine.

More now than ever, but part of me recognizes that she's been mine since the second I laid eyes on her in the entryway of our house. Even when she was letting my best friend fuck her on a sink, even when she was beating Cassidy to a bloody pulp.

"Thought I might find you out here." Hayden's voice pulls me from my mind. I turn my head to look over my shoulder, finding him and Levi walking barefoot on the sand toward me.

I release my fist, shaking the sand out and clearing my throat. "What are you guys doing here?"

Hayden drops down on the sand next to me, Levi on his other side.

“We were worried,” Hayden answers, bending his legs.

“Haven’t seen you anywhere but school all week,” Levi adds, turning his head to look at me. “What’s going on?”

I chuckle, leaning back on my palms. “Nothing. Just busy.”

“Bullshit,” Hayden spits. “Don’t forget that we know you, bitch.”

I sigh, annoyed at my best friends for imposing on my peace – only a little bit touched that they cared enough to hunt me down. “Shouldn’t you two be off partying somewhere, finding girls to play games with?”

Levi laughs. “Is that what we do on weekends?”

Hayden snorts. “Yeah, except usually Carson is doing it with us.”

I roll my eyes at the sky, breathing through my nose as I focus on the sound of the ocean hitting the shore. Silence falls for a minute, but Hayden speaks once more.

“What’s happening inside your head? Is this about Logan?”

I look at him from the corner of my eye. “Logan?”

He presses his lips together in a shit-eating smile, and Levi laughs again as he shifts on the sand to give us his attention. “You’re crushin’ on her.”

“Am I a twelve-year-old girl?” I deadpan.

They both laugh, and it’s Hayden that then turns to look at me. “Carson, I’ve known you since we were in kindergarten, and Levi has that weird sixth sense where he can read people. You like Logan, and you can’t deny it.”

I groan as I fall onto my back and close my eyes. “I may have hooked up with her.”

They both fall silent, waiting for me to continue.

“Twice.”

Hayden huffs a laugh. “So why are you out here contemplating life like a baby boy, instead of at home pounding into your sister?”

“*Jesus, Monroe,*” I sigh.

Levi laughs loud, a full belly laugh. “Talk, C.”

I sit up, looking at my two best friends. They are the complete opposite of each other – where Hayden is dark under the surface, Levi is complete sunshine. Hayden has everything handed to him; his dad is one of the wealthiest men in the country, and he still walks around like a bloodless corpse, so haunted by whatever’s inside of his head that it shows in the bags under his eyes. Levi, however, has never had two pennies to rub together, and he’s a ball of fun – always laughing and cracking jokes. He’s light where Hayden is dark, positive when Hayden is negative. They balance each other out, acting like the angel and devil on my shoulders.

“She isn’t into me.” I sigh. “Ran for her life away from me, told me we need to go back to ignoring each other. She’s with some dude she used to hook up with in the hood tonight.”

“Am I still allowed to fuck her?” Levi asks, totally off topic.

Hayden snorts when my head snaps to Levi, death in my eyes.

Levi holds his hands up in defense. “I’m kidding, I’m kidding.”

I blow out a breath, then fall back in the sand again to stare at the stars. “I just need to think.”

My friends lie down in the sand next to me, letting silence fall over us again. They let me think, giving me the peace I so desperately need right now. They just offer their presence, the calmness that them being in my atmosphere brings.

After an hour, I still haven’t figured out how to handle this situation with grace and dignity, so we stand up together and walk to where we’re parked. Without a word, I open the driver’s side door to my Jeep and get in, but before I start the

engine, Hayden makes his way to me and stands in the doorway.

“If you like her, fight for her, Carson. Fuck the rest.”

I give him a little nod, and he walks to his car without another word.

---

Sunday rolls around, and Logan still hasn't come home. This morning I broke a glass in my fist as I poured orange juice into it, so it's safe to say this is really fucking getting to me.

As I turn on my TV and settle into bed around 10pm, she still isn't home, and I can feel every hair on my body standing straight up. I want to strangle her, bend her over, and make her ass and thighs red until she's screaming at the top of her lungs. I check my phone again, and when there's still no notifications, I dial her number for the hundredth time today.

After one ring, I hear vibrating through the wall.

I spring out of bed like a jack-in-the-box, and I'm through the door to the bathroom, then through her bedroom door before I can take another breath.

“Where the *fuck* have you been?!” I yell, slamming the door behind me as she squeals in surprise.

Once her face has relaxed again, and I'm creeping toward her with malice lining my features, her expression goes sour. “Excuse me?!”

I smirk at her, taking another step. “You think you can just disappear? Turn your phone off and ignore me?”

“I didn't realize I needed your permission to hang out with my friends, *Dad*.” She rolls her eyes, rounding her bed and throwing the blankets open so she can slip in.

“Logan,” I growl, but she speaks again before I can continue.

“What’s your fucking deal, dude?” She pulls the covers over her lap and tilts her head as she looks at me. “I don’t fucking answer to you! *And*, we decided to go back to ignoring each other, so why are your panties in a knot?”

My nostrils flare as I blow a breath out, and I stop moving toward her to cross my arms over my chest. Trying to figure out how to explain my insane behavior is more difficult than I thought it would be. Mainly because she’s being such a brat about it. Don’t chicks like crazy possessive dudes?

She blinks hard, shaking her head in question when I don’t answer her.

“I don’t know!” I throw my hands up, leaning my head back to look at the ceiling. “I want to fucking strangle you!”

She laughs. “For *what*?!”

I sigh and drop my head back down to meet her gaze. I find humor in her eyes, and it makes me want to scream. She’s always so fucking cool and collected, and it drives me absolutely wild. I would give my left nut to see her as unhinged as I feel right now.

“Carson.” She sighs. “Quit being a bitch.”

I grit my teeth. “Shut up.”

She laughs again, her eyes sparkling. “I’m not your girlfriend. I’m not even your *friend*. Why are you so bent out of shape right now?”

My eyebrows pull down, and I grin. “We aren’t friends?”

“No.” She rolls her eyes. “We aren’t. You hate me, and I hate you. That’s how this works.”

I point a finger at her. “Except when we’re giving each other head.”

“We aren’t doing that anymore, remember?”

I faux pout, making her chuckle. I take the remaining two steps to sit down on the edge of her bed, sighing as I drop down. “I like you.”

Her head reels back. “What?!”

I reach a hand out, cupping her jaw. “You make me feel fucking insane. You make me want to kill people.”

“Wow, how cute,” she deadpans, and I roll my eyes in return.

“Tell me you don’t feel something for me,” I whisper.

She blinks. “I don’t.”

I stare into those golden eyes, studying the way they look when she’s lying. Because she is – *lying*. She feels it too. I can tell by the way she sucks in air when I’m around, how she twists her hair around her finger when she doesn’t think I know she’s admiring me from a distance. Logan Briar feels something for me, just like I feel something for her.

“You’re lying.” I rub my thumb along her cheek.

She leans forward, putting her face a few inches from mine. “Just because I sucked your dick, doesn’t mean I have feelings for you.”

I smirk, then stand up. “We’ll just see about that.”

*twenty-six*



## LOGAN

“*Y*ou’re lying.”

What a confident dickhead.

After an hour, I’m still humored by the amount of sheer certainty in Carson’s voice when he spoke to me. He’s always confident, but the way he barged in here and declared his feelings for me, then told me I felt the same? It was a new level of king behavior. He didn’t even *accuse* me of lying, just straight up told me I was lying and wouldn’t accept any other answer.

I rummage through my backpack, tossing my dirty clothes from the weekend into my hamper, then pull out the little box at the bottom. I was smart enough to snag some prerolls from a dealer before I left Franklin, and tonight is just one of those nights where I’ll need a little help from Mary J to get to sleep.

I throw a hoodie on over my bra, which hangs low enough that it completely covers the pajama shorts I have on, then I creep out of my room, trying to be as quiet as a mouse so I don’t alert Carson or our parents.

The house is dark as I make my way to the doors at the end of the living room that lead out to the pool, and I don’t bother turning on any lights before I exit. Finding the farthest possible seat on the deck, I slip my joint and lighter from my pocket and prop it between my lips.

Lighting the end, I puff until there’s a cherry of an ember, then sit back against the back of the recliner and throw my legs up to smoke in peace.

After a few hits, I start to feel the smoke going to my head, so I close my eyes and focus on the feeling. I’ve always loved getting stoned. I wouldn’t call myself a stoner, but I’ve never felt more dignified peace than I do when I’m high. Drinking is chaotic, it goes straight to my heart and makes me a wild

animal – but weed? It goes to my head, makes me light and mellow in ways that nothing else can.

Which is why I don't smoke that often. I like being insane. I like causing chaos and being the wildcard I've turned into as I've gotten older. It gives me my edge, gives me the upper hand. When I'm high, I'm vulnerable. I'm chilled out enough that nothing really matters. That's why tonight smoking was a necessity. Carson turns me into an entirely new subgenre of crazy, making my blood boil and my stomach turn to bubbles all at once.

For tonight, I just want to relax. I want to get him out of my head. I want to put the last few weeks on the back burner and have a slice of serenity before life becomes even more chaotic – because it's about to. The wedding is right around the corner, and it isn't going to be easy.

I can play my part, slap a smile on my face, and wear a pretty dress. I can be the composed, elegant young lady that Sara and my father need me to be for the occasion, because no matter what... they deserve happiness. I'm realistic enough that I know there's nothing I can do to put a stop to this, because it's too fucking late. It's marinated, and it's baked enough that there is no going back now. We're here – we're in Luxington, my father has tied all the loose ends, and there will be no pulling at them again.

I am no fool; this is unchangeable. No matter the amount of hissy fits I could throw would put a dent in this life I have now. My mother is dead, my house has been sold, my entire life has restarted in a way that I cannot fight.

All I need to do is just get through it. Find the light at the end of the tunnel or whatever and move forward when I can.

Roll with the punches, and all that.

I finish my joint without shedding the tears I feel building in the back of my eyelids, stubbing it out on the brick flooring underneath my chair, then tossing the roach into the bushes behind me.

Relaxing back in the recliner again, I stare up at the dark sky and listen to the wind blowing as I breathe.

The light turns on, making me squint my eyes as the entirety of the back patio is illuminated. I'm far enough away that when Carson steps out of the backdoor, he doesn't see me right away. He throws a towel down on one of the chairs, then pulls his shirt over his head before diving into the dark pool.

I watch him, tucking my legs against my body and wrapping my arms around them, as he does laps. Back and forth, back and forth, he swims leisurely, his powerful arms making him travel underneath the water.

I count as he goes, and when I reach thirty, he stops at the edge of the pool and catches his breath with his back to me. All the muscles in his wide shoulders flex as he holds onto the side of the pool and breathes, and I must be high as hell because I can't tear my eyes away. He's sculpted and chiseled in all the right ways, his back a work of art.

Once his breathing slows back to a normal rate, he lets go of the wall and falls under the water again.

He didn't turn the pool light on, so I can't see him when he floats down to the bottom, but I shuffle on my seat to try to get a glimpse of him. When I finally see his body under the water, it's too late for me to hide again. He pops up at the edge of the pool closest to me, opening his eyes as he grins up at me.

"Are you watching me?" Water drops from his hair, so he runs a hand over his face to brush it away.

I scoot backwards on my chair a little, trying to put some more distance between us. "Yes."

He shakes his hair out. "What are you doing out here?"

I point a finger at him. "What are *you* doing out here?"

His eyebrows pull down. "Swimming?"

I laugh then, feeling bubbles fizzing through my veins. "Oh."

He laughs too. "Sooo... Why are you out here?"

“Uh...” I search my mind for an excuse, but it feels like my brain has turned to a liquid instead of a solid, so I decide on the truth. “I was smoking.”

He lets go of the wall, lying back so he’s floating on the surface of the water. “That shit will kill you.”

I shrug. “Life will kill you. Why not have fun while you’re living?”

He looks at me out of the corner of his eye, then his lips pull down like he’s impressed with my words. “Wanna swim with me?”

I sit back against the back of the chair. “No, thanks.”

Looking back up at the sky as he floats, I see his mouth twist into a grin before he speaks again. “Wanna have sex?”

I laugh, crossing my legs. “Do you ever think about anything besides sex?”

He moves then, making the water ripple as he does, grabbing onto the side of the pool again so he can look at me. “Yes, lots of stuff.”

I lean my head back, closing my eyes. “Like what?”

I hear him climb out of the water, but I don’t open my eyes to look at him, I just listen as he pads across the deck to grab his towel, then he sits down in the chair next to me.

“I think about football,” he says once he’s gotten comfortable.

I turn my head to look at him, resting my face against the chair. “Wow, that’s *inspiring*.”

He snorts at my sarcasm. “What do you think about?”

I turn back to the sky, closing my eyes as I blow out a long breath. “I think about a lot of things. My friends, school, the future. Normal stuff.”

He mimics me, “*Wow, inspiring.*”

I huff a laugh, and we fall into silence. The wind blows, making goosebumps pop up on my bare legs, but it feels

refreshing. The night is calm, and I come to the realization that if I was in Franklin right now, it wouldn't be this quiet and serene outside. There would be chaos somewhere, there always is, and I probably wouldn't feel so safe sitting outside in the middle of the night.

"What're you thinking?" Carson's voice breaks through my mental barrier, making me turn to look at him.

"I'm thinking that I should go to bed."

"Stay out here and talk to me for a while," he says with his eyes on the sky, and it sounds a lot like a demand rather than a question.

"What do you want to talk about?" I decide to humor him.

"What's your favorite color?" he asks, dropping his head to his shoulder to look at me.

I laugh. "My favorite color?"

He rolls his eyes a little. "I'm trying to get to know you."

"Why?" I question him. "Why do you want to get to know me?"

He groans under his breath a little, looking up at the sky again. "Why must you always be so fucking infuriating?"

That makes me laugh as well, and once the laughter has subsided, I speak again. "Blue."

He looks at me. "Blue?"

I slip an arm under my head, my gaze moving back to the stars. "My favorite color is blue."

"Mine too," he says. "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

I chuckle. "When I *grow up*?"

"There you go, being infuriating again," he growls. "Just answer a question without giving me attitude for once."

I grin to myself, rubbing circles on my leg with my finger to keep my hands busy. "You mean like, as far as a career?"

"Sure, whatever."

I hum between my lips. “When I grow up, I’d like to be a veterinarian.”

“Yeah?” he asks. “Why?”

“For a while I wanted to be a doctor.” I sigh. “But then I realized that animals are better than people – less calculating and malicious, so I’d rather save their lives instead.”

He laughs. “That’s dark, but kind of cute.”

“What do you want to be?” I turn my head, finding him staring at me through the darkness. “Football player?”

He breathes for a moment, his eyes glazing over as he fights with whatever’s happening inside of his head. “I want to be a lawyer, like my mom, but I’ll probably end up in the NFL instead.”

My eyebrows pull down as I drag my gaze over his face, studying the way his emotions take over – sadness, struggle, uncertainty. “If you don’t want to play football, you don’t have to.”

He shrugs, changing the subject. “Did you have fun in Franklin this weekend?”

“Yes,” I answer him as I slip my eyelids shut. “I did.”

“What did you do?”

I open my eyes again, narrowing them. “Are you trying to get to know me, or are you being a caveman that needs to know my every move because I pissed you off by disappearing this weekend?”

He grins. “Fine. How are you liking Luxington so far?”

I snort. “It’s something else.”

He searches my face before he speaks again, like he’s trying to read between the lines of my words. His face softens a little before his next words fall from his lips. “How are you dealing with being a new member of the Dead Parents Club?”

I turn away again, feeling my mental walls start to lift higher. “I’m fine.”

He's silent for a minute, leaving me to wonder what's going on inside his head.

"When my dad died, it was really hard," he starts, and when I turn to look at him, he's staring down at his hands in his lap. "I was young, so I'm sure it was easier than losing a parent when you're a teenager, but it was still hard."

"How did he die?" I whisper, focusing on his face.

"He killed himself."

My hand finds my lips. "I'm so sorry, Carson."

He waves a hand, dismissing my apology. "It was a long time ago. I've processed, and I've healed."

I sit back in my chair again. "Some days I feel like I'll never heal from losing my mom, like I'll never be able to accept that I'll never get to hug her again."

"Talking about them helps, even if it's just stupid stuff."

"Tell me about your dad," I say, curious to hear the types of things he will say.

"He was tall, and he was strong for a really long time. He grew up on the west coast, I think that's why he always loved the beach so much – it reminded him of home. He signed with the NFL his junior year of college, moved out here to North Carolina to play, met my mom, had me, but it was all too much for him."

"That's why you'll choose football," I whisper.

He nods. "Yeah, he wanted me to follow in his footsteps."

The fog in my head has started to clear. I still feel high, but I'm feeling more down to earth again at the intensity of our conversation. "*He* wanted you to?"

Carson hums between his lips for a moment. "Yeah. I've had a football in my hands since I was a baby. He trained me to follow in his legacy since I could walk."

My eyebrows furrow. "But if that isn't what you want, you don't have to, Carson."

He sighs. “We’re supposed to be talking about you. I wanted to get to know you.”

I sit forward, pulling my legs to my chest and resting my head on my knees to look at him. “If you don’t want to play football, don’t play football.”

He looks at me, dragging his gaze over my face a few times, then he stands up and holds a hand out to me. “Come swim with me.”

I search his ocean eyes, feeling butterflies start to flap their wings inside my stomach, and slip my hand into his. Once I’m standing next to him, he grips the bottom of my hoodie and pulls it over my head, throwing it down on the chair I just vacated, then grabs onto my hand again.

He pulls me to the edge of the pool, then slides his hands around my waist and jumps into the warm water, making me squeal before we plunge under the surface.

Once we’ve resurfaced, I give him a dirty look making him laugh. He wades the two feet to reach me, then spins around and pulls me onto his back. I grip him like a child with my arms around his neck and legs around his waist as he starts swimming. He doesn’t go under, holding his head and mine above the water as he goes, and once we’ve reached the darker side of the pool, he presses me against the wall and lets me slip off of him.

Turning around, he floats in front of me as I hold on to the side of the pool. “What do you like to do for fun, Logan?”

He stares at me in the darkness as I think over his question.

“I don’t really know anymore,” I whisper.

He moves towards me. “What brings you joy? Makes your blood pump so fast that you can’t help but smile?”

I swallow the lump in my throat, breathing out the words I’m suddenly confident enough to say. “There’s only been one thing that makes me feel like that lately.”

He smiles, leaning forward to capture my mouth with his in a kiss so soft that I feel like my stomach might bottom out,



fall straight from my torso out of my ass.

He pulls away after a heartbeat. “I like you.”

“You can’t, you’re not allowed to,” I breathe.

His eyebrows pull down. “Who says?”

I huff a laugh, leaning my head against the edge of the pool. “Everyone? My dad, your mom, your *girlfriend*, fucking society.”

“Fuck all of that. I don’t care about any of that, Logan.” His hand slides around my waist. “Fuck your dad, fuck my mom, fuck society, and Cassidy isn’t shit – we’re not even really dating.”

I look at him, my eyes narrowing. “Wait, what do you mean?”

“Quarterback and head cheerleader – think about it, Logan. This isn’t a Disney movie.” He chuckles. “It’s for show. I mean, at first it was real – but now? Now it’s for her, so she can have the social status she wants.”

“I’m not following.”

He sighs. “She’s my friend, and I grew to care for her. She asked me to stay, so I stayed. But we have an arrangement; it’s only for her pathetic and materialistic ideas about clout.”

“So you don’t have sex with her?” I ask, my lips twisting.

“I mean, sometimes I do.” He laughs, but he’s quick to drop his smile. “It’s fucked up.”

I sigh, dropping my head back against the pool again in frustration.

“Listen.” He pulls my chin with his hand, making me look at him again. “You want me to break up with her for real? I will.”

“No,” I blurt, then take a breath. “I mean, I don’t care. Do whatever you want. It’s none of my business.”

“Did you have sex with Austin this weekend?” he asks, his face turning dark.

My mouth opens, but then I close it again to hum between my lips and think over my answer. “How do you even know who Austin is? How did you know what I was doing this weekend?”

He smirks. “Your friend – what’s her name? – Giuliana? She posts everything on social media.”

He glides his hand around my jaw, moving his face closer to mine again as he spits his next words. “She posted a video on her Instagram Story, of you and that Austin fuck dancing.”

I laugh. “And that’s why you called me.”

He grins. “I almost drove over there to drag you out by your hair.”

Laughing again, I press forward, putting my lips on his. “I am not yours.”

He kisses me with that, slipping his tongue into my mouth so I can taste him, then he pulls away to put some distance between us, making me feel breathless and empty.

“Did you fuck him?”

“It’s none of your business, Carson,” I answer, pulling back farther. “It doesn’t matter one way or another. None of this fucking matters! You having a fake girlfriend or having weird feelings for me or us hooking up, none of it matters... because soon, we will be siblings, and you make me feel so frustrated that I could punch you!”

He laughs. “Don’t do that. Don’t sit there and yell at me, telling me we’re siblings because we’re not. Your dad just happened to get with my mom. It means nothing.”

I groan loudly in frustration, swimming around him and heading for the steps. “I’m going to bed.”

He swims after me, and since he’s a foot taller than me and works out like a fitness model, he catches me and pulls me into him. “Logan, stop.”

I turn to face him, forced to put my legs around his waist so I don’t drown. “Let’s just get through the next few weeks,

Carson. Please. This is going to be hard enough without your bullshit on top of it.”

“Okay,” he whispers, kissing me on the cheek and then letting me go so I can swim away. I don’t glance back, I just make my way across the pool and climb out, stealing his towel and wrapping it around my body before I grab my hoodie and go inside.

*twenty-seven*

## LOGAN

Days start to blur, the same mundane activities filling the time and keeping me moving. Carson is busy with football, with practice almost every day and then games on Fridays, leaving me to listen to him through the wall that separates our bedrooms when he finally comes home. I'm not sure if he's avoiding me, only spending the short ride to school with me wordlessly and then disappearing.

I've been taking Ubers home every day, charging a credit card my dad gave me for transportation purposes. I assume the bill is covered by Sara, but I'm too numb to protest. I just get through my school day, then ride home with my headphones in place before I shut myself away in my bedroom.

I've spent more time with Sara in the house than anyone, sometimes watching movies on the opposite end of the couch to her in silence, then crawling back to my room to crash.

My dad is working toward becoming some higher position at the office, staying late to do God knows what. But I don't really mind, to be honest. I'm holding too much resentment inside to spend time with him, putting the blame of my current situation on his shoulders. I'd rather be alone lately. I haven't even really been talking to my friends back in Franklin – they all have their own lives but reach out sometimes only to be left on *read*.

By the time Halloween rolls around, I'm going absolutely insane, feeling like the four walls of my bedroom may cave in at any moment.

However, I still haven't even made a single acquaintance in Luxington, giving me little to no options to celebrate my favorite holiday. I could always hit Guiliana up, but then I'll have to answer questions regarding my recent hermit crab behavior, and likely feel like shit for shutting her out.

A grin pulls at my lips as I get out of bed. “You know what? Fuck it.” I speak aloud to myself, feeling a buzzing through my veins as I head to my closet. Pulling the giant box of Halloween stuff from the top shelf, I lay it on the floor and lift off the lid to search for what I need.

My smile grows when I finally find the little tubs of fake blood I used last year for Halloween, and standing up, I make my way to the bathroom and spread them out on the counter.

I take a quick shower, scrubbing the day’s makeup from my face before I go back to my closet to find something I can wear as a Halloween costume.

Slipping some fishnets on over a thong, I stand in front of all my hanging clothes to think of what I can piece together. An idea hits me, so I crouch down to dig through the box that’s still sitting open on the floor, hoping I didn’t throw away the fake vampire fangs I wore last year.

I find a pair of cat ears, throwing them to the side as a last resort – my heart set on using all the fake blood I have left. When I find the little plastic case that holds the false fangs, I squeal as I wrap my fist around it.

I pull on a plain black long sleeve bodysuit over my fishnets, foregoing a bra since it’s skintight anyways.

Then I take my Docs from the shelf, throwing them onto my bed as I pass by to the bathroom.

Twisting my hair up into a bun so I can do my makeup, I pull it all from underneath the sink and lay it out alongside my fake blood.

Once I’ve reapplied my foundation and drawn on my dark eyebrows, I smear dark purple eyeshadow on my eyelids, then line the outline of my eyes with black. I stick on some oversized lashes, then draw some dark, jagged lines shooting from the bottom of my eyes to look like veins.

I stare at myself in the mirror, and something is missing. I decide to add some bright, glittery highlighter to my cheeks, as well as to the corners of my eyes to make the darkness stand out more. After that, I line my lips with the same black

eyeliner since I don't have black lipstick, then fill in my lips with a dark, bloody red color.

I grin like a witch as I grab the scissors from under the counter and cut a ton of slices into the front of my bodysuit, showing the milky skin of my chest and a lot of cleavage. Once I'm satisfied, I finally open the first container of fake blood and dip an eyeshadow brush in it.

Once the bristles are saturated, I lean my head back and press the brush to the corner of my first eye, letting the blood trail down my cheek like red tears.

The black of the eyeliner mixes with the red in a streak down my cheek, giving the blood a darker look. I do the other eye the same, then line my lips with the thick blood, making sure it drips down my chin like I've just eaten a helpless human for dinner.

I go back to my room, slipping my feet into my boots before I move on to my next idea.

Pulling the bodysuit a little, I make sure a good amount of skin is showing under the slices I cut in with the scissors, then make my way back to the bathroom. I lay the damp towel from my shower down on the floor for the mess, then I pour the rest of the first container of blood onto my neck, making sure it drips down naturally to my chest.

Soaking my bodysuit, I grab the next little tub of fake blood and coat my hands with it. Pressing my hands to my legs, I make streaks against my skin and stockings with my fingers, making it look like I've just massacred an entire village.

I pull my hair out of the bun with my dirty hands, making sure I get blood in the strands of my hair as I shake it out and make it hang wildly around my face like the girl from *The Ring*.

A smile tugs up the corner of my lips as I look at myself in the mirror. I'm one part scary and two parts sexy, and it's working to improve my mood.

I fucking *love* Halloween, and even if I'm not going out this year, I can still have a sexy little vampire photoshoot in my bedroom.

“What the fuck are you doing?” The abruptness of Carson's humored voice makes me snap my head to the side to find him standing in the doorway to his room.

I laugh, turning my body so he can get the whole picture. “I'm a vampire.”

“You sure are.” He laughs. “You going out?”

“No,” I muse, finding his eyes. “Just wanted to celebrate.”

I grab the fangs from the counter, opening the box and slipping them on my incisors one by one before I catch Carson's gaze again and give him an evil smile. “Wanna let me suck your blood?”

He takes a calculated step into the bathroom toward me. “I got something you can suck alright.”

I hum, sucking on my tongue as I look him over. “Always got sex on the brain, Carson Raines.”

He takes another predatory step toward me. “Do a little spin for me. Let me see your ass in that thing.”

I narrow my eyes for a moment but decide to turn around anyways, putting my back to him. I hear him suck in a breath as he moves, then his hands are pressing against the flesh of my ass where it spills over the edges of the bodysuit.

“Carson,” I sigh.

He squeezes one last time before he removes himself from me, letting me turn around to face him. “You look scary-hot, Logan.”

I grin. “That's what I was going for.”

“Why'd you get dressed up?” he questions as his gaze trails down my body, making chills run all over me.

“Halloween is my jam, so I figured even if I don't have plans, that doesn't mean I can't still dress up.”



His brows raise as he looks into my eyes. “Just gonna sit at home covered in fake blood?”

“Well, I was going to have a little photoshoot.” I smirk.

“I’m going to a party at Hayden’s, if you wanted to come,” he offers, even as he winces through the words. It’s clear this isn’t an invitation he should be offering, even if he wants to.

“Nah.” I wave a hand, popping the teeth from my mouth and holding them in my hand. “I’m just gonna hang out here.”

His eyes find mine for a moment, making me suck air into my lungs. He leans forward, his eyes shooting to my lips as he does. Pulling back, I catch his gaze once more and shake my head.

His nostrils flare in frustration, but he doesn’t push it, just steps backwards and looks down at the floor.

“I’ll get out of your way so you can get ready, but I’ll clean up the makeup and stuff later.”

I turn, rushing through my bedroom door and slamming it behind me so he doesn’t try to follow. No matter how much I want to spend time with him, it isn’t a good idea and I know that.

---

At 1am, I’m sitting cross-legged on my bed, stuffing leftover candy from trick-or-treaters mindlessly into my mouth. *Jennifer’s Body* is playing on the TV, and I’m completely engrossed in a scene where she’s eating some emo dude. I’m still dressed in my makeshift Halloween costume, so I have a towel underneath me to not get any blood on my bed.

It turned out to be a pretty good night. I did a little photoshoot in my bedroom, then helped Sara hand out candy. We didn’t have a lot of kids come by – hence the candy I’m shoveling into my mouth – but I ended up having fun hanging out with Sara.

I'm unwrapping a mini-Twix when my bedroom door slams open, making me almost jump out of my skin.

Carson appears in the doorway, and I slap a hand to my chest before I yell at him. "You scared the shit out of me, Carson!"

He laughs, swaggering into my room and dropping down onto my bed so hard that my discarded wrappers fly in the air. I shake my head at him. "Excuse you?"

He peeks into the candy bowl between my legs, poking through it before pulling out a mini-Snickers. "Whatcha doing?"

I watch him as he unwraps it, then stuffs the whole thing into his mouth. "I'm watching a movie... What are *you* doing?"

He grabs another piece of candy from the bowl and holds it up to show me, speaking with his mouth full. "Getting some candy."

I roll my eyes. "I mean, aren't you supposed to be at a Halloween party?"

He chews between words, shrugging his shoulders. "Eh, it was boring. Wanted to come home. Hang out. You know?"

I look at him like he's speaking German. "No, I don't *know*."

He sighs, swallowing the last of his candy before he meets my gaze. "I didn't feel like partying, I wanted to hang out with you."

I scrunch my face up. "Why?"

He laughs. "Don't play stupid, it's not a good look for you."

I huff. "Every look is a good look for me." He laughs, and we both pull another piece of candy from the bowl. We sit in silence, both eating sweets and staring at the TV.

At some point, Carson got comfortable on my pillows, crossing his legs over one another on my bed. He turns to me.

“So, the point of this movie is... what?”

I look at him out of the corner of my eye. “That men ain’t shit.”

He hums between his lips in thought. “Except she has to eat them to survive, so... they *are* shit.”

I laugh. “She *chooses* to eat only boys because they’re the worst – you should know this, being a boy and all.” I wave a hand. “It’s symbolic of how men are the worst.”

“Ah.” He nods. “Gotcha.”

I stand up. “I need to wash all this blood off of me, feel free to finish the movie.”

He grabs my hand as I’m passing him, pulling me back a little. “Show me the pictures you took first.”

Laughing, I shake my head. “Absolutely not.”

He holds onto my hand tightly, throwing his leg off the side of the bed so he can stand up and step toward me. “C’mon, Logan. Show me.”

I sigh, rolling my eyes. Without a word, I pull from his grip and walk to my dresser to get my phone. He follows me and looks over my shoulder when I unlock my phone to go to the photo album.

I click on the first one, which is just a close-up picture of my face, my mouth wide as I hiss through my fangs. He grabs the phone from my hand, and I let him, and he starts scrolling.

I don’t look at my phone with him, so I can watch his face. He goes from laughing, to grinning, back to laughing, and then he’s biting onto his lip so hard that my stomach clenches.

“Jesus, Logan,” he breathes as he continues to scroll.

My stomach flips at the desire laced in his tone, and when he flicks his gaze up to mine, my chest tightens. He narrows his eyes, his grip on my phone tight.

Gritting his jaw, his nostrils flare. “Who did you send these to?”

I roll my eyes at him, snatching the phone from his hand. “No one, caveman. Relax.”

I glance at my phone before I lock it, seeing that it’s open on a photo of me on all fours, my hair hanging loose toward the floor as I crawl at the camera. The rips in my bodysuit had grown wider by the time I took pictures, and the way I’m positioned makes it so you can see my bare breasts hanging loose under the material.

“You better not have,” Carson growls, reaching out to stroke a finger down the center of my throat. I step back far enough that his touch falls from my skin, and I swallow roughly at the look in his eyes.

“I’m gonna go take a shower,” I say, looking deep into his eyes to drive my point home.

He licks his lips, pausing for a moment before he takes a step backwards and nods his head at me. He heads for the door without a word, and after he’s pulled it open, he turns to look at me once more. “Happy Halloween, Logan.”

I give him a closed-lipped smile. “You too.”

*twenty-eight*

## LOGAN

After another uneventful and lonely five days of school, the day finally arrives. Wedding weekend.

Sara is rushing around the house, putting the final touches on her wedding plans, and I'm sitting on the couch watching her, offering emotional support.

She storms back into the living room. "Do we think lilies were a bad call? Maybe we should change it to roses."

"The wedding is tomorrow. I don't think there's time to change anything, Sara," I answer her, watching her pace back and forth.

She shakes her head but doesn't look at me. "You're right, you're right. You have your dress?"

"Yes, it's at the hotel with everyone else's."

She nods, still not making eye contact with me as she paces her line in the living room. "What did we forget?"

I stand up. "Well, since you hired a wedding planner, I'm going to say nothing." I walk to her and put my hands on her shoulders. "Sara?"

She looks at me, humming between her lips.

"You need to chill." I give her a small smile.

"I am super chill," she answers, eyes bright and wild.

I laugh. "Super chill, *right*."

She puts a hand on her forehead. "Oh God, we haven't even been engaged for that long... is it too fast?! Did we rush to get married?! What if he realizes I'm an insane person and leaves me at the altar?!"

I shake her a little, cutting off the next wild train of thought that's barreling toward her at a million miles an hour. "Sara! Dad loves you, take a deep breath."

It occurs to me that I'm comforting the woman who is essentially going to replace my mom, and that makes my stomach turn over. A few weeks ago, I hated this woman... she was everything I didn't want for my life. But I've grown to love Sara – she's nothing like my mom, and she never will be. She's different, she's crazy and fun, and she's exactly what my dad needs.

“You ready?” I ask, making her slide her gaze to me again. Her eyes are watery and wide, but her lips are curved into a small smile. I return her smile, putting a hand on her forearm. “Let's go.”

She nods, her smile growing. “Okay.”

She blows out a breath, shaking off whatever cold feet she previously had, and then she laughs a little as she threads her arm through mine and leads me to the front door.

When she peels the door open, I find a black, shiny SUV-limo sitting in the circular driveway just in front of the fountain. I perk a brow. “A limo?”

She shrugs. “It's my wedding day. I wanted to feel like royalty.”

I laugh as we make our way to the car. “Did Dad and Carson get a limo as well?”

“No, they took your dad's Hyundai.” She laughs.

I return her laughter as I slip in the car door behind her, my eyes going wide when I catch my first glimpse of the inside of a limousine. It's like its own little room, lined with black leather seating and a bar sitting at the end underneath the window that separates us from the driver. “*Jesus.*”

Sara sits on the long bench on the left side of the car, kicking her feet up on the seat that sits parallel to her as she settles in. I sit on one of three individual seats lining the back, admiring the interior. It smells clean, like fresh vanilla with a touch of leather, and the scent warms me. I settle down as well, putting my little crossbody bag on the seat next to me.

The window that separates the cab from us slides down. “Ready, Mrs. Raines?”

“Ready,” Sara answers, then looks at me with a sparkle to her eye as the driver rolls the window back up. “Drink?”

I cross my legs Indian style on the leather chair. “Sure.”

As the car starts moving, Sara finds her balance to stand up, the top part of her body bent so she doesn't hit her head on the ceiling, and goes for the bar. She pops open the minifridge that's right at the center, pulling out two little bottles of champagne. She peels the foil, pops the corks, then makes her way back to her seat, holding one out to me.

I quirk an eyebrow at her as I take the bottle, and she winks at me. “Royalty, remember? Don't tell your dad.”

I chuckle as I take a mouthful of the bubbly liquid, relaxing in my chair to enjoy the rest of the royal treatment.

---

By the time Sara and I have gone separate ways in the hotel, and I've crashed down onto the large bed in the center of my room, the three little bottles of champagne I downed in the limo have started to go to my head. I feel light and giggly, and I blame the bubbles. I lie down for a minute, but then go on the hunt for a snack so I don't embarrass myself at the rehearsal dinner tonight.

There's a minibar in my room, under where a ginormous flatscreen TV hangs off the wall across from the bed, so I rummage around inside it to find something that looks good.

I decide on a prepackaged container of cheese and crackers as well as a bottle of water, then make myself comfortable on the king-sized bed again.

As I mindlessly snack, I admire the unnecessarily lavish and large room I've been set up in for the festivities. There's a huge sliding glass door on one side of the room leading to a balcony that looks out to the Atlantic ocean, and if I didn't have to spend my evening at the rehearsal dinner, I would love to sit out in the cool North Carolina air and watch the sunset.



The room is decorated in blacks and whites, with little gold accents making everything seem hella fucking classy, and I can't help but feel out of place. If it wasn't for the alcohol flowing through my veins and making me light, I would probably be having some weird culture shock.

When I've finished my food, I down the entire bottle of water and test my legs again. When I can walk in a straight line without wobbling, I make my way to the glass door and slide it open to let in some fresh air. I step out onto the balcony, which has a little loveseat on it, and lean against the railing to stare out at the ocean.

I still have a few hours before the dinner, and I plan to spend all of them out here breathing in the salty air, listening to the waves crashing in the distance.

Closing my eyes, I take a big, deep breath in as I lean over the railing on my forearms, my mind taking me back to the last time I was listening to the sounds of the beach.

Carson deep in my throat. His hands sliding into my pants. Our mouths pressed together so fiercely that just the feeling of him kissing me had me aching to be touched.

I press my lips together and moan, letting the memory heat my core.

“Reminiscing?”

My head snaps to the side, my eyes flashing open to find Carson fucking Raines sitting on the balcony next to mine, his feet kicked up on a little table as he lounges on his own loveseat. He grins at me – that grin that makes my head spin and my skin flush.

“You're in the room next to me?” I slice my eyes, walking to the opposite edge, closer to his own railing.

“I asked if we could bunk together, but your dad said no.” He smirks.

My eyes go wide. “You didn't.”

He laughs, his head going back. “Of course I didn't, Logan. Do I look like an idiot?”

I drop my head to the side, humming through puckered lips. “Sure you want me to answer that?”

He laughs effortlessly. “Shut up.”

“Carson, there’s only two fucking bottles of vodka in this bullshit mini fridge, what kind of hotel is this?” Hayden steps through the sliding glass door of Carson’s hotel room, Levi hot on his tail with about fifteen little bottles of liquor in his arms.

I roll my eyes. “You brought Dumb and Dumber with you?”

Carson laughs, and both of his friends turn to look at me at the same time.

“Hello to you too, Logan.” Hayden smiles smugly, showing me his white teeth.

Levi and Hayden drop down on the couch next to Carson, and Levi deposits the unopened bottles from his arms onto the table in front of them.

“Hey, Logan, wanna come over and be the entertainment?” Levi beams.

I snort, spinning on my foot to head back inside my hotel room. “I would rather die.”

“We’ll be here if you change your mind!” Carson calls out after me, so I slam my sliding glass door shut once I’m back inside.

I figure I might as well get ready, since Sara is trusting me to be *camera ready* – her words, not mine – tonight.

I find my dress hanging in the bathroom, as well as a bunch of stuff spread out on the vanity sitting next to the shower, like someone was in here setting up for me prior to this.

My makeup bag on the counter is still packed, filled with all my grocery store cosmetics and body spray, but next to it there’s all different cosmetics laid out – Dior, Urban Decay, Tom Ford, a bunch more unrecognizable names – all in their plastic like they were purchased for me brand new. There’re also a couple of bottles of expensive perfume, so I smirk as I

grab my own makeup bag and throw it straight into the garbage can sitting by the door.

Might as well, right?

There's a curling iron, a hair straightener, and a bunch of hair products lined up on the edge of the counter as well, and thank God since I forgot to pack anything for my hair besides a brush.

I pull my dress down off the hook on the wall, unzipping the clear garment bag it's inside of and running my hands down the black, beaded fabric. I told Sara I didn't want to wear anything too *Luxington*, and to my very thankful surprise, she offered me this little number, which feels really *me*.

Behind the garment bag, there's another, this one a solid black, and when I unzip it, I laugh. It's black lace underwear – no, not underwear – *lingerie*.

Part of me wonders why I'm being presented with classy and sexy undergarments, but the other part doesn't really care. Not like anyone will see them, and it's probably normal to wear this type of shit at a wedding, right?

I've never been to a wedding, certainly not one hosted by a millionaire, so I decide to just roll with it.

I hang both garment bags back up, then head to the shower and turn the water on a degree above Hell. I strip out of my clothes, step into the glass shower stall, and eye all the products lined up on the shelf on the wall. Shampoo, conditioner, body wash, face wash, something called *body gelato*, and a nice big loofa to wrap it all up.

Seems unnecessary, to be honest, since I'm only here for two nights, but I can always take it home so it doesn't go to waste.

I stand under the spray of the water, letting it run over my face as I lean my head back and get lost in my thoughts.

If you had told me a few months ago that I would be standing in a shower in a five-star hotel room, on the night before my father's wedding to one of the richest women in the

state of North Carolina, I would have probably cracked a rib from laughing so hard.

It feels unreal, even after so long in Luxington and my new life. I'm still waiting for someone to pinch me, to wake me up from this insane dream I've been dropped into. I'm waiting for the morning I open my eyes and I'm back in our little run-down house in Franklin, my mom burning French toast in the kitchen.

Sighing, I rub my hands down my face to get the water from my eyes as I look down at the floor. One more year until college, then I can leave Luxington behind me.

*twenty-nine*

## LOGAN

**B**efore I head downstairs for dinner, I take one last look in the full-length mirror in my hotel room.

I decided to straighten my hair, so it's hanging down my back pin-straight, the darker strands on top hiding the white underneath until I start moving. The white pieces that frame my face make the bright glitter in the corner of my eyes stand out against the black liner and thick lashes.

I covered my lips in a dark, burgundy lipstick that almost looks black until it hits the light, and when I smirk at myself in the mirror, my confidence level shoots up another notch. I look good as fuck, dark and delicious, but still appropriate for a rehearsal dinner.

The black dress hugging my curves is gorgeous, and I realize then that Sara knows what the fuck she's doing when picking out fashion. My cleavage spills out the top of the V in the dress just enough to entice, and the slit up my leg gives a hint of sexy without being slutty, even when I take a step in the three-inch heels and my black garters show through the split in the beaded, lacy fabric.

I go to the bathroom, slip some hoops through my ears, blow myself a kiss in the mirror, then go to the door. Grabbing the little clutch Sara paired with my dress, I slip my phone and room key inside and pull open the door to my room. Unfortunately, the door next to mine is opening at the same time, and the three stooges appear in the doorway as I'm letting mine close behind me.

*"Jesus fucking Christ."* Carson stops dead in his tracks when he sees me, making Levi and Hayden bump into him from behind.

"What the fuck, dude?" Hayden growls, the cigarette behind his ear dropping to the floor, but he's quick to shut up

when his gaze finds mine. Levi stands speechless with them, and I give them each a little grin of my dark lips.

“Good evening, bozos.” I flutter my eyelashes.

They’re each dressed in suits, Carson in his dark grey one, Levi in all black, and Hayden in a light grey that seems out of character for him.

“Holy fucking shit, Logan!” Levi yells, waving a hand up and down my body as his eyes bug out of his head.

“You look like a...” His words trail off, and when his gaze finally falls back to my face, I chuckle.

“Like a...?” I turn my head to the side in question.

He rubs his palms together. “I don’t know, like you’re going to eat my soul or some shit, ma.”

“I am.” I raise an eyebrow, then start walking down the hallway to the elevators.

I hear all three of them jogging to catch up to me, and when they reach me, Carson grabs my hand, pulls me to him and groans, “Logan.”

Rolling my eyes at him a little, I snap my fingers, then wave my hand in the air in a circle. “Walk and talk, caveman. We have a dinner to get to.”

I start walking again, and his grip leaves my hand, but they all follow after me in silence.

Hitting the button for the elevator, I slip my phone from my clutch, so I have something to do with my hands, but Hayden slides up next to me. “How ’bout we skip this thing... head back to your hotel room instead.”

I snort, looking at him from the corner of my eye just as Carson smacks him on the shoulder. The motion irritates me a little, because it’s him being all *I peed on her, so she’s mine* again, so I turn to face Hayden and curve an eyebrow.

“Oh? What do you want to do in my hotel room?”

His mouth curls into a savage smile, and he takes a step closer to me, putting his face about three inches from mine.

“That lipstick would look great smeared all over my dick, to start.”

I hum between my lips, moving my gaze down his body and back up once. “Tempting.”

The elevator dings, so I turn and step through the doors once they’ve slid open, leaning against the wall after I’ve hit the button for the ground floor.

Carson’s face has gone red. “Dude, what the fuck?!” he grunts to Hayden under his breath just as they’re all stepping into the elevator, and Hayden laughs.

“Chill out, Carson. We’re just fucking around.”

“I mean...” Levi says, looking at the floor, “Carson probably has PTSD from when I rearranged her guts, man.”

I bark out a laugh at his phrasing but turn to address all three of them at once.

“Listen, *idiots*. I’m no one’s property. I wanted to fuck Levi, so I fucked Levi.” I center my gaze on Carson. “If I want to fuck Hayden, I’ll fuck Hayden. I am not yours.”

Levi laughs under his breath, trying to hold it in, and Hayden just gives me that smirk he seems to have coined as his own. Carson, however, is gritting his teeth and balling his fists. I wouldn’t be surprised if steam started shooting from his ears.

He takes a few steps toward me on the moving elevator, so his face is right in mine. “Don’t fucking push me, Logan.”

I cock my jaw. “And if I do?”

The sides of his lips curl. “We’re both stuck at this hotel together. You’ll have more to worry about than the monsters under your bed.”

A laugh slips free from my lips, making his smile grow bigger as I run my hands down the lapel of his suit. “Don’t worry, big brother, there’s only one person who will be fucking me tonight.”



He steps closer to me, putting his mouth right at the lobe of my ear. “Oh?”

I push his shoulders, making him take a couple of steps back. “Yeah, *me*.”

All three boys chuckle, but the elevator doors slide open as we reach the ground floor before they can say anything in retort. I smile. “See you in there, boys.”

---

The night moves along without any issues. I’m introduced to a lot of Sara’s relatives and friends, and I don’t miss how there isn’t one single person here from my dad’s side of the family. Not an aunt or uncle, grandparents, cousins – nothing. It makes me curious as to why, because if none of them are here for the rehearsal, will they be here for the wedding?

My dad has always been close with his sister, I think, so it’s weird that even she isn’t here.

I find a moment where my dad is alone at the bar about halfway through, so I sit down on a stool next to him and give him a smile. “Having a good time?”

He puts an arm around my shoulders. “Sure am, are you?”

He smiles so wide that wrinkles spread at the corner of his eyes, and I wonder the last time I’ve seen him so happy. Definitely long before my mom passed, maybe even years. “Yeah, food was great.”

“Thank you for being here, Logan.” He grabs his glass, taking a sip of the clear liquid inside. “I know I haven’t been around much lately, but I really appreciate you supporting this huge life change.”

His words hit home, making heat spread across my chest and down my arms. “I just want you to be happy, Dad.”

He nods. “I know you do, sweetheart. And I want the same for you.”

I wave over the bartender, and when he reaches us, I order some water to help my sudden case of dry throat. Once he's set it down in front of me, I take a long mouthful, and then turn to my dad again.

“Why isn't anyone from our side of the family here?”

He downs the rest of his drink, like my question has made him darken a little. He sets the glass down, waving for a refill, and then he looks at me. “They all have their own reasons.”

“Which are?” I question, eyes on my glass.

He clears his throat. “Most of them negative... some of them valid excuses. I decided I didn't need anything to sour this day for Sara or myself, so I just accepted that they think I'm making a mistake.”

When I look over at him, he's smiling sadly, which makes my heart swell. Whether they have their own opinions on his choices, they should be here to support him. I put a hand on his arm, making him turn his head slightly to look at me. “Fuck 'em, then.”

He laughs, shaking his head. “That mouth of yours, Logan Briar.”

I shrug. “You let me listen to Jay-Z when I was a kid, this feels like your fault.”

The bartender puts my dad's drink down on the napkin in front of him, and he grabs it in his hand and swirls around the ice for a moment before he looks at me again. “You look beautiful tonight, honey. You look more like your mother every day.”

I look down at where my hands are leaning on the bar, sadness creeping into my gut like a toxin. “Thanks, Dad.”

He looks around the room, admiring the set up the hotel has created in their ballroom, and laughs under his breath a little. “We're a long way from Franklin, huh?”

I huff a laugh, looking over my shoulder to the table that Carson and his friends are sitting at, all of them laughing in one way or another like someone just told a joke. “Sure are.”

*thirty*

## CARSON

Hayden, Levi, and I have spent most of the evening sitting at our designated table at the front of the room, people watching and sneaking miniature bottles of liquor from our mini bar. I keep sneaking peeks at Logan, and most of the time she's sitting or standing somewhere doing the same thing – minus the alcohol, I think. I watched her have what seemed like a heartwarming conversation with Gary, then get introduced to my grandparents by my mom, but besides that, she's been pretty antisocial.

My mom is an only child, so there aren't any cousins here for me to chill with, so I'm happy to have Hayden and Levi here with me. Otherwise, I might have ended up in a closet somewhere with Logan.

*Wishful thinking?*

I still might try to sneak off with her somewhere, which seems unlikely after what she said to me in the elevator. Seems she's standing her ground on the whole *we're not going to happen* thing. For now.

There's a sudden drop in the volume of the music, and then a tapping on a microphone, making everyone's eyes turn to the little stage that sits at the front of the room. I find my grandma at the mic, smiling a big smile that's identical to me and my mom's. She clears her throat, and once the room has fallen to hushed whispers, she speaks.

“Hi, everyone. I'm sure you all know me, but I'm Sara's mother.” She smiles again. “I wanted to say a few words since tomorrow speeches are limited to the maid of honor and best man—”

“Man of Honor!” I shout, making everyone erupt into laughter.

“Yes, Man of Honor. Sorry, *Carson*.” My grandma does her best to roll her eyes at me, but she's sweeter than sugar, so

I don't think she could even if she really wanted to. "When Sara came to me and told me she was getting married, I was truly *overjoyed*. And the more I got to know Gary, I knew why she had decided to head to the altar so quickly."

I had no idea Gary had even met anyone in my family before, but when he kisses his palm and waves it to her, it shows that he's more than comfortable with my grandma, at least.

"Gary and Sara." My grandmother continues, pulling my attention back to the stage. "You two are like love-struck teenagers, and I wish you a beautiful and amazing life together."

She blows two kisses, one for each of the happy couple, and the room of friends and family claps for the end of her speech. She waves as she steps down from the stage and embraces my mom, pulling emotions from deep in my gut that I didn't know lived there.

I might be soft for love deep down after all.

My mom's best friend graces the stage next, but my attention has already run out, so I stand up, telling Levi and Hayden I'm heading to the bathroom.

I walk past a bored-looking Logan on my way, and when she notices me, she grins and checks me out. I wink at her, shooting her a finger gun because I'm just *that* fucking smooth.

As I push into the bathroom, I luckily finding it empty. Laying my hands flat on the counter, I lean forward and look at myself in the mirror. My light hair has lost some of the volume my mom gave it before the dinner, but it gives me that *freshly fucked* look that chicks are into, so I'd call it a win.

Standing up straight, I check myself out in the mirror, making sure my suit hasn't gained any wrinkles. Just as I'm turning around to look at the back, the door to the bathroom opens and is filled with Levi's laughter.

"Dude, are you checking out your ass?"

I spin around, making it very obvious that I was, and he laughs even harder. “Jesus Christ, you’ve got it bad.”

I turn on the faucet, pump some soap into my palms, and wash my hands. “Shut up, bitch.”

He claps his hands together, then points a finger at me. “Only one bitch in this room, my guy, and it ain’t me.”

I finish washing my hands, turn the water off and dry them with one of the towels in the basket on the counter. Throwing it in the bin with the used ones, I turn and lean against the counter. “Do you think Hayden would really hook up with her?”

Levi grins. “Don’t do that, man.”

“So, yes?”

He cracks his knuckles as he thinks over his next words, then leans a hand on the counter as he answers me. “It’s Hayden, C. Motherfucker does whatever he wants, doesn’t think of the consequences, just chases his nut and moves on. If he did, it wouldn’t mean anything.”

I huff a laugh, shaking my head, because he’s right. Hayden is ruthless. He doesn’t care what outcome his actions have; he just does whatever he wants without thinking. One day, it’s going to turn around and bite him in the ass, but until then, we can only watch Hurricane Hayden destroy everything in his path.

Hayden has always been fearless, even as a child. He was the first kid to do a flip on the monkey bars in kindergarten, simply because the teacher said it was dangerous. He’s quick to act, but loyal to the core when it comes to his family. Not his blood family, per se. But me and Levi? We’re that boy’s brothers. Even if he knows how I feel about Logan, as long as she’s single and pushing me away, he sees her as fair game. He’ll support me in my quest to sweeping her off her feet, but he won’t hesitate to fuck it all up on the way.

Evil bastard likes a game, likes to create his own rules and cut corners, so he’s the winner. It’s easy to be that way when you have no credit limit and an empty house, I guess. He’s

jaded, haunted and damaged, and to an extent, I can see all the bad shit that lives inside of his head and use it as justification for his shitty behavior. At the end of the day, he's my brother.

Levi claps me on the back. "Don't let it get to you, man. Even if Hayden *would*, I don't think Logan would do that to you. She's one of the good ones."

"Did you not hear her?" I laugh, shaking my head. "*I'm not yours.*" She was looking right at me, bro. She doesn't give a shit."

He puffs his lips in a sarcastic smile. "That girl likes you, even if she's denying it."

I point a finger at him. "She was with some dick when she went to Franklin."

He shakes his head. "And I'll bet you a hundred dollars right now, she didn't do shit with that pendejo."

I slap my hand down on his when he holds it out for me, shaking it. "Bet."

---

After another hour, the rehearsal dinner wraps up and everyone either heads to the bar to party the night away, down to the beach, or up to their rooms. Hayden, Levi, and I head to our room since we've run dry of mini liquor bottles, ready to drink the night away and relax. Logan was nowhere to be found on our way upstairs, and I found myself itching to pound my fists on her door just so I could see her one last time tonight.

We all change into sweats and crack open the large bottles of rum and whiskey Hayden brought from home, mixing them with ice in the glasses above the mini fridge in our room.

Settled on the balcony with low music playing from my phone, we all sit and drink in silence for a while. The music is quiet enough that I can still hear the ocean kissing the shore in the distance, and I close my eyes as I lean my head back against the couch so I can focus on the sound.

After about an hour, Logan's sliding glass door opens, and she steps out into the evening, still in her dress from dinner. We wave when we see her, all too tired and warmed from the liquor to put any effort into teasing her right now.

"You guys got any ice?" Logan calls out, and when I look up, she's leaning against the railing closest to my own balcony, a sassy smile gracing her face.

"There's an ice machine down the hall." I point in the general direction of inside the hotel, and she rolls her eyes at me in annoyance.

"I know that. I don't feel like walking down there." She bats her eyelashes, "Please?"

Hayden stands. "I'll bring some over."

Levi shoots an arm out to stop him, and he takes the hint, dropping back down on the couch and grumbling something under his breath.

Levi points at him. "You're far too drunk to be in close proximity to Carson's girl."

Logan snorts, humor in her tone. "I didn't know Cassidy was here."

"Shut up, Logan." I press my lips together, standing up. "Meet me at your door."

She heads through her sliding glass door without another word, closing it behind her.

"I'll be back," I grunt to my friends as I walk through my own doors.

"Need a condom?" Levi shouts after me, but I ignore him, instead just laughing under my breath.

I grab a glass from the bar, pour some ice into it from the bucket we filled up earlier, and snatch my keycard from the entryway table before leaving my room. I tap my fingers on Logan's door a few times to announce my arrival, and after a few seconds, she pulls the door open. Her makeup is still flawless, sparkling fireworks on her eyes, and I can't help the



smile that pulls at my lips when she holds the door open for me, ushering me inside.

“Just take the glass.” I hold it out for her.

“Come in for a drink,” she answers, grabbing the glass of ice from my hands and motioning again with her other hand for me to come in.

I cross my arms over my chest. “I have drinks next door.”

“Carson,” she growls, making me laugh and walk through her door frame.

She heads to the bar on her bare feet, puts the glass down, and spins around to face me. “Okay, there’s another reason I needed you to come over here, and please don’t overthink it or imagine it means something it doesn’t.”

I raise my eyebrows, taking a step toward her. “Okay?”

She spins again, turning her back to me. “I can’t get the zipper on my dress.”

“*Logan*,” I groan, stopping in my tracks.

She laughs. “I told you not to overthink it! Just get over here and unzip my fucking dress, Carson.”

I lean my head back, sighing through my lips, but then stalk across the room to reach her. I find the zipper right at the top of the fabric and slowly pull it down, exposing her skin inch by torturous inch.

When I get to the top of her ass, I stop, knowing that if I see her in her panties right now, I’ll spread her out on top of her bed and feast on her like a fucking meal.

“Carson,” she says, “all the way, please.”

I groan, my fingers tightening on the metal of the zipper, then I pull it down and expose the black, lacy material covering her ass, or rather, hugging her ass.

“Jesus,” I breathe, letting go of the zipper and taking a step back.

She spins around, holding the dress to her front so it doesn't fall off. She gives me a smile. "Thank you."

"Let go," I groan, the taste of begging sour on my tongue, but fuck, I don't care. I'd beg Logan Briar any day of my fucking life.

She thinks about it for a second, but then presses the material tighter to her chest. "No."

I step forward again, my mouth pulling into a tiny smirk. "C'mon."

She shakes her head, even as her mouth drops open and she starts breathing heavy. Once I reach her, there's no stopping me, I slip my hands under the loose fabric on her arms and start to pull it down. She loosens her grip a bit, the dress sliding to her waist and revealing the black bra she has on underneath.

Her head falls back an inch as I slither my hands inside the dress at her waist and push it over her hips, letting it drop to the floor.

I'm lucky I don't come in my pants from what is revealed the moment the dress is no longer on her body. She's in the lacy, black lingerie with matching garters that I snuck into her bathroom this morning, making my cock turn to stone in my sweatpants.

She's my perfect wet dream come to life, standing before me panting as I run my eyes all over her body from a few inches away. Once our gazes lock, I reach forward and grab her by the waist, pressing my fingertips against her skin as I pull her into me.

"Carson," she groans when my mouth falls to the skin of her neck. "We said we wouldn't do this anymore."

I suck on her skin, kissing down her throat and into her cleavage. "We aren't doing anything."

I bite at the flesh of her tits, eager to taste every inch of her.

Running my hands up her sides, I slip them under the cups of her bra and pull it down so I can suck one of her nipples into my mouth. She moans when I press into the rosy bud with my teeth, threading her hands into my hair as I continue playing with her nipple with my mouth.

“Oh, God.” Her head falls to her shoulder, her back hitting the bar as she lets herself succumb to her pleasure. Pulling my face free from her breast, I slip my hands under her ass and lift her up, wrapping her legs around my waist.

I turn and walk across the room, laying her down on the perfectly made bed in the center, climbing on top of her and putting my lips to hers.

She slips her tongue into my mouth the second we touch, spreading her legs so I can settle between them and arching into me so she can rub her clit against my erection.

I groan, slipping my hands into her hair to control her head as I kiss her, showing her with my tongue exactly what I want to do between her legs.

She pulls back, moaning my name against my lips as her hips gyrate against me to gain friction.

I smirk, kissing down her throat again before I lean back slightly to look at her. She groans from the sudden lack of pressure between her legs, but when she sees the hungry look in my eyes, she drops her legs open and runs her hands along my forearms.

“You’re so fucking sexy, Logan, you know that?”

She presses her nails to my flesh in response, then slides her hands down in between us. She slips a hand into the waistband of my sweatpants, gripping my cock over my boxers and making me groan.

Lifting onto her elbow, she presses her lips to mine once more, lightly, the touch teasing when I want so much more from her. “Are you going to fuck me, Carson?”

She runs her hand over my dick again, making it very fucking difficult to answer, and when I find her grinning like

an evil genius, I smash my lips to her taunting mouth and press my body against hers.

I thrust my hips, rubbing myself against her so the back of her hand hits her clit perfectly. “You told me earlier you were the only person that got to fuck you tonight, remember?”

I raise an eyebrow in question, my lips curving higher.

She nods, but before she can answer me, I speak again. “Show me.”

She moans as I thrust my hips again, creating pressure against her clit once more, and when I pull away from her and rest on my knees between her legs, she gives me a look.

“Show me, Logan,” I groan. “Fuck yourself for me.”

She doesn’t hesitate, just pulls her hand from my boxers and trails it down the front of her stomach with her gaze glued to mine. I move my own gaze to her hand, watching as she slips underneath the lace of her panties and rubs her clit.

I stand up, eager to see her, ripping her panties down her legs and exposing her pussy, making her breath catch. She slides her hand from her clit, circling her entrance before she plunges two fingers inside of herself. She moans, curling her spine up off the bed as she fucks herself, making my cock leak precum in my boxers.

I lick my lips. “Jesus Christ.”

She adds her other hand, pressing her fingers against her clit as she continues to impale herself over and over with the other. Her moans turn erratic and loud as she chases her release, and when I see her fingers coated with her juices, I lunge for her.

“I can’t fucking take it,” I groan, pulling her hands from her pussy and replacing them with my own fingers and tongue.

Her hands slip into my hair, and she pulls on the strands as I feast on her, swirling my tongue around her clit as my fingers curl inside her to rub against her G-spot.

“Carson, fuck – I’m gonna come, don’t stop,” she moans, her legs tightening around my head as her orgasm hits her. I

lick at her faster, using my fingers to drive into her as her cunt tightens on them.

I lap at her clit as she comes down, making her twitch and grind underneath me, and when I pull my fingers from inside her, I pull back to slip them into my mouth, sucking down the rest of her release.

She sits up, her hands grabbing the waistband of my sweats, pushing them and my boxers down in one swift movement to release my cock. “Fuck me right now.”

I grab her wrists. “I didn’t bring a condom.”

She shakes her head, pushing my t-shirt up my stomach next so she can kiss at my skin. “I don’t care. I’m on the pill. Fuck me right now or I’ll die.”

I peel my shirt over my head, slide my pants to my ankles and kick them off, then position myself between her legs. She’s soaking wet, and I rub the tip of my cock around her entrance to tease her a little.

“Carson!” she whines, grabbing me by my lower back to try and pull me on top of her.

I press forward an inch, the head of my cock slipping inside of her and making her fall back to the bed in relief. Just as I’m flexing my hips to plunge inside of her, there’s a knock at the door, followed by my mother’s voice.

“Logan? Are you up?”

I freeze in place. “You’re fucking kidding me.”

She sits up, slapping a hand to my mouth. “Shut up.” She shuffles from underneath me, on the hunt for her clothes. I fall face first to the bed, my dick cursing my name, and then items of clothing are thrown onto my back.

“Get dressed, you absolute moron.”

I laugh, rolling over. “Well you’re—”

She cuts me off with a hushed whisper. “Shut up!”

I chuckle, standing up and picking my clothes up off the floor where they’ve landed. She shouts, “Coming, Sara!”

“I wish,” I grumble under my breath as I slip my legs through my sweatpants, then pull my shirt back over my head.

I find her wrapped in a robe once I’m fully dressed, standing at the edge of the room with wild eyes. “You need to jump over the balcony.”

My eyebrows shoot up. “What?!”

She waves her hands around like a maniac. “Do you see any other option?”

I whisper, so she doesn’t tell me to shut up again. “I could hide in the bathroom until she leaves.”

She shakes her head, whisper-yelling back at me. “No! What if she needs to go to the bathroom?! Go!” She points to the balcony, then starts chasing me toward the sliding glass door. Hayden and Levi are still sitting on the balcony of our room when I get outside, and they give me questioning looks as I start to climb on top of the railing of her balcony to jump to mine.

I shake my head at them. “I’m going to kill her.”

*thirty-one*

## LOGAN

Once I see Carson catapulting over the edge of my balcony railing, I rush back inside to get the door. My heart is racing inside my chest like I'm having a damn heart attack, so I take a few deep breaths to calm my heaving chest.

Slapping a smile on my face, I pull the door open to find Sara with a curious look on her face. "Hi, Sara! What's up?"

She curves her brow in question. "Am I interrupting something?"

"What?" I blurt. "No, of course not, come in."

Holding the door open, I spread my other arm out toward the inside of my room, and she chuckles as she walks past me. She pulls a chair out from the little table that's sitting just inside the room and takes a seat. I follow, sitting across from her as I mess with my robe to make sure it's secured tightly.

"Sorry to just show up like this, Logan. There's something I wanted to talk to you about." She lays her hands on the table.

"Okay..."

"So, I didn't say anything before, and I haven't said anything to your dad, but I did get a call from the school. They said that you had been in some sort of fight." She presses her lips together.

"Oh," I answer, unable to come up with anything else to say after the last five minutes of my life shaking my nervous system so bad.

"Yeah, I'm on the board of Luxington High... and I figured you've been through so much that you're bound to have bad days. Just try to stay out of trouble, okay?"

I nod. "Yeah, of course, Sara. I'm so sorry to put you in that position."



My mind travels back to that day, to what the kid in the auditorium said to me about Carson and Hayden... *“Unless your parent is on the school board.”*

Sara must have pulled some strings to make sure I didn't get into trouble, and that makes me sick to my stomach. I don't need anyone taking care of me, and I certainly don't need anyone's money to pay for my spot at school when I've broken the rules.

I start to feel anger flaring in my belly.

“You have nothing to apologize for, Logan. They told me it was involving Cassidy. She's a tough queen bee to sit under.”

I ignore the sassy remark I want to spit back. “Why are you bringing this up to me right now?”

She sighs. “I'm close with Cassidy's mother, and they'll be at the wedding tomorrow.”

“*They?*” I ask.

Nodding, she gives me a sympathetic smile. “Cassidy will be coming with her parents.”

My eyes go wide, a mixture of anger and dread settling deep inside of me. “Oh.”

“I just wanted to give you fair warning, before you were surprised to see her. I don't want there to be any issues tomorrow, Logan. This is a huge day, a day that needs to be about me and your dad... I need you to promise me that there won't be any problems.” She gives me that damn smile again, and I so badly want to clap back with a bitchy retort, but I bite my tongue.

“Of course, Sara, I totally understand.”

She reaches a hand out, placing it on top of one of mine. “Thank you, Logan.”

“Sara, does Carson know that Cassidy is coming?” I question her, and she meets my gaze with a puzzled look.

“Of course he does. Why?” She tilts her head in curiosity.

I shake my head. “No reason.”

She stands. “Okay, I should get going, big day tomorrow and all.”

I stand as well, and as I do, she steps toward me and wraps her arms around me in a warm, motherly embrace. The gesture feels nice, honestly. I haven’t given much thought to the fact that I’ll never have my mother’s love again, but it helps that I get along with my stepmother so well.

I hug her back for a moment, and then we pull apart. “Thank you, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

She turns to head to the door, so I follow her to walk her out. Once she’s waved goodbye and the door is closed, the anger in my gut flares again. Spinning around, I make a beeline for the glass doors and slide them open with force.

“You motherfucker,” I growl as I’m stepping out onto the patio and rushing to the side that faces Carson’s. He’s sitting on the couch with his friends again, and when he sees the deadly look on my face, he stands up.

“What?!”

“You didn’t fucking mention that your goddamn *girlfriend* is coming to the wedding tomorrow.” I spit the words like acid, waving a hand at him.

Levi and Hayden stay sitting in silence, watching the scene unfold in front of them like they’re in a movie theater.

Carson opens his mouth to speak, but I cut him off with a shout. “You could have fucking told me that before we almost had sex tonight!”

I hear Levi laugh, so I glare daggers at him, and he squeezes his mouth shut.

“Logan.” Carson holds his hands up in defense, even though I’m on an entirely different balcony than him and it’s not like I can beat his ass from here. “I forgot.”

“You *forgot?!?*” I screech, then look at Levi and Hayden and throw my hands in the air. “He forgot!”

Levi and Hayden both laugh, making me huff a laugh with them. “You... *forgot.*” I chuckle under my breath.

Carson takes a step closer to the railing. “I’ll come over there and we can talk—”

I cut him off. “Abso-fucking-lutely *not!* Don’t come over here, and don’t fucking *look* at me at the wedding tomorrow.” I spin on my foot and storm back inside my room, slamming the door behind me. My heart beats heavy in my chest, and when I realize I’m not done creating destruction tonight, I slide the door open and step back onto the balcony.

“You know what?” I start, walking back to the railing and waving a finger between Levi and Hayden. “Do one of you want to come fuck me? Because clearly, we just do whatever the hell we want around here!”

Carson is still standing at the railing, his head hanging low, but at my words, he snaps it up and gives me a dirty look. “*Real* classy, Logan.”

I laugh, throwing my head back as the sound booms from my mouth. I bend my head to look at Carson again. “*Classy?! Don’t* fucking start with me on *classy*, motherfucker, because you’re the one that’s fooling around with your stepsister behind your girlfriend’s back!”

He spreads his lips in a humorless smile, but before he can spit a response at me, I speak again. “Maybe I’ll have a little heart-to-heart with your bae tomorrow, let her know what her boyfriend’s been up to.”

He slices his eyes. “Go wild, I don’t give a fuck.”

I laugh. “*Right.*”

I turn and head through my sliding glass door, slamming it again, then I fall down on my bed.

Tonight, right now, is the first time I’ve felt like the other woman, the dirty little secret, and it isn’t a feeling I want to have coursing through my veins. Maybe I was a little *too* explosive, but fuck it. Fuck him. Yeah, I knew he had a girlfriend, but he’s the one that’s been chasing me, pursuing me, coming on to me. Even if he says he’s only still dating her because of her pathetic little image, they’re *still dating*.

Slipping my robe off, I throw it on the floor and crawl under the covers on my bed, hoping that my bitterness and anger subsides by tomorrow so I can keep my promise to Sara.

---

My alarm goes off at 10am, pulling me from a dead sleep that has me sweaty and twisted in the sheets of my bed.

After I take a long, boiling hot shower to wash the sweat and lingering feeling of Carson's hands off my body, I throw on a plain black crop top and pair of jeans so I can head downstairs for some coffee.

Slipping my feet into some Vans, I grab my keycard as well as my phone and leave my room on silent feet. Thankfully, the hallway is empty, as well as the elevator when I get on. I don't think I could face Carson or Dumb and Dumber after my fiery explosion out on the patio last night.

I still feel a little mad, but I'm mostly just dreading slapping a happy face on today to interact with Cassidy. I haven't seen her since *the incident*, and I don't think she's going to be very happy to see me. But – at least it wasn't a surprise for her, she knows it's my dad's wedding.

I, however, was fucking bombarded by her attendance.

Getting off the elevator in the lobby, I look around for any indication of where I need to be going to get some coffee into my system, but luckily, I find my dad wandering around, looking lost as well. "Dad!"

His head turns, and he smiles as he crosses the lobby to reach me. "Do you have any idea where I can get a cup of coffee in this place?!"

I laugh. "No clue, let's find someone to ask."

I lead him to the front desk, asking the receptionist where breakfast is served, and she points me toward the wall of windowed doors at the other end of the lobby. "Take a right out of the lobby, past the pools, and then there will be a

restaurant on the right. If you hit the tennis courts, you've gone too far."

She beams, and my dad turns to me as we walk away, an impressed look on his face. "*Fancy.*"

We go through the doors the receptionist motioned to, turning right on the white stone walkway next to a large patio area. The pools are on our left after a minute, so we look out for the restaurant she mentioned, finding a set of Victorian double doors propped open. We go inside, admiring the welcoming and warm vibe of the room, which is set up with a breakfast buffet and lots of tables spread around.

My gaze runs through the room, landing on a coffee bar that's set up on the far end, so I rush for it to look over my options. I decide on an iced coffee, and since it's buffet style, I decide to do half vanilla, half caramel, with extra half and half.

My dad gets his own coffee – hot and black – and then points to a table. "Want to sit?"

I take a sip from my straw, shaking my head. "Gotta get to the bridal suite to get ready with Sara."

"Okay, honey." He walks to the doors with me, back the way we came, and once we're walking in the lobby again, I turn to him and wiggle my eyebrows.

"See you at the wedding. Break a leg."

He chuckles, pulling me into a tight embrace. "See you there."

He walks back out the doors to the patio, and I press the button to call the elevator to head upstairs to meet Sara and her bridal party.

*thirty-two*

## LOGAN

It's 3pm by the time we're wrapping up the preparations of getting ready. Sara hired people to do our hair and makeup, and seamstresses to make sure the dresses were perfect, even though they were all made specifically for us.

I'm sitting on a white ottoman in a silk robe that has my name embroidered on the back, with Sara's best friend Caroline sitting next to me in a matching one.

Sara is last to get her makeup done, because she "*needs to look the freshest*" – her words, not mine.

I'm done up like a doll, my hair and makeup flawless from the women that were hired to perfect us all. They went over me with a precision that can only be done by a professional, keeping my eye makeup light but still somehow making me look like a runway model. My hair is curled today, the top half clipped up and secured with a gorgeous diamond comb at the back.

All the other women in the room look equally perfect. I've kept to myself, though. Sara made it a point to put me in her bridal party, which I thought was nice. She didn't have to, since we haven't known each other that long after all.

Caroline is the only person I've really spoken to aside from Sara, simply because she's gone out of her way to make me feel comfortable and included. Everyone's really sweet, which you don't expect from a group of filthy rich women. At least, that's what I was expecting from all the TV shows.

As the artist is finishing up Sara's makeup, and the stylist is putting the finishing touches on her hair, one of the double doors to the suite bangs open and Carson's shit-eating grin appears at the other side. He's dressed in a black suit today, and it's hard for me to keep my eyes off of him even though I'm still pissed off. The guy really knows how to wear a damn suit.

“Carson, what if we were changing?!” Sara yells at him, but he just walks toward her and places a kiss on the top of her head, making the hair stylist wave him away and curse at him.

“I’m your Man of Honor. Don’t I get to hang out with you guys?” He catches my eye as he makes his way to the couch, plopping down noisily like he owns the place. I turn away, focusing on a spot on the wall instead of him.

I can feel his eyes burning me from across the room, like he’s trying to send me telepathic messages.

Caroline pulls him into conversation about football, which makes me blow out a breath of relief. I’m committed to not making a scene today, like I promised Sara, but sitting two feet from Carson is making me feel anxious and angry after last night.

“Alright, ladies, time to get dressed,” the wedding planner announces as Sara is standing up from the vanity.

“That’s my cue.” Carson laughs, standing up. “Logan, could I talk to you outside for a minute?”

I stand too. “Nope, gotta get dressed.”

I turn away from him with the intention of walking across the room, but he grabs my arm with one of his big hands. “It’ll just be a second. It’s about the wedding.”

I meet his gaze, wanting to call him out on his bullshit. I can’t, though, as there’re too many wandering eyes. I just sigh, wave a hand toward the door, and follow him out of the room when he goes.

Once I’m through the door, I walk a few feet down the hallway, just in case he makes me yell, then turn to look at him. He crowds me instantly. “Don’t be mad at me anymore.”

I take a step backwards, my back hitting the wall. “Wow, what a great apology.”

He sighs, pressing closer to me again. “I’m sorry.”

“Apology declined. Can I go?” I try to sidestep him, but he presses his body to mine, pushing me harder against the wall.



“No.” He drops his face to my neck. “You look gorgeous.”

“Carson,” I warn him, gritting my teeth.

His nose rubs up my throat. “And you smell good enough to eat.”

My stomach flips, but I stand my ground, putting my hands on his shoulders and trying to push him away. His body doesn't move – because he's a mountain of muscle – so I just end up frustrating myself.

“*Carson*,” I warn him again, making his face lift from my neck and look deep into my eyes.

“I'm sorry, Logan.” He speaks clearly, and part of me even believes him.

“Are you going to kiss her with the same mouth that ate my pussy yesterday?” I spit back.

“Probably,” he answers, then leans back into my nape and kisses my skin. “But I'll be thinking of you.”

I laugh humorlessly, shaking my head and pulling myself from him. I move to the side, slipping free from his grasp. “That isn't as fucking romantic and sexy as you think it is.”

As I start walking back to the suite, he grabs my hand, pulling me back into him and spinning me. He smashes his lips to mine, wrapping his free hand around the back of my neck and squeezing.

It would be so easy to give into him and how good he feels, but I pull away, and he lets me, loosening the grip he has on my neck. My eyes fill with moisture, and I blink it away before I ruin my makeup. “You can't just fucking do that, Carson!” I yell.

He opens his mouth to speak, but I cut him off.

“You can't just fucking kiss me, you can't grab me, you can't fucking come near me!” My voice cracks, but I keep yelling. “Stop talking to me. Don't even fucking look at me, dude. Just leave me alone.”

I turn to walk back to the suite, and this time, he lets me without saying another word.

*thirty-three*

## CARSON

Since I'm the Man of Honor, Hayden and Levi are left to take care of themselves for most of the day. I'm thankful, because if I had to hear them make fun of me for last night one more time, I was going to start swinging.

From getting cock blocked to leaping over the balcony, then Logan yelling at me in front of them... they had a lot of material to work with.

They're like flies on shit with gossip or anything they can bitch about. I'm certain in another life they were mean girls.

I've felt like shit all day, like someone hit me with a tractor trailer and drove away to let me pick myself up. I wish I could blame it on my hangover, but when the feeling still lingered after a beer and a greasy breakfast, I knew it was because of what I did to Logan.

It might have something to do with my blue balls too. It's not like I could go pull one out in the hotel bathroom with Hayden and Levi in the next room. But mostly, I feel fucking bad for hurting her.

As much as I want to justify my actions – and I do, I've come up with so many excuses – I know that what I did was fucked up. I should have warned her Cassidy was coming today. Partly because they hate each other and recently got in a fight, but mostly because of what's building between me and Logan.

She deserves better than to have been caught off guard like that, and she definitely didn't deserve for me to hook up with her last night when she's going to have to see me with Cass today.

I've never felt like this before – guilty about my actions or bad for lying and being sneaky. But with Logan, things are *different*, and I want to prove that to her.

That's why I decided to break up with Cassidy after the wedding today. I was going to do it before, but that would make for the most fucking awkward wedding in history.

Logan knows that what Cassidy and I have is purely for fun and image. I didn't think it mattered that she was in the background, but clearly, it's a problem. I'm going to fix the fucking problem, and I'm going to be someone that deserves her.

I'm falling for her, and I'm not afraid to show her that. I don't fucking care about anything else. Hayden was right – fuck everything else. I'm going to win her over, and she's going to realize that we could have something really great. I mean, yeah, it's complicated with us being family now, but whatever. I don't give a shit.

I spotted Cassidy sitting with her parents during the ceremony but didn't pay her any attention, trying to give it all to my mom and Gary, which was difficult since Logan looks delicious in her red bridesmaid's dress. It was a big ceremony, as expected. My mom is typically pretty extra, so I wasn't surprised.

The party starts right after the ceremony ends, in one of the larger ballrooms in the hotel, and the room is done up in over-the-top decorations. I find Levi and Hayden the minute I get there, hoping they have something I can sip on before everyone starts piling in.

Luckily, Hayden has filled up a Hydro Flask with rum, so I down a few shots from it to lessen the weight on my shoulders.

Cassidy comes prancing in the room just as I'm handing the bottle to Levi, her light-yellow dress fanning out around her as she crosses the room toward us.

She gives me a smile, making her pretty face light up as she wraps her arms around my neck. I instinctively wrap an arm around her waist, returning her embrace. "That was so beautiful, I cried like three times."

I chuckle. "You're a sap."

She presses her lips to mine, and I return the kiss as well – because what the fuck else am I going to do? When she pulls away, she looks into my eyes with her big green ones. “If my wedding isn’t that big and gorgeous, I’ll die.”

I grip her waist with my hand. “You have a while to figure it out.”

She rolls her eyes. “*We* do.”

I hear Levi choke on his mouthful of rum, making Cassidy’s head snap to him, venom on her tongue. “Good evening, *Levi*.”

Cassidy has never liked Levi, and she barely tolerates Hayden – only puts up with them because of me and the status it gives her to be wrapped around me when I’m with them. She thinks Levi is the shit on the bottom of her shoe, because he wasn’t born elite and filthy rich like her, which is pathetic. She doesn’t like that Hayden has fucked so many of her friends and then ghosted them, which is actually kind of a decent reason.

“Sup, Cass.” Levi tips his head to her once he’s stopped coughing, a little smirk on his lips.

“Cassidy, good to see you.” Hayden smiles like an evil bastard, making her groan and roll her eyes.

She threads her fingers through mine, ignoring Hayden and pulling me away from them. “I need a drink.”

The second I turn to follow her, I catch sight of Logan walking through the propped-open double doors of the ballroom, a bored look on her face.

“Ugh.” Cassidy makes a disgusted face. “The trash has arrived.”

I pull my hand from Cassidy’s when Logan’s gaze connects with mine from across the room, but I’m too late because Logan just laughs and turns away.

I sigh. “Let’s just get a drink and try to be civil, Cass.”

She clicks her tongue, heading toward the bar. “I’m always civil, but I can’t speak for the Franklin bitch.”

“*Enough, Cassidy,*” I snap, making her turn to look at me when she’s reached the bar across the room.

“What?!” She laughs sarcastically. “Why are you defending her?”

I sigh, waving down the bartender who’s at the opposite end. “I’m not. She’s my stepsister now, so you need to be nice to her.”

Cassidy laughs humorlessly, giving me a wounded look like I’ve just hit her puppy, but thankfully, the bartender approaches us to take our order before she can start bitching me out.

Since we’re surrounded by my relatives, I order two club sodas for us and once we have our glasses, I wordlessly lead Cassidy to a table across the room that Levi and Hayden have claimed. She bitches the whole way to the table about having to hang out with them, but I just ignore her and sit down to wait for the happy couple to arrive.

---

Everyone’s tipsy, dancing, laughing, and having a good time celebrating my mom and Gary’s new marriage, myself included. I’m surprisingly having a good time. I ditched Cassidy about an hour in, leaving her at a table with her parents so I could run upstairs to refill our flask. Then I just never went and to collect her again, so instead I’ve been dancing with my relatives, laughing with my best friends, and avoiding Logan at all costs.

She seems to be having a good time as well, dancing with her dad and making friends with everyone. She’s carefree, like nothing is bothering her, and it’s nice to see her let go and have a good time even though I know she’s upset.

I make my way to the stage, tapping on the microphone to get everyone’s attention, and when the DJ turns down the music, I give everyone a big smile.

“Good evening, everyone. When my mom told me I was going to be her Maid of Honor, I wondered if I would have to wear one of those matching red dresses like all her friends.” The room erupts in laughter, and when they die down, I continue. “Thankfully, she’s allowing me to call myself the *Man* of Honor, and I was allowed to wear a suit. My mom is my best friend, she’s my role model, and she’s everything to me.”

The crowd *awws*, and I turn to where Gary and my mom are sitting at their table. “I hope one day to be as happy as you are, Mom. And Gary, if you ever hurt my mom, I’ll hunt you down and kill you. Cheers, everyone.”

Everyone laughs once more, and when I hold up my glass of water, they all raise their glasses as well. I step off the stage, walking to my mom and pressing a kiss to her cheek. Gary offers me his hand, and I shake it, giving him a smile. “Congratulations, guys.”

They both thank me, then Logan is tapping on the mic, making me turn to look at where she’s standing on the stage.

She waves a hand. “Hi, everyone. I haven’t had a chance to meet all of you, so let me introduce myself. I’m Logan Briar, Gary’s daughter.”

She smiles at her dad. “Dad, when you told me you were getting remarried, I thought you were insane. But when I met Sara, and started to get to know her, I realized you really must just be lucky as hell. Sara, you are kind, generous, and sort of crazy. In the best way, of course.”

Everyone laughs, including me.

Logan continues, raising her glass. “I wish you guys a lifetime of happiness. Cheers.”

She steps off the stage, coming over to our parents to give them each a hug. When they’ve thanked her and my mom has dabbed a napkin to the side of her eyes, Logan turns away to head back to her table without a word to me. I walk after her, hot on her tail. “Logan.”



“Not right now, Carson. Please,” she says without stopping or turning to look at me, so I stop chasing her and go back to my table as well.

Gary gives a speech next, thanking everyone for coming and declaring his love for my mother. He says some more shit, but I’m too busy drowning my feelings in my Hydro Flask of rum that I block him out.

The bottle is empty again by the time my mom is walking on stage and stepping up to the microphone, so I give her my attention while Hayden sneaks upstairs.

“I want to start by thanking everyone for being here with us tonight. I’m so blessed that so many of you want to share the love that Gary and I have. I knew this would be a special day, but you all have made it even more perfect just by being here. Seven months ago, I hired a handsome, intelligent, caring, and amazing man to work with me.” She slides her gaze to Gary. “When you asked me to dinner a few weeks after, it didn’t even occur to me that it would be inappropriate to date my assistant.”

The crowd laughs, but in the corner of my eye, I catch Logan get up from her table and run from the room. My eyebrows pull down in confusion, but when my mom starts speaking again, I turn back to listen to her.

“Gary, you are constantly impressing me, inspiring me, and surprising me. I am so glad you walked into my life with the confidence and spark of happiness that you did, because I have truly found my soulmate within you. I love you.”

She holds her glass up. “Now, let’s all drink and dance the night away.”

The masses cheer for my mom, raising their glasses with her as the DJ turns the music back up and drops the center lights in the room down to create a dance floor.

I join my grandma on the dance floor, stealing her away from my grandpa for a dance, and when two songs have passed, he cuts in to take over. I press a kiss to my grandmother’s cheek, giving her a big smile and thanking her

for the dance. I make my way back to my table, finding Hayden and Levi laughing about something, and I sit down to search the room for Logan to steal a glance at her.

When I don't spot her, I sit up a little straighter and turn in my chair to double check behind me. I lean toward Hayden and Levi. "You guys seen Logan?"

"She ran out during your mom's speech. Hasn't come back yet," Levi answers, shrugging. "Probably in the bathroom or something."

It's been almost twenty minutes since they wrapped up speeches, and something inside of me pulls to go and look for her.

I stand. "I'll be back."

Walking across the ballroom, I dodge where Cassidy is sitting with her parents and leave through the doors of the ballroom.

I'm wondering where I should look first, but then I see a ball of red fabric at the end of the hallway, so I run that way.

Logan is curled in a ball against the wall, her chest heaving as she cries. Panic and fury run through me, worried someone has hurt her.

I bend down, putting a hand on her back, but I end up startling her.

She jumps, and when she notices it's me, she pushes me away. "Did you know?!"

I fall back on my ass. "Know what?!"

There's mascara dripping down her cheeks, her face red and blotchy from crying. She sobs, her chest rising and falling a few times before she can speak again. I lean forward, wanting to comfort her, but when she gives me a look of warning, I stop in place.

"Did you know that they were together for six months?!" she yells, sitting up against the wall and wrapping her arms around her bent legs.

“Logan, what are you talking about?” I question, scooting a little closer to her on my ass.

“My dad and your mom!” she yells louder, making me turn my head to make sure no one is around. “Did you know he was fucking cheating on my mom?!”

My head rears back. “*What?! With my mom?!*”

Her face falls, and she starts crying again. Not small, little cries, but full-blown sobs that echo through the hallway. Putting a hand on her arm, I try to soothe her. “Logan, calm down.”

She starts hyperventilating, her eyes connecting with mine and showing me that she can’t calm down. She can’t fucking get control right now.

“Okay, c’mon.” I stand up, bending down and slipping one arm under her legs and one under her back to pick her up. “We need to go somewhere a little more private.”

She wraps her arms around my neck, sobbing into the lapel of my suit jacket as I carry her down the hallway to try and find somewhere we can hide out. I try the first door I go past, but it’s locked. I try the second, and it opens to a dark room that looks like a smaller version of the one we’re having the wedding party in. I slide through the door, closing it behind me and sitting down on the floor, pulling Logan into my lap.

Keeping her arms wrapped around me, her face presses into my neck as she cries. “I can’t believe he would do that to her.”

I rub my hands down her back, trying to calm her down. “Shhh, it’s okay, baby.”

She cries until she can’t anymore, until my neck is completely soaked and marked with the blackness of her makeup. When she finally starts to go quiet, her chest moving a little bit slower, I run my hands down her back once more. “It’s okay.”

She shakes her head against my neck. “I can’t believe he would do that.”

I slide my hands to her hair, gently threading them through the strands. “Talk to me.”

She pulls her face from my neck, and I find her eyes wild and bloodshot. “When did you meet my dad?”

The question catches me off guard, so my brows pull down. “Ummm...” I run through the timeline in my head.

“Maybe five, six months ago?” I look at her, curious. “Why?”

Her eyes fill with tears again, but I stroke my hands along her hair and down her neck to try to get them to subside. “What is going on, Logan?”

She shakes her head, sniffing. “He was still with my mom then.”

“What?!” My muscles go tight. “When did your parents split up?!”

“*Split up?!* ” she spits. “They *never* split up. My mom died almost five months ago, and they were still together when she did!”

My mouth hangs open, and I can’t seem to find any words to say back to her. When she sees the shock on my face, she realizes that I wasn’t complacent in this, and she starts crying again.

“I’m going to fucking kill him,” I growl, tightening my hands in her hair from the anger running through my veins. “I swear to God, I’ll kill him.”

She chokes on another wave of tears, trying to clear her throat to make it subside. “I can’t fucking do this right now.”

She doesn’t say anything else, just tilts her head up to align her face with mine, then she presses her lips to mine in a kiss so soft that I feel myself relaxing.

*thirty-four*

## LOGAN

Carson is hesitant to kiss me back at first, keeping the movements of his lips slow and gentle, but when I shift on his lap to straddle him, his hands tighten in my hair again and his tongue slips into my mouth.

I slide my hands around his neck, digging them into the skin there as I speed up our kiss. He groans as he kisses me, and when I start to grind my hips in his lap, he yanks on my hair to pull my mouth from his.

“What?” I ask, breathless, leaning toward him again.

“Not here,” he groans, gripping my hair to keep my lips from his.

“Please,” I breathe. “Carson, I need you.”

He lets go of my hair at that, lunging for me and smashing his mouth to mine. I grind on him again, slipping my hands up his neck and into the back of his hair to pull on the strands as I press my chest to his.

We kiss fiercely, his tongue playing with mine and creating a fire between my legs that only he can put out. When I pull my lips from his, he opens his eyes to look at me.

“Fuck me.” I grind on him once more, rubbing the sweet spot between my legs against his growing cock. He presses his lips to mine again, pushing me backwards until I’m lying spread out on the floor and he’s between my legs.

“I don’t want the first time I fuck you to be on the floor of some ballroom.” He nips at my bottom lip. “I want to fuck you in my bed, where I can take my time with you, make you drench my sheets and scream my name.”

My stomach bottoms out at his filthy words, making me moan as my hips circle on their own accord. He kisses me again, pressing closer to me so his dick rubs my clit. “I want to spend all night between your legs, feasting and fucking until

you can't hold yourself up anymore. I don't want a quick fuck in a dark room. I want you shaking and exhausted when I'm done with you."

His lips find mine again, and when his hand circles my throat, I moan. His hips flex, putting more pressure between my legs and driving me crazy. "Carson," I moan against his lips, begging with one single word.

He nods, moving his hand from my throat to my chest, where he squeezes my breast for a moment before he continues dragging it down my front. He presses against my stomach, grabbing the fabric of my long dress to pull it up.

"Well, look what the fuck we have here."

The voice makes my head jerk up, catching Cassidy standing in the open doorway, her phone in her hand as if she's been taking photos of us.

Carson sighs, annoyed like it isn't his girlfriend catching him cheating on her. He falls down on top of me, groaning. "Goddamn it."

Cassidy laughs. "You're fucking the trash, Carson?"

I feel his body go solid as his muscles tighten up, then he slides off me and stands up to address her. "Shut the fuck up."

Pushing my dress back in place, I stand up too and take a step backwards to keep a good distance from them.

Cassidy laughs again. "Is this why I'm not allowed to be mean to her? Because you're fucking her? Great job. You managed to get the dirtiest girl on the block to sleep with you, now can we go?"

Carson takes a step toward her. "Watch your fucking mouth, Cass. I mean it."

"Oh my God." She covers her mouth as she laughs again. "You have feelings for the girl from the hood?"

I can feel the rage bubbling inside me, but I take a deep breath, so I don't charge across the room and lay her out again.

Cassidy's gaze moves to me. "Do mommy and daddy know what their kids are doing?"

I lunge forward, but Carson holds an arm out to catch me before I can reach her. "Logan, don't."

Cassidy laughs. "Let's go, Car. Let the trash take itself out."

"No," he snaps, making Cassidy's eyes flare. "We're done. I think you should leave, Cassidy."

She grits her teeth, snapping her eyes to me for a moment as the anger takes over, then she looks back at Carson. "We're not breaking up."

He sighs, leaning his head back in frustration. "Cass, enough already."

"No!" she yells, but then an evil smile takes over her face. "How about I walk back to that party and tell everyone what I just saw in here? That the new brother and sister are *fucking* each other?"

I lunge again, going for her throat, but Carson is quick to wrap his arms around my waist and pull me back. I spit my words at her like they're bombs. "Don't you fucking dare."

She giggles, an awful sound that makes my stomach turn over. "Car, I'm going to head back to the party. Why don't you get rid of the boner tenting your slacks, then join me. I'll give you ten minutes."

She turns on her heel, going back through the door and slamming it shut behind her.

Carson lets go of me, walking to the wall and sliding down until his ass hits the floor and his face falls into his hands.

I stand there staring at him, completely mind-fucked and overwhelmed. "What the fuck?"

He shakes his head, keeping it in his hands. "What the fuck is right."

I walk to him, dropping down in front of him and pulling his hands from his face to thread my fingers between his.



“What are we going to do?”

He laughs humorlessly, dropping his head back against the wall. “About which part? The fact your dad is a piece of shit, or the fact we’re now being blackmailed by my girlfriend so I keep dating her?”

I snort. “Either. Both.”

He shakes his head, connecting his gaze with mine. “Tonight, we’re not going to do anything. I’m not going to ruin this day for my mom. Tomorrow, we’ll figure it all out.”

I can’t help but feel annoyed and irritated by his answer, no matter how logical he’s being. “You don’t think your mom deserves to know?! And what, are you just going to just pretend everything is fine with the wicked witch of the cheer squad? Fuck her in your hotel room?”

“Of course, I’m not going to fuck her, Logan. I’m going to slap a smile on my face, let this party run its course, then get blackout drunk in my hotel room with my friends to ease the fucking burning rage inside of me. Yes, my mom deserves to know about your dad, but not tonight. Let her fucking have this, Logan, please. She deserves to have a slice of happiness before we set it all on fire.”

I press my face to his shoulder, sighing. “Fine.”

He puts a hand on my face, so I lift up to look at him. “I’m sorry.”

I shake my head. “Don’t. Just... don’t.”

He nods, understanding my words and reading the exhaustion in my tone. He rubs his thumbs across my cheeks. “You have mascara all over your face.”

I laugh. “Yeah.”

He sighs. “Are you going to come back to the party?”

Shaking my head, I suck a breath in and then blow it out slowly. “No, I don’t think I want to face my dad or see you with Cassidy, so I think I’ll just head up to my room.”

He nods, kissing me softly on the lips. “I promise I’ll fix this.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Carson,” I breathe against his lips, then stand up and leave the room without another glance at him.

*thirty-five*

## LOGAN

I bite my lip to stop the tears as I walk to the elevator, telling myself I can wait until I get into my hotel room to break down. I'm thankful we have another night here, because I don't think I would be able to get myself home tonight. I feel exhausted deep in my bones.

Taking the elevator up to my floor, I walk numbly to my room and unlock the door with my key card.

My vision starts to blur as it fills with tears, so as my door slams behind me, I start stripping. I kick off my shoes, then rip the comb from my hair and throw it across the room. Reaching around to my back, I unzip my dress, but I'm bombarded with thoughts of Carson sliding my zipper down last night. I can't hold it in anymore, and I sob, a loud and heavy sound that makes my chest cave. I slide out of my dress, leaving it lying on the floor as I head for the bathroom.

I slip my panties down my legs, then unclip my bra and throw it on the floor as well. Stepping into the shower, I turn the water on and stand under the freezing cold spray as it starts to heat up. My body shakes with sobs, but I keep moving. As the water turns molten, I wash my hair and then my body, letting cries shake through my system the whole time.

Scrubbing my face, I wash away all the expensive makeup that was applied to my skin just hours before.

I wash my face one more time when I'm finally breathing steady and only a few tears slip from my eyes, and when I'm completely cried out, I turn the water off and slip from the shower.

Wrapping a towel around my body, I dry my hair with another as I stare at myself through the foggy mirror. I shake my head at myself as I go through the entire day in my head. When I woke up this morning, my biggest problem was that I was angry with Carson over something that seems so

irrelevant and stupid now that it actually pulls a laugh from my mouth as I start to dry my body.

Once I'm dry, I walk to my bed completely naked.

I flip the lights off as I reach the bed, and when the room is cloaked in blackness, I crawl under the blankets and curl myself into a ball.

Letting myself cry fresh tears, I feel all the pain that's resurfacing as I'm alone in my dark and quiet room.

I cry until the darkness takes me, pulling me into sleep.

---

"Logan?" Carson's voice wakes me, and when I finally drift from sleep completely, I feel his mouth kissing my neck as his body wraps around me from behind.

"What are you doing?" I mutter, curling myself on my side so I can press against him.

"I need you," he slurs, his voice laced with misery.

"You're drunk," I state, slipping my fingers through his as he finally lays his head down behind mine and breathes against my hair.

He nods, and when I hear him start to cry, my heart cracks into a million pieces. "Carson..."

"I fucking hate this," he whispers, his voice aching in a way that makes my own eyes water.

I try to roll over to face him, but he tightens his arms around me, holding me in place. "Don't. Please. Don't look at me."

I blow out a breath, relaxing my body again. "What's going on, Carson?"

He clears his throat, but even through the slurring of his words, his tone is still laced with sadness. "I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to play football or be the star. I don't want Cassidy threatening you or holding this over my

fucking head...” He trails off, so I squeeze his hand, holding his hand closer to my chest.

“I don’t want to be this person anymore.” He continues, sniffing like his tears are slowing. “I want you, Logan. That’s all I want, and I’m so fucking tired of not being with you.”

“Carson, you’re drunk. You don’t know what you’re saying,” I say, even though the words feel like a lie on my lips.

“Just sleep with me, okay?” He nuzzles his face into the back of my hair, “Just be here with me.”

I sigh. “How did you even get in my room?”

He speaks against my hair. “I have a key.”

I want to laugh, because him having a key to my room is the most *Carson* shit I’ve ever heard. I just curl my back a little more, ignoring the retort on my tongue because he’s hurting.

“I’m naked,” I confess, even though he can probably feel it already.

He nods, and I start to feel his body drifting into sleep. “It’s okay, just sleep with me.”

“Okay,” I answer, closing my eyes again and letting the lulls of his breathing take me back under the darkness.

*thirty-six*

## LOGAN

I wake up around noon with Carson's body still wrapped tightly around me, his leg between one of mine like he was trying to get as close to me as possible while he slept. I pull myself from him, careful not to wake him and grab my phone from the nightstand before heading to the bathroom to pee.

Sitting down on the toilet, I unlock my phone as I do my business. I have a bunch of unread messages, most of them from Carson, before he crawled into my bed last night.

**Carson:** *Logan*

**Carson:** *I neejd to seeee you*

**Carson:** *Pleas waake up*

**Carson:** *Im cominfg to yojur room*

I chuckle as I read through them, imagining the state he was in when he sent them last night. He must have hit the minibar pretty hard before coming to my room.

The next message is from my dad.

**Dad:** *Tried knocking on your door before we left, but there was no answer. You must still be asleep. We're heading on the honeymoon. We'll be home next week. I love you, Logan.*

I don't reply. Too disgusted with him to respond, I just delete the message.

As I finish up in the bathroom, I brush my teeth, then wrap a robe around my body before I deposit my phone on the



counter and head back to bed to wake Carson up.

He's still asleep, bundled in the blankets on the bed like a cocoon, so I slide back underneath the warmth and press my face into his upper back as I wrap my arms around his waist. He groans when my hands slip under his shirt.

"Good morning." I speak against his skin, and his hands slide on top of mine so he can thread his fingers between my own. He squeezes them tightly, pulling me closer to him and nuzzling his face against the pillow.

I kiss along the flesh of his back, inhaling the scent of his skin as I do. "We should go home soon."

He shakes his head, his voice laced with sleep. "No."

"Mhmm." I suck on his skin, then bite him lightly. He rolls over quickly in response, taking me with him and putting himself on top of me, resting on his forearms.

His eyes are clear when he looks down at me and grumbles, "I'm tired."

I chuckle. "It's noon. Don't we need to check out soon?"

He shrugs, dragging his gaze down my body and then back up. "What is this?"

My brows pull down. "What's what?"

Grinning, he sits up and then pulls open the tie on the front of my robe. "I wanted to wake up to you naked."

I laugh again. "I'm sorry?"

He moves both sides of the tie on my waist to the sides, sliding his hands underneath the thick cotton of the robe and pulling it open to expose me. Licking his lips, he stares at my body. "Much better."

My nipples pebble in the cool air of the room, and when he leans down to suck one into his mouth, I bite into my bottom lip to stop myself from moaning. "Do we have time for this?"

He nods, slipping off my nipple as he rubs his hands down my waist to my hips. He keeps going, squeezing the flesh of

my thighs before he pulls my legs apart and puts himself between them.

My back arches instinctively, his eyes zeroed in at the apex of my thighs as I slide my feet up until my knees are bent on the bed. I pick my head up off the pillow, sliding my lips against his. “Do we have enough time to do all the things you want to do to me?”

He nods again, kissing me deeply and pressing forward until we fall back onto the pillows. His tongue plays with mine, his teeth nipping at my lips and tongue as he fucks my mouth with his, his hands rubbing up and down my body and creating fire in their wake.

I thread my hands into his hair, pulling the strands tight as we kiss, and when his hand slips between my legs, I moan into his mouth.

His fingers play with me, rubbing my clit in light circles that drive me wild and have me gyrating my hips against his hand. Slipping a finger inside me, he groans against my lips as I squeeze his hair tighter and yank his mouth closer. He moves at a torturous pace, fucking me slowly with his finger as his tongue slides against mine.

I pull my hands free from his hair, gliding them down his back until I reach his waist, where I pull his shorts down to free his cock. He pulls his mouth from mine to look down at what I’m doing, and when I grip him in my hand, he moans deep in his throat.

“Fuck me, Carson,” I breathe, sliding my hand along his thick shaft.

He looks at me, his eyes darkening, but he just smirks at me and shakes his head. “Be patient, baby.”

I don’t have a chance to feel the butterflies from him calling me baby, because then he adds a second finger inside of me and speeds up his hand, making my body fill with burning heat.

“Fuck.” I roll my head back, dropping the hold I have on his dick and squeezing the sheets in my fingers. He keeps

pumping his fingers, his mouth falling to my breast again where his lips suction around my nipple.

The two different sensations send me rocketing toward the edge of my climax, and when he presses his thumb to my clit and bites down on my nipple simultaneously, I fall. I scream out my orgasm, bucking my hips against his hand as he fucks me harder. He pulls from my nipple, slamming his mouth against mine to swallow down my moans as I ride out the rest of my orgasm, and once I'm coming down, he pulls away.

My chest heaves as I try to get my body to catch up with my brain, but he just licks down my throat, through the center of my tits and down my stomach. Pulling his fingers from my pussy, he swirls his tongue in my belly button and then keeps moving downwards.

When his tongue slides against my clit, I gasp and my back lifts from the bed, but he's quick to press a hand to my chest to push me back down. He sucks the bundle of nerves into his mouth, swirling his tongue around and making me cry out again.

My hips jerk, and when he moves downwards again and pushes his tongue inside of me, my legs start shaking.

"Carson." I moan his name, grabbing at the sheets with my fists as he continues flicking his tongue inside of me.

"Give me what I want, Logan. Come on your brother's tongue like the good girl you are."

I buck my hips against his face, chasing his tongue every time he pulls out to thrust it back inside of me, and when he licks from my entrance to my clit again, my second orgasm hits me at a million miles an hour.

I scream as my body turns to embers, my pussy flaring as he continues to lap at my clit and push me through my orgasm with his skilled tongue. His hands squeeze my hips as I ride out the pleasure, the simple act of his fingers pressing into my flesh making my orgasm stronger.

When I start to come down, he pulls his face from between my legs and pushes his shorts down the rest of the way to his

ankles, then kicks them off effortlessly. Crawling up my body, he kisses every inch he moves past, causing all the nerves within me stand at attention.

When he reaches my face again, he slides his tongue into my mouth, making me taste my release as he reaches down with his hand and lines his cock to my entrance.

He pulls his mouth back a centimeter. "Ready?"

I spread my legs wider, sliding my hands down his back to his ass where I push him, making his dick slide inside me. His teeth clench, his eyes staying on mine as he pushes all the way in slowly. I squeeze the globes of his ass, clenching all of my muscles as I feel every single inch of him.

We moan together as he fills me, his face twisting up in pleasure as he adjusts to the feel of my pussy squeezing him tight.

He groans into my dropped open mouth. "You feel like fucking heaven."

He pulls his hips back, then plunges back inside of me, making me dig my fingernails into the flesh of his ass as I roll my head back and moan.

Then he does it again, slamming his hips to mine over and over so hard that I press into the bed and reach down to grab the sheets.

Slowing his hips, he kisses me languidly for a moment before he pulls back and looks deep into my eyes, groaning as he speaks. "Don't grab the sheets, they aren't doing this to you. Grab onto me, Logan. Show me how good it feels when I fuck you."

I do as he says, running my hands down his back as he fucks me slowly. When he speeds his hips up again, pulling sounds from my mouth that I don't recognize, I press my nails against his back and scratch him. He groans as his head falls to my neck, his hips slapping mine as he creates a pressure so intense inside of me that I feel like I might explode.

He pulls back, slipping free from inside of me and kisses my mouth once before he sits up. "Roll over, baby."

I comply wordlessly, feeling empty without him deep inside of me, but when I'm lying flat on my stomach on the bed, he slides his hand underneath my stomach and lifts my hips until I'm on my knees in front of him. Then he's slamming back into me, grabbing my hips with his big hands so I don't move across the bed. He's so deep in this position that I can barely hold myself up from the pressure in my core when he starts thrusting.

My head falls down. "Holy shit, Carson."

He thrusts languidly, moving his hips in a circular motion as he does, making his cock grind against me from the inside. Sliding his hand into my hair, he wraps the long strands around his fist and tugs, pulling my head back up and turning it so I'm looking at him.

He's glistening with sweat, all the muscles in his stomach and chest chiseled and tight as he fucks me from behind, and when he catches my eye, he gives me that smirk that drives me crazy.

"Faster," I moan, biting down on my lip as I watch his body work, and when he complies, my cunt tightens around him so hard that my legs shake, threatening to fall out from under me.

He groans, hitting deep inside of me over and over again, and when he yanks on my hair again, I scream, feeling my next climax barreling toward me. He pulls harder, so I push myself up into a kneeling position in front of him, putting my back against his chest.

He finds my mouth with his, kissing me like he's starved for my lips, and when he moans in his throat, the vibration runs through his tongue to mine. He keeps driving his hips forward, and I try my best to meet his thrusts with backwards ones of my own, but the pleasure is building so hot inside of me that all I want to do is fall back down and take everything he's giving me.

When he uses his free hand to rub down my back, then through my ass crack, he pulls his mouth from mine, keeping

his face against mine as he speaks. “Have you ever been touched here?”

He rubs a circle around the puckered hole of my ass, and when I shake my head, he grins. “Can I?”

I flick my tongue out to lick at his bottom lip. “You can do whatever you want to me if you keep fucking me like this.”

He smirks, letting go of the grip he has on my hair. “Lay back down.”

Falling back to the bed, I press my chest against the sheets but keep my knees bent on the bed, my ass up for him. His hips smack against me a few times, then I watch as he spits directly onto my asshole, using his fingers to spread the saliva around.

My muscles clench on instinct, making him groan as my pussy sucks down his cock, but he smacks his hand down on my ass cheek as his fingers rub wet circles around my puckered hole. “Take a deep breath for me, baby.”

I do as he says, sucking oxygen in and then blowing it out slowly. As I do, he slips his finger through the ring of muscle, creating a bite of pain between my cheeks. I take another breath, and when his hips drive forward at the same time as his finger does, I yell out my pleasure.

“Oh my God.” I moan at the dual sensations, my hands grabbing the blankets tight.

He keeps a steady pace, fucking me with his cock and his finger. My orgasm creeps up on me, making me scream into the blankets under my face. He moves his hips faster, giving my climax more length as my pussy tries to swallow him whole.

“Oh, fuck, Logan. *Jesus Christ.*” He thrusts his finger in my ass, throwing his head back as my orgasm continues. “You’re going to fucking kill me.”

I’m the one that feels like I’m going to cease to exist, though, my body shaking and convulsing through the best, most excruciatingly powerful orgasm of my life.

When it finally subsides, I collapse onto the bed, his cock and finger slipping from inside of me.

He leans over me, kissing along my spine and making goosebumps pop up on every inch of my skin.

“You’re so beautiful,” he murmurs against my skin, making me smile into the sheet that’s suffocating me. Turning my head, I look at him and grin.

“Move over,” I command him, and when he slides off of me to sit up against the headboard next to me, I throw my leg over him and straddle his thighs.

He watches me with a heated gaze, and when I slide my hand along his soaking shaft, he groans.

Running my fist up and down him, I keep my gaze on his, and even though exhaustion is claiming my body, the need for his release is stronger.

“I want to feel you come inside of me so bad,” I say, slipping my tongue from my mouth to lick my lips.

“Ride me, then,” he answers, his eyes flicking to where I’m still rubbing his cock.

I move up his legs, positioning myself at his hips as I put his cock at my entrance. I sit down slowly, letting him fill me again, my head falling back in pleased bliss.

His hands stroke up my back as he moans, his fingers squeezing the flesh of my hips as I start moving on top of him. The fire reignites inside of me as I grind on top of him, his dick hitting me deep inside.

I moan, wrapping my hands around his neck as I ride him. “God, you feel so fucking good.”

He leans forward, capturing my mouth with his as his hips start bucking up into me.

He pulls back. “*You* feel so fucking good, Logan.” He groans. “So fucking tight and perfect, like your pussy was made just for me.”

His words have me moving faster, thirsty and needy for his cum like it's the only thing in the world that matters.

He grabs my hips tighter, moving me back and forth faster on top of him as he grunts and huffs. "Fuck – Logan, I'm gonna come."

I drop my head back a little. "God, *yes*. Fill me with your cum, Carson, I need it so bad."

I grind down on him, tightening the inner walls of my pussy as I bounce and thrust, my hands squeezing his throat as he starts to explode inside of me. His head knocks back against the headboard, but I go with him, tightening my hold on his neck as I continue to ride him.

I keep his gaze, even as he's bucking so hard underneath me that my body shakes, making sure he sees exactly who's pulling the pleasure from his body.

When his hips start to slow, I squeeze the muscles inside of me again, making him groan loud as I let go of his throat. His chest heaves. "Fucking shit, baby."

I grin, leaning forward to kiss his lips as I wrap my arms around his head. His tongue slips into my mouth, stroking against mine slowly as we kiss and breathe heavily.

After a moment, he pulls back to look at me. "That was better than I could have ever fucking imagined."

I nod, sliding onto the bed next to him and curling myself toward him. He moves down too, laying his face in front of mine to stare into my eyes. We sit in silence, staring at each other in a haze and running our hands all over each other's bodies. After a while, I kiss his lips lightly. "I really like fucking you."

He smirks, threading his fingers into my hair. "I really fucking like *you*."

I kiss him again, then pull his hands from my hair and start to slip from the bed. When he grabs my hand and tries to pull me back to him, I laugh. "Your jizz is dripping out of me, can I clean up?"



Laughing, he rubs his hands down his face. “You’re nasty.”

I slip from the bed to run to the bathroom, yelling back at him. “You’re the one that put it there!”

*thirty-seven*

## CARSON

There's a bang on the door once Logan has closed herself in the bathroom, Levi's voice barreling through the thick wood. "Are you guys done?"

I sigh, annoyed. "Hold on!"

Standing up, I find my boxers and slip them on before I go to the door.

I pull it open an inch, just in case Logan comes out of the bathroom in her birthday suit. "What?"

Levi is smirking, and Hayden just looks bored where he's standing, leaning up against the wall.

"Can we go home?" Levi asks.

"What do I care? Do whatever the fuck you want," I growl.

"I'm your ride, bitch!" Hayden yells without looking at me.

"Right." I nod. "Gimme ten minutes."

Closing the door before either of them can say anything else, I start putting the rest of my clothes on while I wait for Logan. She comes out of the bathroom a minute later. "What're you doing?"

I look at her, grinning as I run my gaze down her naked body. She's gorgeous, simple as that. She's perfect in every way, and it has my cock thickening in my pants again.

"Carson!" She snaps her fingers, making my gaze shoot to hers. "Focus."

"What?" I ask, smirking.

She rolls her eyes. "Since you're dressed, I'll assume you're leaving."

I cross the room to her, threading my hands into her hair and kissing her once before pulling away to look at her. "We

are going home. Our ride is about to leave. Are you packed?"

"I can be in five minutes." She kisses me again, pressing her bare chest against mine and making the thoughts of leaving completely fall from my mind. I wrap my hands under her ass, lifting her so her legs go around my waist.

She pulls back. "I thought we had to go?"

"We can spare a minute." I kiss her again, walking to the bed and falling down so her back hits the mattress and I'm pressed between her legs.

Her tongue plays with mine as we make out, her legs lifting and wrapping around me as she grinds against me. I pull back, breathless. "I want to fuck you again."

She grinds her hips, rubbing against my hard dick. "I can tell."

I thrust once, hitting her clit with the outline of my cock, and she hums. "As soon as we get home, baby, I'm fucking you on every surface in the house."

Kissing along my jaw, she moans in her throat. "Sounds good to me."

Standing up, I look down at her. "Let's get out of here."

She nods, standing up as well and heading for the closet to get dressed. I help her pack, throwing a bunch of random shit from the bathroom into a backpack, and when I'm done and walking back into the room, she's finished packing her clothes.

"Ready?" I ask, and she nods. She double checks the bathroom and the closet one last time, and then we're on the move.

I slide my keycard into my door, finding Hayden and Levi sitting on the couch drinking iced coffees. They turn to look at me once the door is closing behind me and Logan, and Hayden stands up. "About time."

"Let me just pack my shit and we can go." I start to head toward my suitcase.

“I already packed it. Just double check the bathroom,” Hayden tells me, so I do as he says, turning to go to the bathroom and looking through to make sure we haven’t left anything behind.

When I walk out, Levi and Logan are laughing together and it makes my blood boil. He finds my gaze and takes a step back, lifting his hands. “Deep breaths.”

“Let’s just go,” I growl, going for the door.

Hayden and Levi snicker behind me, and all three of them follow me out of the room.

“Logan, I didn’t know you were a screamer,” Levi comments as we’re waiting for the elevator. I shoot him daggers, assuming Logan will be embarrassed.

“There’s a lot you don’t know about me, Levi,” she retorts, keeping her gaze on whatever she’s doing on her phone.

“You didn’t scream with me.” Levi faux pouts when she looks at him and laughs.

Before I can smack him in the head, Logan answers him. “Carson’s dick is bigger.”

I bark out a laugh, and Hayden chuckles too. Levi’s face falls, and Logan just grins at me like she’s impressed with herself. The elevator doors open, we all step on, and when Logan threads her fingers through mine, I can’t help but smile.

“Maybe I could get a redo,” Levi grumbles.

I squeeze Logan’s hand. “Not a chance.”

Hayden sighs. “God, is this going to be some lame-as-shit love triangle now?”

Logan laughs, and Levi speaks up. “Nah, I’ve moved on.”

“In the last two seconds?” Hayden questions.

Levi points a hand at me and Logan. “Look how damn cute they are, dude!”

Hayden groans. “God, you two are going to be that boring couple now, though, right?”

Logan clicks her tongue. “One, there’s nothing boring about me. I am a blast. Two, Carson has a girlfriend already. Three, mind your fucking business, Hayden.”

I laugh, but Hayden keeps going. “That reminds me, what are we going to do about Cassidy? That bitch needs to get what’s coming to her. Do we have a plan?”

He looks at each of us, and when his gaze finds mine, I shake my head.

The elevator doors open, and I don’t miss the way Hayden’s mouth turns up in a sinister smile as he walks through the doors. I know him well enough to know he’s concocting something fucked up.

He gives the hotel valet his ticket, and once the driver has pulled his Mercedes G-Class up to the curb, the bellboy starts loading our bags into the back. We all slip in, Levi in the front, with me and Logan in the backseat. Hayden slides the guy some cash, then gets into the driver’s seat.

“What happened to the Maserati?” Logan asks as Hayden is pulling out onto the road.

“We had a lot of bags, figured I would bring the G,” he answers, focusing on the road.

“You have a Maserati *and* a G-Wagon?!” Logan questions, making me and my best friends laugh.

Hayden looks at her in his rear-view mirror. “And about ten other cars that just sit at my house.”

“Fucking Luxington,” she huffs under her breath.

Levi hooks up his phone, putting on some music, and we all enjoy the ride wordlessly. It’s about twenty minutes across town to my house, and when we’re pulling through the gates of my neighborhood, Levi turns the volume down and twists in his seat to look at me.

“We still having a party tonight?”

“Ehhh...” I hesitate, and Levi frowns at me. “I don’t know.”

“We’re having a party?” Logan asks, grinning.

I look at her. “We were going to, since the parentals are in Hawaii, but we could just chill... Spend time together?”

“God, you’re fucking lame.” Hayden laughs.

I roll my eyes at the back of his head, and Logan’s hand wraps around my jaw. “Have your party. I’ll invite some people.”

“Yes!” Levi holds a hand out to her, and she gives him a high-five. Then he points his finger at her, feigning seriousness. “Hot girls only.”

She gives him a flat look. “Shut up.”

We all laugh as Hayden is pulling into our driveway, and once the truck is in park, Logan and I get out, grab our bags, then round the front. Hayden pops his head out his open window. “We’ll be back at like eight.”

I nod, slapping his hand in goodbye.

I turn to Logan, smirking. “Get inside, and get your clothes off.”

She laughs, but goes for the door, dragging her suitcase behind her as she unzips her jacket.

*thirty-eight*



## LOGAN

Carson fucks me on the kitchen counter, the couch, the floor just outside the patio doors, and then in the pool. And when I say he fucked me... Boy, did he fuck me. There was no effort made by me – he took control of my body like a madman, refusing to let me ride him into oblivion because he wanted to claim my orgasms like they were his human right.

I'm slumped over, lying on a recliner at the edge of the pool with a towel covering my naked body, waiting for Carson to bring me a glass of water. Because not only did he make me come 5 times and fuck me six ways to Sunday, he's also making sure I stay hydrated.

I could get used to this.

“Here, baby.”

I look up at him, blocking the sun from my eyes as I grab the glass of water he's extending to me as I run my gaze along his strong torso. He has a towel wrapped around his waist, and his hair is dripping water from the pool.

“Thank you.” I grin, taking a refreshing mouthful as I let my eyes drop closed.

“Drink the whole thing. I'm not done with you yet.” He sits down next to me, shimmying his hips to get me to move over on the chair.

I do as instructed, because apparently, he's the boss of me today, downing the entire glass of water before I hand it back to him. He puts it down on the ground, then turns to face me and throws his legs over my own. Running his hands through my hair as I lean against his chest, he stares at me. “You're amazing.”

I grin lazily, looking up at him through heavy eyelids. “Your dick is made of magic.”

He laughs as he continues to play with my hair. “Don’t forget about my tongue.”

Rubbing my nose along his neck, I whisper my next words. “You’ll have to give me a reminder.”

I hear him suck a breath in, feeling his body go solid as he chuckles and moves quickly, flipping me onto my back and landing on top of me. He rips the towel off of me, letting his gaze rove slowly along my curves until he zeros in on the apex of my thighs. He hums between his lips. “I am kind of hungry.”

I don’t have a chance to respond, because then he’s moving down my body and ripping my thighs apart. He doesn’t waste time, just goes mouth-first between my legs and starts feasting, moaning in the back of his throat as he licks and sucks on my flesh.

My head rolls back. “Jesus Christ, Carson.”

He pulls the pleasure from my body with his tongue, making every inch of my skin heat and tingle as I feel my orgasm rushing through me. He pulls back an inch, turning his head to bite along the insides of my thighs. “I could eat your pussy all day.”

The vibration of his voice against my thighs makes me roll my hips, begging him without words to continue, and he chuckles against my skin. He grabs my thighs with his big hands, spreading my legs farther and pushing me down into the chair. He spreads me with one hand, licking my clit quickly with a pointed tongue that makes me buck against him to apply more pressure.

“So fucking greedy.” He moans, sliding a hand to my pussy and pinching my clit. I cry out, arching against the chair and pressing farther against him, which makes him chuckle again. “C’mon, baby, drench my face.”

He thrusts two fingers into me hard and fast as his tongue dances circles around my clit. My hands thread into my own hair, pulling the strands as the pleasure becomes too much to handle. Then I’m coming with a scream from my lips. He licks

faster at my clit, lapping at me like he can't help himself, slurping through the saliva that's dripping from his lips as he does.

I pull at my hair as my climax peaks, yelling his name over and over as my body is taken over by my pleasure. My vision goes white as every muscle in my body tightens and convulses, my legs squeezing his head tight. He doesn't seem to care, just continues to let me ride it out on his face. I fall lax, panting and heaving as I try to catch my breath from an orgasm so intense that my entire body is throbbing to my heavy heartbeat.

He keeps licking at my cunt slowly, slipping his tongue inside of me once he's pulled his fingers free to swallow down the release he's pulled from me.

"Carson," I groan, making him lift his head from between my legs with a grin pulling at his lips. He kisses up my body, taking his time and creating embers to ignite on every inch his wet mouth touches. By the time he reaches my face, his tongue slips into my mouth and I suck it, tasting myself on him as my hands wrap around his back to feel his skin.

"Have you guys been doing this all day?"

Hayden's voice makes Carson pull his lips from mine, looking over the back of the chair to address his friend.

"Go away," Carson growls, pressing his chest to mine to cover my naked body.

"Oh, relax." Levi sighs, walking around until he comes into my line of sight. "It's nothing we haven't seen before."

Carson's head falls into my neck as he sighs. "Jesus Christ."

I laugh, my chest shaking and making Carson bounce up and down. Looking at Levi, I roll my eyes. "Did you need something?"

Hayden answers for him, from wherever he is behind me. "Yeah, we're having a party, remember?"

Carson doesn't pick up his head, just speaks to his friend into my neck. "You said you wouldn't be back until 8."

"Well, we're early," Hayden replies, boredom lacing his tone.

Carson still doesn't raise his head, just grumbles against my skin again. "You could have called."

"Yeah, I've been calling you all day, motherfucker. You've been too preoccupied with Logan's snatch to answer," Hayden snaps.

Finally, Carson lifts from my neck to yell at his friend. "Hayden! Go inside so my girlfriend can get dressed before I beat the fuck out of your scrawny ass!"

My stomach drops, making all my muscles tense up as I watch Levi make a humored expression and then walk back toward the house. I assume Hayden has walked inside too when I hear the door shut behind me, and Carson lifts off of me.

"You called me your girlfriend," I say, lifting an eyebrow.

Carson looks at me from over his shoulder as he ties his towel around his waist. "Did I?"

"You did." I grab my towel from the ground, wrapping it around my body before I stand up. "Which must have been a mistake, because I'm pretty sure you already have a fake girlfriend, and you haven't *asked* me to be your girlfriend."

He laughs. "Shut up, Logan."

I grin, walking behind him and sliding my hands around his waist. "Were you planning on *asking* me to be your girlfriend, Carson?"

He turns around to face me, that cocky smirk pulling at his lips. "I don't ask for things that are already mine."

Huffing out a laugh, I drop my head back a little. "You're such a douchebag."

He shrugs, meeting my gaze. "But you like me anyways."

I hum between my lips, narrowing my eyes in amusement. “A little.” He kisses me at that, laughing between his lips as we collide.

I savor the feel of his mouth against mine, blowing the air from my lungs out through my nose and letting my body go lax. I can’t stop the feeling that something bad is coming, that I’m going to wake up from the daydream Carson and I have been living in today. That it’s all going to be pretend.

He pulls back, wiggling his eyebrows. “Let’s go take a shower.”

“C’mon.” I move my hands from around his waist, slipping my fingers between his as I start to walk toward the house. I shake my head. “My pussy’s gonna be wrecked tomorrow.”

---

“*That’s* what you’re wearing?!” Carson blanches from behind me, making me spin around to face him. I drag my gaze up and down his body, giving him a dirty look.

“I’m sorry?” I question, raising an eyebrow. “Did I give you the impression that I’m the type of girl that dictates her outfits based on how a *man* feels about them? Would you like to start over?”

He huffs, but I don’t miss the twitch to his lips as he tries not to smile. He steps toward me slowly, sliding his hands around my waist once he reaches me. “You look really hot.”

“Much better.” I grin, kissing his cheek. “Thank you.”

I’m dressed in jeans that are torn apart, showing off the fishnet stockings that I have on underneath. The bralette I paired with it is black, with straps crossing over my cleavage. There isn’t as much skin showing as there could be – my jeans are high waisted and the stockings come up even higher, almost reaching where the straps of my bralette crossing over my ribs are.

“I’m going to have to pluck the eyeballs from the skulls of every guy here,” Carson grumbles, squeezing my hips.

I can already hear the bass from the music Levi turned on in the living room, and when I made my way upstairs earlier, Hayden was setting up endless liquor bottles on the kitchen counter. I am guessing we’re not going to school tomorrow, since it’s feeling like it’s going to be a long night.

“You’ll have more important things to worry about if Cassidy got an invite.”

He pulls back to look at me. “Hayden knows better.”

Clicking my tongue, I roll my eyes at him. “Are you really saying you don’t think someone didn’t tell her that her *boyfriend* is having a party tonight?”

He sighs. “She wouldn’t dare show up after the way we left things at the wedding.”

“You never told me what happened after I went upstairs last night,” I point out, looking into the blue sea of his eyes.

“Nothing happened,” he says. “I kept my distance from her, and when it was time for her to leave, I told her to stay away from me.”

“And?” I push.

“And nothing. She made some more empty threats and left.”

I sigh, searching his gaze. As his hands run up my back, and he pulls me into him, I feel a twinge in my chest as I imagine what will happen if Cassidy’s threats aren’t as empty as Carson thinks they are. She holds our fate in the palm of her sick and twisted hand, and I don’t want this to blow up before it even starts.

“Logan,” he breathes into my neck as he melds his body to mine. “She’s not going to show up, and if she does, I’ll throw her out.”

I rest my head against his. “It doesn’t matter. It’s not like we can even *be* together tonight, Carson. Dumb and Dumber invited the entire school.”

“We could just tell everyone we’re smashing,” he mumbles into my hair.

Laughing, I pull back and look at him like he’s the dumbest boy in the world. “You’re funny.”

He smiles. “We’re going to have to tell people eventually, so why not just rip the Band-Aid off?”

I press my lips together, blowing air from my nose. “I’m going downstairs to get blackout drunk. Please stop being a moron.”

He laughs as I pull from his arms to start walking to the door. Grabbing my hand, he pulls me back against his body. “Make out with me a little first, baby.”

I grin as he presses his lips to mine, his tongue licking against my bottom lip to request entrance. I open for him, meeting his tongue with my own as his hands slide around my waist, then down to my ass. He squeezes the globes as we kiss, making a mess of the lipstick I applied moments before. Running my hands up the back of his neck, I play with the strands of hair there as I melt against him, nipping at his lips with my teeth and making him groan.

He squeezes me so hard that I squeal in my throat, but he swallows down the noise as he keeps kissing me. I suck on his tongue as it moves around inside my mouth, making him flex his hips against mine.

“You’re making me hard,” he groans, pressing his erection against me again.

I slide my hand down his stomach, hovering just above the waistband of his jeans. “You want me to take care of it?”

“If you touch my cock right now, Logan, I’ll spend the entire night between your legs. Is that what you want?” he breathes into my mouth.

I nod. “Kind of, yeah.”

There’s a bang at the door, making me jump away from Carson and wipe at my mouth. Levi comes barging in. “Yo, Lo. Your friends are here.”

I run my thumb against the outline of my bottom lip. “Did you just call me Lo?”

He shrugs, his gaze pinging from me to Carson, then back again. “Were you guys fucking?”

I sigh, laughing a little. “I’m fully clothed, is that how people fuck?”

He steps toward me, a grin twisting up his lips. “Wanna try?”

Carson grunts, stepping toward his friend and making me laugh. “Levi, you’re upsetting the caveman, go downstairs.”



*thirty-nine*

## CARSON

When we get downstairs, there's already a crowd of people in the living room, as well as a pod of people at the front door. Logan gets a pep in her step, running to Giuliana – who I recognize from Instagram. I'm unsure what I'm supposed to do... do I wait for an introduction, or do I walk away?

I decide to wait, standing off to the side and running my gaze over the kids from Franklin. When I spot Austin standing at the door, all the blood in my body ignites. I clench my fists, but stand still to watch what Logan will do. No way she'll embrace that motherfucker in front of me, right?

She goes around the group, including lots of girls who are in outfits as equally exposing as Logan's, which makes me feel better about her outfit, and when she reaches Austin, she hollers and jumps to give him a hug.

Nope.

Not today.

I step toward her, past her girlfriends, who are staring out into the living room at the crowd of people who are strangers to them, and slide my hand along her arm until I'm gripping her wrist.

Turning her head, she drops her embrace on Austin and gives me that look – the one she's mastered that is equally impressive as it is scary. She's telling me to back off with her eyes, but my little spitfire knows I'm not going to. She grins as I do, her white teeth showing as she shakes my hand off of her.

“Guys, this is Carson... my stepbrother.” Her eyes sparkle with humor as they stay connected with mine, even as she addresses her friends.

“Carson, Carson, Carson,” Giuliana says, pulling my attention. She crosses her arms over her chest. “The infamous stepbrother.”

I laugh, returning my gaze to Logan's. "Talking about me?"

"Only bad things." She smiles, addressing her friends. "Let's go drink."

They all shuffle past me, leaving me standing at the door watching Logan's hips swing as she crosses the threshold of the entryway to the living room. She turns her head once she's nearing the center of the room, winking at me when no one is paying attention.

I don't miss the way Austin stays close to her, way too close for comfort. I'll need to do something about that before I combust with rage.

---

I'm three beers and two shots deep by the time I get Logan alone. I find her out by the pool with her jeans rolled up to her knees so her legs can dangle in the water, a few people swimming or lounging around nearby. I drop down next to her, crossing my legs so they don't go into the pool. "Where are your friends?"

She grins at me, her eyes squinty and her face red. "Dancing."

I can see the mischief in her gaze when I stare deep into her eyes, alcohol doing most of her thinking for her. "You drunk, baby?"

She nods. "A little. Wanted to get some fresh air." She holds up a water bottle. "Hydrate a little."

I feel tipsy myself, but I'm definitely not as intoxicated as her. "Smart."

I smile at her, and when she leans into my neck and breathes me in, I slide my hand down and wrap my pinky around hers. She makes me feel weightless, and as her mouth kisses along the skin of my neck, I drop my face to the top of her head. "Someone's going to see us."

She sighs. “Wanna go to the pool house?”

I kiss the top of her head. “Yeah.”

Before I can stand up, Levi is pushing through the back door of the house and yelling, “We have a problem, dude!”

Looking at him over my shoulder, Logan lifts her head. “What?”

Levi reaches us, bending down to put his hands on his knees and breathing hard like he just ran a mile. “Cassidy’s right behind me.”

My gaze moves to the door again, just as Cassidy is walking through in a little black dress, her mouth twisted into a smile. I sigh. “fuck.”

Looking at Logan, I find her laughing. I perk my brow, questioning her as her laughter infects me, and I start smiling. “What are you laughing at?”

She takes a breath, sucking down her laughter as she tries to compose herself. “Sorry, it’s not funny. It really isn’t.” She chuckles a little.

“There’s my boyfriend!” Cassidy squeals as she’s nearing us. “I must have missed the invite to your party in the mail. Luckily, my whole squad got invited and passed it along.”

I stand up. “No, you just weren’t invited.”

She grits her teeth, her puffy lips still twisted into a smile. “I warned you, Car.”

I step toward her. “Your empty fucking threats mean *nothing* to me, Cass. What are you going to do? Tell the whole school your boyfriend left you for his stepsister? Go ahead, try. I’m sure you’ll end up looking great.”

She laughs humorlessly, her eyes focusing behind me onto Logan, who’s watching us closely. “I’ll end up looking better than that trash.”

My nostrils flare. “Watch it.”

She finds my eyes again. “Last chance, Car. Come inside with me, be the good boyfriend, or I’ll tell everyone, including

mommy and daddy. I'm sure they'd love to see the photo I took of you two going at it on the floor of that ballroom."

"You know what?!" Logan yells from behind me, making me turn to look at her. "Go ahead. I don't fucking care anymore." She stands, stepping next to me. "Do whatever you want, Cassidy. But when you're done, get the fuck out of my house."

"Lo—" I start, but she cuts me off.

"And next time you threaten Carson, I'll remind you what my fists taste like." She gets in Cassidy's face.

Cassidy goes red, her gaze moving from Logan to me, then back again. She laughs. "Do you think I'm scared of you? You're nothing but white trash that got pushed to the wrong side of town," she spits.

Logan clenches her fists at her sides as Cassidy continues. "When the Shiny New Toy Syndrome fades, you'll be tossed aside and forgotten. It'll be like you never even happened. And I'll be here, just like I always have been."

"Cass—" I shout, only to lose the words that are sitting on my tongue when Logan springs forward and punches Cassidy in the face, knocking her head back. She doesn't go for a second shot, just shakes out her hand and walks back to my side with a grunt.

Cassidy screams, grabbing her face with a shaking hand, but she doesn't say a word, just looks at me and Logan standing together as her face turns red with rage. She takes a step backwards on her heels, and I can almost see the gears turning in her head as she decides what she's going to do next.

She spins, walking slowly toward the back door like she's giving us a chance to stop her. I look at Logan, urgency burning inside me. "Your hand okay?"

She nods. "I couldn't listen to her bullshit for another second."

"Uh, guys?" Levi interjects, making me realize I had completely forgotten he was standing out here with us.

“Should we follow the wicked witch of the west, or let her burn down the whole city by herself?”

Cassidy has reached the door, and when she peels it open, we all move, following her inside to see what she’s going to do.

She doesn’t pay us any attention, just walks across the room and unplugs the speakers that are blasting music. One by one, everyone turns to look at her, as if they’re in slow motion. She smiles, clears her throat, and then opens her big mouth.

“I just thought everyone should know that Carson has been cheating on me.” Her smile drops, like she’s trying to convey that she’s completely heartbroken over the fact. She dabs a finger under her dry eye. “With his sister, Logan.”

“Yikes, she had to say it like that, huh?” Levi mutters. Logan snorts, but then slaps a big ass grin on her face just in time for everyone to turn and look at us.

I wave a hand. “Thank you, Cass.”

“Dude,” Graham, one of the guys on my football team says, “you fucking your sister?”

“I am his *stepsister!*” Logan laughs.

“Cassidy,” I address my ex, who’s now being circled by her friends, “we broke up almost a year ago. I stuck by your side because you wanted to keep being Queen Bee and you’re an easy lay. Please don’t give everyone the wrong impression.”

Levi laughs, and a few other people in the crowd mimic.

I turn to look at everyone else. “And what Logan and I do is *no one’s* business, but if you’d like the gory details... yes, we’re dating, and yes, our parents are married. If anyone has a problem with that, get the fuck out of my house.”

No one leaves, but a couple of people cheer, which has me turning to a grinning Logan to narrow my eyes at her with satisfaction.

I see Hayden coming down the stairs, a few girls trailing after him, and when he’s finally stepping into the living room,

he crosses the space, slides between a few cheerleaders and steps into Cassidy's face. "Get out, bitch."

She laughs, but he doesn't return her smile, just stares at her with his dark eyes. "Get out, or I'll throw you out."

"I fucking *dare* you, Hayden," she spits. "Put your hands on me, and I'll ruin you."

He laughs humorlessly. "Do you think you scare me, cheerleader?" He bends, grabbing her by the waist and throwing her over his shoulder. She screams like she's being attacked, but he carries her effortlessly to the front door and opens it. "Goodbye, Cassidy."

He pulls her from his shoulder, dropping her onto her ass on the front porch, then walks back inside and slams the door shut. Rubbing his palms together, like he's trying to get the invisible dirt off of them, he snaps his fingers. "If anyone else would like to join Team *Bitch*, please find the fucking door. Now, turn the music back on, daddy feels like dancing."

*forty*



## LOGAN

“Sooo...” Giuliana starts, making me chuckle. “You’re sleeping with Carson?”

Cassidy was a big bucket of cold water, rushing over my head and completely sobering me. The alcohol was definitely in the driver’s seat when I told her to go ahead and out us, but now I’m stone-cold sober, and it’s time to confront everything.

“Yes,” I answer, searching my best friend’s face for how she’s feeling, what she’s thinking.

“You didn’t tell me.” She narrows her eyes, but when Carson slides up behind me and throws his arm over my shoulder, her mouth spreads into a smile. “Go do damage control. We can talk later.”

Carson kisses my cheek, making my stomach flutter, but I step toward Giuliana. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.”

Spotting Austin coming up behind Giuliana, I suck down a breath and wait for the inevitable. “Lo.”

Carson’s hand reaches around my waist, pulling me back an inch like he’s showing his claim. My eyelids flutter as I try not to roll my eyes, and I can’t help the huff of laughter I let out as I realize I *like* the feeling of him being possessive over me.

“That’s why you wouldn’t let me smash when you came to Franklin?” Austin questions, making Carson snap his head to look at me, his mouth turning up in a satisfied, triumphant grin.

“Shut up,” I mutter to Carson, even though he hasn’t said anything. I can feel his cocky, big dick energy radiating from his shit-eating grin, and I don’t want to hear whatever nonsense is going to slip from his mouth.

“Sorry, Austin. The days of you experiencing this First-Class Pussy are over.” I bat my eyelashes at Austin, and when

he laughs, I do too. “Friends?”

Carson’s hand tightens on me as Austin holds a hand toward me, and I shake him off to dab Austin up. “Friends always, Lo.”

“Awwwww,” Giuliana croons, sliding a hand over Austin’s shoulder. “The gang’s back together again.”

The lights drop low, making the room fall to shadows right as the music changes to a song with heavy bass. Giuliana grins. “I love you, Lo. When you’re ready to talk about it, we’ll talk about it. For now, I’m going to drink and find some rich guy to make out with.”

She winks as she turns, heading through the living room to the makeshift dance floor everyone is pouring onto. Austin follows her, on the hunt for someone to keep him occupied for the rest of the night. Carson’s hands slide around my waist again, making me turn to face him. He smirks. “It’s out, and no one pulled out the pitchforks. I think we need to celebrate.”

His face presses into my neck, his mouth whispering across my skin as he finds my ear. “Dance with me, baby.”

My skin prickles with goosebumps as he breathes onto my flesh, making me step from foot to foot as my body fills with need. Need for him, for his hands on my body, and his mouth all over me. I nod into him, making him pull back and look at me with heated eyes. He slips his hand into mine, pulling me across the room behind him until we’re cloaked under shadows and hormones on the dance floor.

Wrapping my arms around his neck, I step into his body just as his arms go around my hips. My lungs fill with air as I take a deep breath in, then I blow it out in relief at the fact we’re in front of everyone, together, enjoying each other the way we want to be.

His face falls to mine as we start to dance, our hips rubbing against each other on tempo with the music. Our lips connect, making me sigh into his mouth, which gives him the opportunity to slide his tongue against mine.

We kiss like everyone around us has disappeared, like nothing else in the world exists besides each other.

I pull back as the music starts to slow, looking into those crystal blue orbs of his. “What are we going to do when she tells our parents?”

He shakes his head. “I don’t know, and I don’t care. Not tonight.”

He pulls me by the waist, pressing my body flush against his as he grinds his hips against mine to the beat of the new song that’s playing. I feel his cock growing in his pants as his hands rub all over my hips and waist. I grind against him, rolling my hips as I dance and heat fills my body. Sweat licks at the back of my neck as we move, and when his face falls to my nape and his mouth suction on my skin, I almost combust completely.

I grab the hair at the back of his head and pull his face to mine, pressing my lips to his so hard that my teeth shake. He groans into my mouth, licking at my tongue with his. My senses feel like they’re on high alert, like everywhere he touches me, I become even hotter than the moment before. He grinds with me as our mouths battle, showing each other that we’re both dominant and turned on.

I pull from him. “C’mon.”

His eyebrows twitch a little as I grab his hand from my body and start heading across the living room for the little bathroom downstairs. There’re a few people lining the wall, watching and drinking, and as I pull him into the bathroom after me, they all give us one last glance before I shut the door.

Before I can tell him how badly I need him, he’s spinning me and slamming me against the door, his mouth finding mine as his hands slip into my hair to control my head. I moan, pressing my hands against the cold wood of the door as he feasts on my lips and tongue.

“God, you’re fucking sexy,” he groans, pulling his hands from my head to lift me and wrap my legs around his waist.

My chest heaves. “Carson, fuck me right now.”

He drops me on my feet again wordlessly, popping the button on my jeans and pulling the zipper down. He drops to his knees in front of me, slipping my shoes off before he yanks my pants to my ankles. “Step out, baby.”

Doing as he says, I lift my feet one by one as he pulls my legs free from my jeans. I go to grab the waistband of my stockings, but he stands up and grabs my hands to stop me. I give him a confused look, but the only response he gives me is a smirk before he grabs me and spins me again, pressing my face against the door.

Kissing down my back, he licks at my skin and nips at the ties of my bralette before he reaches for my stockings with his big hands, then slides his fingers between one of the holes of the fishnets. He presses against my panties. “Already wet for me, Logan?”

I nod against the door, spreading my legs a little to give him more room. “Always.”

He chuckles, rubbing his fingers across the lace of my panties as he presses his face into my hair, right at my ear. “Always so fucking wet and needy for your big brother, huh?”

I moan, his words feeling dirty in all the right ways. “*Carson.*”

He kisses my ear, running his face along my hair and kissing me the whole way around to my back. His hands pull from my panty-covered pussy, then he grabs my stockings and rips, completely exposing my ass and making me gasp.

I hear him pop the button to his pants, and as he pulls the zipper down, I arch my back as impatience runs through me. I feel so empty without him as I wait, and when he notices, he grabs the string of my thong and groans. “Can I rip this?”

I bang my hand on the door a few times. “Carson, rip the fucking panties and fuck me.”

He chuckles, ripping them enough at the side that he’s able to pull the torn lace free from my wet flesh.

His cock slides through my ass cheeks until he reaches my pussy, and then he flexes his hips and slips inside of me until

his balls smack my clit.

“Fuck!” I yell, pressing my entire body against the door as he fills me from behind, and when his hands grab onto the flesh of my hips to control my movements, I arch my back a little more.

He bucks his hips, pulling almost all the way out of me and then slamming back in, making my body bang against the door. His fingers squeeze my flesh as his pleasure overtakes him, and I tighten the walls of my pussy as I moan out my own ecstasy.

There’s a bang on the door, and I jump, but Carson just raises one of his arms and bangs on the door as well. “Fuck off!”

He speeds up his hips, making me cry out over and over, chasing his release. “Fuck, Logan. I’m gonna come already.”

I arch a little more, looking over my shoulder at him in time to watch him come apart as his orgasm takes him over. He bucks, fucking me hard through his release as he fills me with his seed, turning me on even more. He grunts and groans, his hands squeezing me as his eyes stay connected with mine.

“God, you’re so fucking hot,” I moan as he slows his thrusts, his orgasm subsiding. “I love watching you come.”

He grins, his chest rising and falling as he tries to catch his breath, then he pulls his cock from inside me and drops to his knees. His tongue connects with my pussy, spearing me as his fingers slip up my front to pinch my clit. My head falls to the door once more, feeling my own climax creeping up on me.

I moan. “You like tasting your own cum dripping out of me, Carson?”

He speeds up, moaning in his throat and rubbing at my clit with two fingers as his tongue pushes deep inside of me. I fall over the edge with a scream, pressing my face against the wooden door as pleasure rushes through me in waves so strong I feel as if I might fall over.

My legs shake as he keeps licking at me, and there’s something so fucking erotic about him eating a mixture of

both of our releases that makes me burn hotter. He slides his hands around my thighs, holding me up as he stands.

There's another bang on the door, followed by a guy's voice I don't recognize. "Dude! I gotta piss!"

I huff out a laugh as Carson kisses along the back of my neck, ignoring whoever is on the other side of the door. His hands slide across my skin, down my sides to my ass, and then down my thighs. "You're amazing."

I grin as he pulls his weight off of me, giving me the chance to spin around and watch as he tucks himself back into his pants. He bends, grabbing my pants and holding them out for me to step into. His gaze connects with mine as I do, grinning like the queen as he dresses me after what we just did.

He rises as he pulls my jeans up, then rips the remaining shreds of my panties the rest of the way off, palming them for a second before he shoves them into his own pocket. Zipping and buttoning my jeans for me, he kisses me softly and hums between his lips, smiling at me. "Ready?"

I run my hands through my hair, even though I know it'll be obvious what we've been doing in here the second we step out. Grabbing my shoes, I dangle them in one hand. "I'm gonna go upstairs and clean up. I'll be back down in a minute."

He kisses me one more time, holding my lips for a moment as he hums in his throat. When he pulls back, he kisses the tip of my nose, then pulls the door open so we can leave.

*forty-one*

## LOGAN

“That’s right, you little bitch!” I yell, sinking another ball in one of Hayden’s cups, making his face twist into a scowl. “Drink up, pretty boy!”

Carson laughs, his own ball still in his hand as we watch Hayden down another cup of shitty beer. Levi is beet red, drunk as a skunk, and laughing hysterically as he stands next to Hayden.

We’ve been going two against two for three rounds now, and I have singlehandedly dominated these games of beer pong. Carson sunk one ball, then accepted that his girlfriend is from the hood and she’s going to be better at this stuff than him.

I wonder what they play in Luxington? Something with champagne, probably.

I mean, I’m sure these goons play beer pong sometimes, because Levi’s managed to sink a few shots, but they’re nothing compared to me. I was raised on beer pong and dominos.

Hayden crumples the plastic cup once he’s downed the entire thing, throwing it on the floor and giving me one last dirty look before he looks at Carson. “Shoot your ball, bitch.”

Levi wavers on his feet as he watches intently, and I give Carson a reassuring look. “One last ball, baby. You got this. Sink that shit, and I’ll give you head.”

His mouth twists into a smile as he concentrates on where he’s going to throw the ball. “Alright, I’m gonna hold you to that, Logan.”

Focusing, I watch as Carson tosses the ball overhand. It moves almost in slow motion as it goes over the table, then plops down into the final cup of beer like a magnet. I scream,



throwing my hands in the air and turning to Carson, who is also screaming like a banshee.

I jump up and down. “That’s right, bitches! We are unstoppable!”

Launching into Carson’s arms, I wrap my legs around his waist as my arms go around his neck. “You did it!”

“Fucking *champions*, baby!” he yells, slamming his lips to mine as we both laugh.

“Oh God,” Levi groans. “I don’t think I can do it, man. Hayden, dude, you gotta drink this or I’ll die.”

Carson drops me back onto my feet, and we laugh as we watch Hayden take the cup from Levi’s unbalanced hand, then he downs it in one big gulp before throwing the cup onto the table.

“Another?” I question, wiggling my eyebrows at Hayden, who’s still scowling.

“Fuck no. If I drink one more cup of beer, I’ll be barfing all night.” He groans, rubbing his flat stomach.

“You just don’t like getting beat by the fucking *champions!*” Carson yells, his arms flying out into the air. My man is drunk.

Hayden laughs. “The *champions*? Logan might as well have been playing alone, my guy. Don’t kid yourself.”

That makes us all laugh, because there’s complete truth behind it, and when Levi laughs so hard that he loses his footing and falls on the floor, we all scream out our laughter even harder. We’re all drunk, that much is obvious, and since it’s nearing 3am, most of the party has cleared out except for a few stragglers.

A yawn slips past my lips once my laughter has subsided, and Carson catches my eye. “Tired?”

I nod as I watch Levi roll around on the floor as he tries to get up. Hayden keeps laughing, holding his stomach with one hand and trying to lift Levi under the arm with his other. They’re *sloppy drunk*, and to be honest, it’s making me warm

up to them more. I mean, I was already pretty warm with Levi, but Hayden has been a tough nut to crack. There's just something about him that is so... *unlikeable*. He's a moody, broody asshole.

But seeing him let loose is making me understand what Carson must see in him.

He's being a sore loser since I kicked his ass in pong, but he's different. There's a lightness to his eyes rather than the darkness that creeps through them during the day.

Hayden slips both arms under Levi's arms, lifting him with a strength I didn't realize he had. "Let's get you to the couch, Valentino." He chuckles. Levi cannot handle his alcohol – note taken.

"We're gonna head to bed. Kick the rest of these people out, Hay." Carson flicks his head to his friend, and Hayden nods back.

"Yeah, I got it."

Carson slips his fingers through mine, then starts pulling me behind him across the room to the stairs. "You too tired for that head, baby?"

I grin at him as he looks over his shoulder at me once he's started climbing the stairs. "Never."

He freezes, looking down at me where I'm still standing on the marble floor, and pulling his hand free from mine, he wraps it around my throat loosely. "Gonna let me fuck your throat, little sister?" His eyebrows twitch as his eyes darken.

My stomach flutters as it burns with need, my pussy tightening at the look in his gaze as he stares at the hand he has wrapped around my throat. I quickly hop up the two stairs to reach him, licking at his lips as my breath fans across his mouth. "You can do whatever you want to me, Carson."

His grip tightens on my neck, and he smirks at me. "I like the sound of that."

Even with the alcohol burning through my veins, I feel clear-headed and stable as I stare into his eyes, imagining all

the unsaid things that are running through his mind as he decides what he's going to use my body for tonight.

He breathes against my mouth, letting his hand drop from my throat to grab my hand again. "Get upstairs, get your fucking clothes off, and get on your knees for me."

I grin, my entire body filling with bubbles that are likely going to explode, so I skip past him on the stairs to run to his room. He chases after me, growling under his breath as he smacks my ass – hard. I squeal, picking up my pace as I meet the top of the stairs, turning to look at him over my shoulder as I giggle. His face is spread into a sinister smirk, making my stomach bottom out as I reach his bedroom door and turn the knob.

---

The sun is blaring through the open curtains of Carson's room, so I try to pull the blanket up over my head to shield myself from it, but something is holding it in place. Probably Carson's massive body, which is also making me sweat since he's radiating so much heat. I rub at my eyes as I finally crack them open, but the person lying in front of me isn't Carson – it's Levi.

"What the fuck?" I groan, twisting my body a little to look on the other side of me, where I find Carson curled up, facing me with his leg half hanging off the edge of the bed. That explains the heat, I'm being sandwiched between two giant-sized guys.

I shuffle a little under the blanket, getting closer to Carson so I can reach his ear. "Carson!" I whisper-shout, and his face scrunches up in dissatisfaction.

"Hmm?" he groans.

"Why is Levi asleep next to me in your bed?" I whisper again.

He doesn't open his eyes, just throws his arm on top of his face to block the sunlight from behind his eyelids. "Who?"

*“Oh my God,”* I whisper. “Levi!”

His voice is laced with sleep as he licks his lips and finally wakes up a little more to comprehend my words. “He came in here last night. Hayden too.”

My eyebrows pull down, and I sit up a little to look over Levi’s body, finding Hayden spooned behind him. I chuckle a little at the picture before me, wishing I knew where my phone was so I could take a photo for blackmail later.

I lie back down, turning onto my side to face Carson and kiss his face. He groans deep in his chest, his arms wrapping around my waist under the blankets.

“Good morning,” he whispers, sliding his hands around my ass and squeezing before they run down my thighs. He grabs the back of my legs, pulling one over his waist and dropping it. The same hand then slides between my legs, into the leg hole of my shorts and underneath my panties.

“Carson!” I whisper-shout. “What are you doing?”

He leans into my face, speaking against my lips as his fingers start stroking my clit. “Can you be quiet?”

I nod, pressing my lips against his to kiss him just as he plunges a digit inside of me. Sucking in a breath at the sensation, a moan creeps up my throat, making him pull his mouth from mine. “You said you could be quiet.”

I grind my hips, fucking his finger. “It’s not my fault.”

He laughs a little, pulling his finger out and adding a second one as he plunges back inside of me. “No?”

I moan, my mouth falling open. “No, it’s yours.”

He fucks me with his fingers, using his thumb to rub circles around my clit. I can’t help the noises that slip free from my mouth, even as I try to keep myself as silent as possible.

“You know what I want, Logan,” he breathes against my mouth. “Come on my fingers.”

The heat from his mouth, his fingers impaling me, and his thumb rubbing my clit, makes me arch my back, my head dropping back a little as I give in to the pleasure.

“Oh God,” I moan, and he slaps his free hand over my mouth. When I find his eyes, they’re filled with lust, making me grind harder on his fingers.

He slides his hand around my face, grabbing me by the hair and pulling my face to look at his. “God, you’re so fucking wet, baby. You like it when your big brother fingers your pussy?”

I nod, breathing hard and moaning incoherently.

“Bruh, I was trying to be cool and let Logan nut before I said anything,” Levi says, his voice ringing through in the quiet room and making my eyes bulge as my hips freeze, “but Hayden is grinding his fucking dick against my ass, and I can’t take it anymore.”

I choke on a laugh, and Carson drops his head into my neck as he laughs too.

“Dude, listening to Logan moan is making me horny,” Hayden says in defense.

I laugh harder at that, my chest shaking. Levi moves toward me. “Well, find someone else to fucking rub up on, Hayden, *damn!*”

The entire bed shakes as Carson and I laugh hysterically, the moment officially ruined. He pulls his fingers from me as he howls with laughter into my neck. “Jesus Christ,” he heaves against my skin.

I feel someone get up, and when I look up over the bed, I see Hayden stomping to the bathroom. “I gotta fucking jerk off in your goddamn bathroom now. Thanks a lot, *Logan.*”

Levi joins into our laughter too, rolling onto his back to claim the spot Hayden was just in. When we’ve all calmed our hysterics, I turn onto my back to catch my breath.

“That whole “*big brother*” thing is super-hot, by the way, guys. Kinda fucked up, but hot,” Levi says to us. “Wish I had

a stepsister.”

*forty-two*

## CARSON

“What’re we gonna do today?” Logan questions as she stands at the bar in the kitchen, swirling around her iced coffee.

I shrug. “We could just hang out here, watching movies and stuff.”

Levi raises a hand, keeping his head laid on the counter. “I vote for that. I feel like I was hit by a rocket.”

“A rocket?” Logan questions, looking at him.

I chuckle. “Maybe you shouldn’t have gotten white girl wasted last night, Levi.”

He uses the same hand that’s raised to flick me off, still not lifting his head, making me laugh again. Hayden is sitting on the kitchen island, drinking a cup of hot coffee and swinging his legs. “I think we should go to the beach.”

Levi groans at the same time Logan beams and raises her hand. “Two votes for the beach.”

“Well, the votes have it – we’re going to the beach.” I grin, turning to open the fridge and grabbing a bottle of water.

“You didn’t vote,” Levi mumbles.

When I’ve turned back and twisted the cap off my bottle of water, he turns his head on the counter so he can look at me. “Logan voted beach. That means I vote beach.”

“Pussy,” Levi grumbles, standing up and wandering to the living room.

I drink half the bottle of water before I replace the cap and put it down. Rounding the counter, I wrap my arms around Logan’s waist. “Let’s go get ready.”

She nods, and Hayden drops down from the island onto his bare feet. “Leave in fifteen?”



“Sounds good. You’re in charge of getting Levi ready,” I answer him, then follow Logan across the house and upstairs.

Making myself comfortable on her bed, I watch as she digs around in one of her dresser drawers for a bathing suit. She pulls a few out, throwing them down on the mattress next to me before she heads for her closet. I eye the little bikinis, and when she comes back from her closet, she’s holding a few more.

“Which one?” she asks, dumping the rest on the bed.

“Why do you have so many bathing suits?” I question as I start looking through them, throwing a black, stringy one behind me in the *no* pile.

She shrugs, and picks up a red one-piece, holding it up to show me. “This one?”

I shake my head, grabbing it and throwing it behind me. “Too much coverage.”

She laughs, but doesn’t pick out any others to show me, just lets me look through the pile. I toss another black one behind me, then a green one, but then I find a little white bikini that is right in that sweet spot between *too much* and *not enough*.

“This one.” I hand it to her, and when she turns to head for her closet to change, I make a sound in the back of my throat. “Where do you think you’re going?”

Looking at me, she quirks an eyebrow. “To change?”

I wave a hand, relaxing back on the bed. “Give me a show.”

She laughs, throwing the two pieces of the bathing suit at me before she walks toward me. When she’s about a foot from me, she slips her shirt over her head, revealing her tight, pebbling nipples to me, and it takes everything in me not to reach out to pinch them.

I groan a little as she flips her long hair over her shoulder to give me a better view of my favorite tits in the world. Before I can give in to the carnal urge burning through me, she

slowly slips her thumbs into the waistband of her shorts and pulls them down her legs, leaving her in a pink thong.

Biting my lip, I slide my gaze all over her, memorizing every single mouth-watering inch as she runs her hands over the skin of her stomach and chest. She kicks the shorts off her ankles, spreading her legs and standing before me in her little panties. Her mouth drops open, and she takes a step closer to me. “See something you like?”

I nod, grabbing her on the outside of her thighs and pulling her on top of me, making her legs go to either side of my hips. I pull a hand from her, slipping it between us and through the top of her panties, finding her wet cunt waiting for me.

I moan in my mouth, flicking a finger against her clit a few times before I remove my hand from her panties. “Take these off.”

She stands up, breathless, with her mouth dropped open as she stares at me. She slips her fingers into the strings at her sides, pulling the material covering her pussy down and kicking it off her feet. Lifting my hips, I tug my sweatpants down to my knees, then drop back down on the bed, letting my cock hit me in the stomach before I grab it and run a hand down my shaft.

“Come here, baby.” I hook my finger, beckoning her to me. “Ride my fucking dick.”

She licks her lips, stepping toward me and straddling me slowly again, making sure to position the entrance of her pussy right at my cock before she sits down and sucks me in deep.

“*Shit*,” she moans, holding onto my shoulders as she lifts herself, then drops down again until I bottom out inside of her.

I don’t touch her, just leave my hands on the bed beside me as she rides me, watching her and moaning in my throat every time her cunt tightens on my dick.

She moves faster, bucking her hips and grinding so the head of my dick hits her G-spot just like she likes, and when her nails dig into my shoulders, I know she’s close to falling over the edge.

“You’re so fucking beautiful when you use my dick, baby.” I squeeze the blankets to keep myself from touching her, letting her perform for me.

“Oh, God,” she shouts, slipping one hand from my shoulder to reach between her legs and rub her clit. “Carson, I’m gonna come.”

Her hips buck faster, her fingers rubbing tight circles on her clit. Leaning back on my forearms, I watch her fall apart for me. “That’s right, Logan. Cream all over my fucking dick.”

I watch her as she starts to come, her stomach sucking in as she rides me faster as she peaks. “Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh *fuck!*” she moans, and as her pussy sucks me down deep and tightens on me, I feel my own orgasm creeping up my spine and shooting to my balls.

I groan, squeezing the sheets in my fists, and when she comes down from her orgasm and slows her hips, I finally let myself touch her. Grabbing her by the hips, I stand up and then slam her down on her back on the bed, fucking her so hard that my hips hit hers over and over in a resounding slap.

Her fingers grab my back, her nails digging into my skin, and she yells out her pleasure as I slam in and out.

She spreads her legs farther, giving me more room, and when I start to fall over the edge of my own orgasm, I slide my hand to her throat and squeeze, needing something to hold onto as pleasure takes me over.

She tenses, her pussy tightening harder as I spill inside of her, making my vision go white. Bucking my hips, I pound into her through my climax, then finally let my grip loosen on her neck as my face falls into her chest. Breathing heavy as the fog of my orgasm pulls me under, I speak against her bare chest.

“I love you.”

Her entire body goes rigid, making me realize what I’ve just said. I pull my head from her flesh, swallowing roughly. “I didn’t mean to say that.”

“Carson...” she whispers, but her lips twist into a smile.

I shake my head, laughing at myself. “That wasn’t me, that was post-nut Carson. That guy will say anything.”

She laughs too. “Do you fucking *love* me?!”

I drop my head into her tits again, blowing a raspberry against her skin. She wiggles under me, wrapping her fingers into my hair so she can pull my gaze back to hers, and I find her face filled with a big ass grin that makes me grin too.

“Say it again,” she says, narrowing her eyes.

“No.” I shake my head, a chuckle passing through my lips. “Absolutely not.”

She laughs, rolling her head back on the bed. “You love me!”

I groan, dropping my head again. “Oh my God.”

A loud bang fills the room, making me snap my head back up, finding Hayden rushing through the doorway and then closing the door behind him. “Dude.”

“Hayden! Get the fuck out!” I yell, trying to cover Logan’s bare chest with my hands.

He waves a hand. “I don’t care that you’re fucking. Your parents just pulled into the driveway, bro.”

“What?!” I slip free from Logan, not caring that I’m giving my best friend a free peepshow. Logan stands up, running to her closet naked as I tuck myself into my pants while I address Hayden. “Stall them.”

“Okay, I’ll try.” He opens the door again, slipping through. I close it behind him, flipping the lock before I turn to run to Logan’s closet where she’s putting random articles of clothing on.

“What the fuck?” she asks, not looking up from what she’s doing. “They’re supposed to be in Hawaii.”

I run a hand through my hair. “I don’t know. Just get dressed, and we’ll go talk to them.”

“That’s what I’m doing, Carson!” she snaps, looking up at me. “Go down there. They can’t find you in my room with

me.”

I can see the anxiety swimming in her eyes, so I take a step toward her and put my hands on her arms to look at her. “Take a breath.”

She shakes me off to slip a t-shirt off a hanger and put it over her head. “What’re we gonna do? We’re gonna have to explain why we aren’t at school, the house is still a mess from the party, and not to mention that we haven’t decided what to do about my dad cheating on my mom.”

“Logan,” I say, making her stop to look at me with wild eyes. “Relax.”

She takes a deep breath, blowing it out slowly. “Okay. Go downstairs. I’ll be down in a minute.”

*forty-three*

## LOGAN

“**L**ogan June Briar! Get your ass down here *now!*” I hear my father shout from downstairs, making me shoot up from where I’m sitting on my bed. Carson went down a minute ago, but I needed a moment to breathe before I followed. I saw through my window that Hayden and Levi sped off a minute ago, successfully avoiding the family drama.

Taking a deep breath, I stand up and walk down the stairs slowly, nervous for what’s to come.

Carson is standing across the room, and when I’ve stepped onto the marble of the first floor, he crosses the space to stand next to me.

My dad points a finger at him. “Get away from my daughter.”

My eyebrows shoot to my hairline. “Dad!”

“Gary...” Sara starts, but he holds a hand up to silence her. Carson just stays at my side, staring at my father.

I move from foot to foot uncomfortably as we all stand in the front room in silence, my dad’s eyes on Carson and Sara’s eyes on my dad. Clearing my throat, I pull my dad’s attention. “I thought you guys were in Hawaii for another week?”

“We were supposed to be, Logan.” My dad’s face turns red and splotchy with anger as he pulls his phone from his front pocket, swiping on the screen a few times before he turns it to face us.

I suck down a sharp breath as I study the image on the screen – the scene of Carson and I hooking up on the floor unfolding before me like it’s in live-motion.

“Our flight was delayed out of Wilmington, and when *this* was sent to both of our phones this morning, we raced back here,” my dad snaps, and my gaze darts to his.

“Well, that was an overreaction,” Carson says, making my dad’s head whip two inches to the right to shoot daggers at him.

“You think I was going to let you continue to defile my daughter in the comfort of my own home?!”

“Dad!” I hiss, but Carson’s laughter interrupts me.

“*Your* home?!” He runs a hand down his face, sighing as he does. “And you’re one to talk about *defiling*, Gary.”

My chest burns with anger, knowing exactly where Carson is taking this. He’s going to bring up the cheating. He’s going to turn the attention from us to them, so our sins seem tiny compared to the wrongdoings of my father. It’s genius, but I’m unsure if I’m ready to come face-to-face with this.

“What is that supposed to mean?!” my dad asks through gritted teeth.

“Carson...” I whisper, but he just slides a hand into mine, even with our parents looking, giving me comfort in a moment that has become inevitable.

“Get your fucking hands off my daughter!” my father yells, taking a step toward us.

“Gary!” Sara hisses, moving with him to stand between us. “I don’t care how angry you are; don’t speak to my son like that.”

His face softens as he looks at his wife, making my gut churn. He loves her, that I can see, but it’s all going to blow up in his face. Pain simmers in my veins, but even as it does, I know that I need to be the one to start this conversation.

“I know you saw me... at the wedding,” I start, drawing everyone’s attention to me as I look at my dad. “When Sara gave her speech.”

“Logan.” He holds a hand out, as if he wants me to stop speaking. “Why don’t we talk about this in private?”

Carson grinds his teeth. “What, so you can keep lying to my mom?”



“Lying to me?” Sara questions, turning to look at my dad. “What is he talking about, Gary?”

“You know,” I say to my dad, “I’ve grown to really love Sara, and the life you shoved me into here, and somewhere along the way I started to love Carson too. I won’t let you make me feel bad for that when you’ve been keeping secrets of your own, secrets that can hurt a lot of people. We all made our own choices, and it’s time to own up to them, Dad.”

“Gary?” Sara questions softly, her eyes searching his face.

He doesn’t speak, doesn’t look at any of us, just stands there breathing heavily as his lies start to cave in on themselves, and it turns my anger into fury.

“You can’t even do it?! We’re all standing here, willing to hear you the fuck out, and you can’t even man up and own your mistakes?! Still?!” I yell, making Carson’s hand tighten in mine. Turning to Sara, I continue. “At the wedding, during your speech, you said that you had been on your first date seven months ago.”

Sara nods, looking at me. “Right...”

“My mom and dad were still together then,” I breathe, my eyes filling with moisture as I watch Sara’s face go from confusion to shock.

“What?!” She turns to my dad. “Gary, is that true?”

He nods, his own eyes filled with tears as well as he stares off at the wall. His voice is small and raspy when he finally whispers, “I’m sorry.”

“Oh my God.” She puts a hand on her chest, stepping backwards a few times before she finally turns around and runs from the room. My dad looks at me finally, tears slipping from his eyes.

Staring at him, something I hadn’t thought of crosses my mind, turning my stomach to acid and my blood to near boiling. “What happened to Mom?”

“What?” he whispers, wiping at the moisture on his cheeks.

I clench my fists, the hand I have slipped in Carson's squeezing him as tight as I can. "Did you..." I trail off, taking a step toward my dad. "Did you kill Mom?"

"What?!" His head pulls back. "Logan, of course not!"

My chest heaves as I try to pull oxygen into my lungs, but it's like I'm underwater, slowly drowning and being taken by the current. "Oh my God."

"Logan." My dad holds his hands out. "I did *not* hurt your mother."

"I don't believe you," I rasp, my head floating. "How could I ever believe anything you say ever again?"

"Baby..." Carson's hand slides up my back. "He's a cheater. I don't think he's a murderer."

"Are we even going to talk about the reason we're here?!" my dad snaps. "You're dating your brother?!"

I drop to the floor, my eyes glazing over as a million different scenarios cross through my mind at 100 miles per hour. My chest burns from how tight it is, my lungs exhausted from trying to gasp down oxygen through my panic attack. My head spins, making me lay my palms flat on the floor to try and balance myself.

"I don't think now is the time, Gary," Carson bites out, falling to the floor with me to wrap his arms around me. "Logan, it's okay. Take a deep breath for me."

I look at Carson, finding his deep blue eyes wild and worried. "Carson... Did he kill my mom?"

He kisses my face, my head, my jaw, my hands, rubbing his palms down my back and arms. "No, Logan, I don't think so."

"Your mom knew about Sara." My dad speaks, making both of us tip our heads to look at him. "She was seeing someone as well, Logan. We'd been having problems for years, and we were waiting until you graduated and went to college to split. I didn't hurt her, Lo. I would never hurt her; she was my best friend. She was out one night with the man

she was seeing, and on her way home, she got hit. It was a freak accident, Logan. An *accident*.”

Tears slip from my eyes, pulling a sob from my mouth with them that makes my whole body shake. My mind feels like static, unable to pinpoint a singular thought from the noise of blood rushing in my ears. I put my face into Carson’s shirt and cry, feeling the loss of my mother and the lies of my father.

“I think you should walk away now, Gary,” Carson says, wrapping his arms so tight around me that it pulls the air from my lungs. “Go talk to my mom and leave us alone.”

I don’t know what my dad says in response, I don’t even know if he walks away, I just squeeze my eyes tight as I sob into Carson’s chest, hoping and praying that the pain is coming out with my tears. Carson lifts me, standing up on his powerful legs as he does, wrapping me around his body so he can carry me upstairs.

He goes into my room, closing the door behind us and lays us both down on my bed. Pulling me on top of him, he rubs his hands down my back as I continue to cry. He lets me cry until I feel stable enough to stop, until my eyes can’t produce any more tears, and I finally rub my snotty nose on his t-shirt. He laughs as I do, then when I look up at him, he rubs his thumbs underneath my eyes to collect my remaining tears.

“You said you loved me.” He grins, rubbing his dry nose on my wet one.

I kiss him through the wetness that runs from my cheeks to my mouth, making everything taste salty. Sliding my tongue against his, I feel the warmth radiate from his mouth to my own as we kiss passionately.

He pulls back after a minute. “Say it.”

I keep my eyes closed as a way to shield myself from the vulnerability of this moment, but whisper against his mouth anyways. “I love you.”

I feel his mouth tip up at the sides as he smiles. “I love you too, Logan.”

*forty-four*

## LOGAN

I lay in Carson's arms in silence, just listening to his heart beating through his chest as I go over everything in my head. After about an hour, there's a knock at the door. I shoot up, shuffling away from Carson on the bed just as my dad is pushing my bedroom door open.

"Logan?" He steps past the threshold, his face grief-stricken. "Can we talk?"

"Sure," I answer, moving so I'm sitting next to Carson against my headboard. "Come on in."

"Alone?" He eyes Carson.

"I'm just going to tell him everything you say. Might as well let him stay."

Carson chuckles as my father nods and steps farther into the room, leaning against my dresser before he looks at me.

"We're going to move back to Franklin for a little while."

"What?!" I yell, and when Carson's hand grabs mine like he's trying to keep me in place, panic runs through my system. I look at Carson, and in his face, I see that he's panicking too as he thinks about me leaving. "No, I'm not going anywhere."

"Logan..." His voice is as exhausted as his face looks. Sighing, he runs his hand down his face as his eyes fill with tears. "Sara and I are going to take some time apart. I spoke to the realtor that sold the house, and she has a rental we can stay in down the street from Franklin High."

"No!" I shake my head. "You can't keep dragging me from place to place behind you!"

"You don't have a choice, Logan. Please... don't make this harder than it needs to be," my dad says, his tone soft and defeated.

“I do have a choice!” I yell, standing from my bed. “Sara will let me stay here.”

I run from my room, down the stairs and across the house until I find Sara sitting out on the deck by the pool, nursing a glass of wine. Sliding the doors open, I run outside. “Sara!”

She turns to look at me, her face fresh like she’s just taken a shower, and when she sees the panic in my eyes, she stands up to catch me as I run into her arms. “Don’t let him take me away, Sara. Please. Let me stay here with you guys.”

She rubs her hands along my back, similar to the way Carson does when I need comfort. “Of course, you can stay here, Logan. It’s okay.”

“I can? You don’t want me to leave?” I ask, pulling from her to look into her eyes.

She shakes her head. “I don’t care how brief it’s been, I’ve loved you being my daughter, Logan. If you want to stay here, you’re welcome to.”

My dad and Carson run through the open door, making me turn to look at them.

“Gary,” Sara says, “If Logan doesn’t want to move back to Franklin, she shouldn’t have to. She shouldn’t have to keep uprooting her life for us. Once we figure this out, we can make a more permanent arrangement, but until we know what’s going to happen between us, if Logan wants to stay here, she can.”

“So I’m supposed to just leave my daughter? No, I won’t do it,” my dad answers, walking toward us. “C’mon, Lo, I don’t want to lose you too.”

“Consequences have actions, Gary,” Carson says from the doorway. “It’s something we’re all taught as children. You made your bed, now lie in it.”

---

My dad packs his things in about an hour, only taking the essentials because he doesn't want to jinx things with him and Sara by taking everything. Once he's loaded his Hyundai, we all meet him at the doorway to say our goodbyes.

"I'm sorry," he says, holding onto the door and sliding his gaze over each of us. "I'm really sorry."

"I'll speak to you in a few weeks, Gary. Give me some time to figure this out," Sara says softly, making him nod his head.

He doesn't say anything else, and he doesn't try to embrace me, he just presses his lips together and walks outside, rounding his car and getting in the driver's seat. We watch him go until he's turning from the end of the driveway onto the main road in the neighborhood. Carson steps to the door, closing it and locking it before he looks at me.

"You okay?"

"I'm fine." I blow out a breath.

"Wanna watch a movie?" He grins, stepping toward me.

Before I can answer, Sara is stepping closer to us and holding her hand out to stop him from touching me. "Okay, you two. Now that episode one of the family drama is over, let's move on to the next."

Carson smiles like a boy prince addressing the queen. "I don't know what you're talking about, Mom."

"*Okay*," Sara says, "clearly you two have started some sort of relationship. Please spare me the graphic details, but there will be rules while you're in this house together."

Carson opens his mouth, a grin touching his lips when he goes to speak, but Sara just holds her hand up to silence him, like she knows he's going to say something ridiculous. She turns to me. "Are you on birth control?"

"Oh my *God*, Sara," I groan. "Yes."

She turns to Carson. "We've had the sex talk, but do I need to do the condom on the banana demonstration again?"

“Absolutely fucking not,” he answers. “I’ve finally stopped having nightmares.”

“Is this like a real thing, or are we just exploring our teenage hormones?” Sara asks no one in particular, so I speak before Carson can say something incredibly inappropriate.

“It’s real.”

“Okay,” she breathes, “I don’t see how I can stop you from sneaking into each other’s rooms in the middle of the night, but please keep the... *loud noises* to a minimum.”

“Oh my God,” I say again, mortified. Carson laughs, and I can feel his inappropriate response radiating from across the space, so I shoot daggers at him to tell him to shut up.

He smirks, but presses his lips together, running his finger over them like a zipper before he twists an invisible lock at the end. I roll my eyes at him, turning to look at Sara.

“I’m sorry,” I say with a sigh.

She shakes her head, a little smile touching her lips. “You don’t need to apologize to me, Logan. We do need to figure out what we’re going to do about Cassidy, though.”

“What do you mean?” Carson asks.

“Technically, she distributed child pornography since you two are minors. We could file charges against her.” Sara raises her brows.

“No.” I shake my head. “I don’t need any more reason for there to be a target on my back at school. We’ll already have to deal with everyone knowing about this tomorrow.”

“That reminds me,” Sara says, narrowing her eyes at Carson. “Skipping school? Throwing a party? Are you kidding?”

“Well—” he begins, but she cuts him off.

“Clean this house up, both of you.” Sara turns and starts to walk away. “I’m going to go find the answers for my day-long marriage failing in the bottom of a bottle of wine. Please don’t bother me.”



I find Carson's eyes, a laugh slipping from my lips that makes him chuckle as well. He wiggles his eyebrows. "Wanna pound it out before we clean?"

"You're so romantic, Carson Raines," I deadpan, turning around to head to the kitchen to grab some trash bags.

"So, no?" Carson yells after me, making me laugh.

"Help me clean!" I yell back.

---

The sun is setting by the time we finish cleaning the house. We filled five trash bags and used an entire bottle of Lysol, but everything looks as good as new. Sara has been out by the pool, drinking wine and staring up at the sky. I feel bad for her, I really do. From what I know, she hasn't been with anyone since Carson's dad died, and now this? She doesn't deserve it.

After throwing the trash bags filled with empty cups and bottles into the garage, Carson turns to me with a smirk plastered to his gorgeous face.

"What?" I ask, humor in my tone.

"Wanna take a bath?" He rubs his hands up and down my arms. "Get all soapy, slippery, and hot?"

"Yes," I breathe, feeling goosebumps rise on my skin from his touch.

He kisses my cheek, sliding his fingers through mine before he pulls me across the house, up the stairs and then down the hall to the last bedroom, which is a guest room.

He closes the door before leading me to the adjoining bathroom. It's bigger than ours, with a huge ass tub sitting in the corner. "Damn, why didn't I get this room?"

He grins as he leans down to plug the drain and turn the hot water on. "You wanna move away from me for a bigger bathroom?"

“Nah.” I lean against the counter across from him, watching as he digs around in a basket sitting on the edge of the tub, then drops a bath bomb into the water. When he turns to me, there’s a heat in his eyes that makes my clit pulse with need.

He walks across the bathroom at a torturous pace, making me hold my breath until he finally reaches me and slides his hands underneath my t-shirt. “Arms up.”

Raising my arms, my stomach and chest pebble with goosebumps from the cold air as he slips my shirt over my head and tosses it onto the floor. He reaches around my back, unfastening my bra with ease. When it slides off my arms, he looks down at my breasts and bites down on his lip in satisfaction.

He continues, sliding his hands under the waistband of my leggings and panties, dragging them down my legs slowly at the same time he drops to his knees in front of me. Tugging them from my ankles one by one, he tosses them to the side and leaves me bare before him. As he looks up at me, my pussy clenches, wetness pooling between my legs.

“I love seeing you on your knees for me,” I rasp, sliding a hand into his hair as he leans forward to kiss my stomach.

“I’ll always get on my knees for you, baby.” He looks up at me as he licks across the skin of my belly. “You and only you.”

I spread my thighs, raising one to hang it over his shoulder as I arch my lower back to put my pussy on his mouth. “Fuck me with your tongue, Carson.” I tighten the hold I have on his hair, pressing him closer.

He does as instructed, sliding his tongue against my pussy just the way I like. He moans into my flesh, sucking my clit in between his teeth as his tongue flicks against it. I grab his hair with one hand, and the bathroom counter with the other, letting my head drop back as he slides his hands up the back of my thighs to grab my ass.

He slips downward with his mouth, thrusting his tongue inside of me and making me cry out from the sensation. With the power of the muscle, he fucks me fast and hard, making my legs shake.

I grip his hair, pulling his mouth from my pussy to look into his darkening eyes. "I need your dick."

Groaning, he pushes my leg from his shoulder before he stands up and rips his shirt over his head. As he pushes his pants down, he burns me with his gaze. "Get in the bath."

He kicks his pants off as I do, following behind me and climbing into the tub first, turning the water off and sitting down against the edge. I straddle him, threading my hands into his hair as he lines his cock to my cunt, letting me slide onto him until I'm completely filled. The water sloshes around us as I ride, my head swimming with the overwhelming feeling of being consumed by him.

His hands wrap into my hair as well, and he pulls my mouth to his as I keep grinding on top of him. He kisses me with tongue and teeth, like he needs to make love to my mouth as I fuck him toward my release.

I moan, feeling so full of him every time my hips move downward on his lap. "Carson..." I breathe against his mouth.

He answers by kissing me again, sitting forward to let my legs wrap around his back as his arms tighten around me. He bucks upwards, meeting my thrusts with his own. "I want you to come with me, Logan."

I nod, sliding my tongue against his as he grazes his hand between us to rub my clit. He pulls back. "Come all over my dick, baby."

He slips over the edge at his words, bucking faster and digging his fingers into the flesh of my lower back, making my own orgasm slam into me. I ride him faster, savoring the feeling of us falling apart together as I cry out my release in his arms.

*forty-five*

## CARSON

“I have a surprise for you.”

Logan cracks an eye open, rolling to face me in bed. “Can it wait until I wake up?”

Sliding my hands around her back, I pull her on top of me so I can kiss her face. “You are awake.”

She groans, stretching her muscles and rolling her head into my neck. “I am now,” she grumbles, making me laugh.

Smacking her ass, her hips flex straight into my erection, which makes me groan. “Get up and get ready. We have plans today.”

“Carson, we have to go to school today.” She laughs. “Your mom is going to kill us if we skip again.”

“She already left for work,” I say, rubbing my hands along her waist. “I just need one more day, Logan. One more day before we face reality. Just you and me.”

Pulling her head from my neck, she narrows her eyes as she grins at me. “Okay.”

I lean forward and bite her neck, hard, pulling a moan from her mouth. Slapping her ass again, I release my teeth to speak against her skin. “Put that white bikini on. We’ll leave in ten.”

She licks my lips before she rolls off of me and stands up, stretching her arms above her head as she gets her blood to flow. “Fine.” She walks across my room, opens the bathroom door, and heads to her own room to get ready.

I stand up too, willing my boner to deflate as I dig my swim trunks out of my dresser. Excitement for the day pulses through me as I get dressed, my need for uninterrupted alone time with my girl about to be sated.

A few minutes later, as I’m running a comb through my hair in front of the mirror in the bathroom, Logan comes

through the door in her little white bikini. I whistle through my teeth. "Goddamn."

She spins once, waving a hand down her body. "Bikini, as instructed."

I toss the comb on the counter, rushing her and grabbing her by the ass as I lift her up and wrap her legs around my waist. "You're gonna make me cancel these plans and spend the day between your thighs."

She kisses me, rubbing the spot between her legs against my stomach, making my cock fill with blood. Pulling back, I look into her eyes. "We gotta go."

She huffs, pouting her lip. "Fine."

I drop her back onto her feet, slapping her ass again as she turns to head back to her room. Squealing, she jumps a little, which makes me laugh. "One minute!"

Grabbing the backpack I packed with towels, I head downstairs to put some water and snacks in it as well, then I grab my keys and go to the front door to wait for Logan. She comes down the stairs in a tiny pair of denim shorts, with a big t-shirt covering her top half that hangs all the way to her knees. I lift an eyebrow when she reaches me. "Ready?"

"Ready." She nods, slipping a pair of sunglasses over her eyes just as I'm pulling the front door open. Getting into my Jeep, I throw my backpack in the back and crank the engine as Logan hooks her phone up to the Bluetooth. I pull out of the driveway just as the music starts, then press the buttons on my left to roll all the windows down.

Logan kicks her legs up on the dash just like last time we did this, making herself at home in my truck. My chest flares as I stare at her, her two-toned hair fanning around her face in the wind as she mouths the words of the song she's picked. She's a work of art, truly, gorgeous even in the most casual of settings that makes me all the more grateful she's who I'm with in this moment. She fills every space she occupies with a sense of safety and security, even though she's unpredictable and crazy.

I've never met someone like Logan Briar before. She's one of a kind and completely individual. Never giving a shit who's watching, never caring what she perceives herself as on the outside. I know her heart, and her soul, and that's something not a lot of people can say. She's golden, rare and exquisite, priceless.

I slide my hand to her thigh, grabbing her tight as she puts her hand atop it, slipping her fingers between mine. I look at her in the corner of my eye as I drive, meeting her gaze and blowing her a kiss that makes her grin.

*"I love you,"* I mouth, and she leans across the console in between us to kiss my neck.

"I love you, caveman," she says against my skin, making me smile as she sits back in her seat and crosses her legs Indian style on the leather.

I turn the music up when a Drake song comes on, then put my hand between her legs to rub against the skin of her thigh as we ride through town, the wind blowing and the beat of the song making everything seem faster.

Fifteen minutes later, we're pulling into the private strip of beach I brought her to one of the first nights we spent together. The sun is shining overhead, causing sweat to lick at the back of my neck, and as I put my Jeep in park, she unbuckles her seatbelt and leans across the console again to kiss me.

I thread my fingers through her thick hair, controlling her mouth as she slides her tongue against mine.

When she pulls back, her skin is flushed, and her mouth is dropped open as she breathes. "Let's go."

I leave the windows down, letting fresh air blow through the truck so it's not too hot when we get back in, then pull the keys from the ignition and grab my backpack before we get out. We make the small trek through the pathway out to the beach, and once we're standing on soft sand, I drop the backpack and crouch down to dig out the towels.

Handing her one, both of us spread them out on the sand next to each other. She pulls her shirt over her head, dropping

it on the towel before she pops the button on her shorts. I watch her, unable to tear my eyes away as she shimmies her shorts down, leaving her in the bikini I picked out.

“You’re a dream,” I groan, pulling my own shirt over my head before we both sit down on our towels.

I lie down, throwing my arm over my eyes when the sun becomes too bright, feeling Logan lie down next to me.

“Tomorrow is going to be interesting,” she remarks, making me turn my head to look at her under the shield of my arm.

“It’ll be fine,” I answer, but that only makes her laugh.

“Except the whole school likely knows I’m fucking my stepbrother.” She chuckles. “And Cassidy and her army will be out to get me.”

“Doubtful.” I sigh. “You’ve already punched her in the face like ten times. I think she’ll leave you alone to avoid any more shiners.”

She snorts. “If she’s smart.”

I roll to my side, looking at her. “Forget about everything for today. We’ll face whatever comes tomorrow. Let’s go swim.”

She blows out a breath. “Okay.”

Standing up, I hold a hand out for her to use to get up.

I try to hold her hand once she’s standing on the sand next to me, but she takes off like a rocket toward the ocean, yelling with her arms in the air like a madwoman as she goes. Laughter bubbles in my chest as I watch her, walking at a normal pace to the water, and when she dives into the cold ocean, she screams at the top of her lungs. Luckily, the strip of beach we’re on is deserted, otherwise someone would probably assume she’s drowning when she pops up out of the water and screams again.

“Motherfucker!” she yells, her body dripping water when I finally step into the ocean. “It’s fucking cold!”



I laugh. “Yeah, sure is.”

I continue toward her slowly, allowing my legs to adjust to the chill of the water before I keep going, then let my waist drop under the ocean. “Want me to warm you up?” I wiggle my eyebrows when I reach her, wrapping my arms around her to pull her body against mine.

Her skin is cold, wet, and covered in goosebumps, making me laugh. “You’re supposed to go slow, babe. Let yourself adjust to the temperature.”

She blows a raspberry with her tongue. “Go big or go home, pussy. You have to just go for it.”

“You’re insane,” I say, holding her flush against me to try and radiate some heat into her shivering body.

She smiles. “That’s why you like me.”

I hum in agreement through my lips, nodding my head as I capture her lips with mine, feeling the chill of her skin against my warm mouth.

She pulls back, tilting her head to the side as she narrows her eyes. “I like you.”

I chuckle. “I would hope so.”

She rolls her golden eyes. “I mean... I didn’t think I would.”

“Wow.” I laugh, dropping my head back.

“Shut up.” She slaps my chest. “You know what I mean, Carson. We’re so different. We’re opposites in all the ways that usually matter. You drive me *crazy*. But somehow all of that works for us, like you fill the spots that I lack and vice versa. Your crazy stopped frustrating and annoying me at some point, I don’t know when, and turned into something that’s hot as fuck and makes me wild.”

I grin. “Because you’re just as crazy as I am.”

She huffs. “I’m crazy in a different way. You’re possessive, have no boundaries, and think you’re the king of the world.”

I purse my lips. “This doesn’t feel like a compliment anymore.”

“That’s what I’m saying, though.” She rubs her fingers along my lower back lovingly. “I love all of those things about you. They turn me on and make me feel so fucking important.”

“All of our pieces fit together,” I point out. “You push me, fight back, and remind me that if I’m the king... You’re the fucking *queen*, and everyone knows the queen controls the king.”

Her lips spread into a smile. “I’m what you’ve needed all along.”

Leaning forward, I rest my forehead on hers and press my nose against hers, breathing her in. “Don’t let it go to your head.”

*forty-six*

## LOGAN

After spending the day on the beach, we sneak back into the house before Sara gets home from work and shower off all the evidence. Carson orders a pizza while I set up a movie in the living room, and once Sara is walking in the door an hour later, we're curled up watching *The Hunger Games* and shoving slices of pizza in our mouths.

"I don't care what he looks like, Logan! *Gale sucks!*" Carson is shouting and waving his hands around in the air like a lunatic, making me roll over onto the couch and laugh.

Sara's heels click on the marble as she reaches us. "The Hunger Games?"

"Sara." I sit up, turning to her. "How have you never made Carson watch this franchise before?!"

"I knew he would get overly invested." She sighs, looking at Carson's red face as he grits his teeth. "Clearly, I was correct."

I laugh, throwing my head back.

"How was school today?" Sara asks, raising a brow.

I turn to Carson as he stares at me, reading his thoughts by the look in his ocean eyes. Turning back to Sara, I make a face that shows her how painful it is to speak my next words. "We didn't go."

"I know," she says, crossing her arms over her chest. "The school called... *again.*"

Carson and I both sit in silence, staring at Sara as she stares back at us with that *disappointed mom* look on her face.

"Carson, you missed football practice, so you're benched for the next game. Logan, you missed a pop quiz in French, so now you have a C. Great job, kids, keep up the good work." She turns to walk away, blowing out a heavy breath as she

reaches down one by one to slip off her heels. “Don’t do it again!” she yells over her shoulder.

I look at Carson, stretching my lips into a frown. “Uh oh.”

He rolls his eyes, pulling me closer to him as he picks up the remote to keep playing the movie. “She won’t remember in an hour. Don’t stress.”

Nuzzling my head onto his chest, he wraps his arm around my shoulder and plays with the ends of my hair as we put our attention back on the TV screen.

---

At some point, Sara joined us in the living room, curling up on the armchair next to the couch with a glass of wine she keeps refilling with the bottle she placed on the table. When the movie has ended, Carson stands up and stretches his arms above his head, the little patch of hair above the line of his sweats peeking out. I stand too. “I think I’m gonna head to bed.”

“Oh!” Sara stands, setting her wineglass on the table. “I almost forgot. Logan, I got you something.”

I raise an eyebrow in curiosity. “What did you get me?”

She grins, her cheeks red. “Come with me.”

Carson and I follow behind her as she crosses through the house, then out the front door. She waves her arms, holding them out like Vanna White in front of a shiny, white two-door BMW.

My mouth drops open as I stare at it, blood rushing in my ears as I try to find words, but my tongue feels heavy and thick.

“Do you like it?!” Sara asks, stepping closer to me with her face spread into a giant smile.

“Sara...” I start, my eyes wide. “What the fuck?”

Carson laughs, rubbing a hand on my lower back. “Mom, you do know it’s *my* birthday that’s next week, right?”

I spin to look at him. “Your birthday is next week?”

“Ye—” he starts, but Sara grabs my shoulders and shakes me from behind.

“Logan! Car! I got you a car!” She laughs.

I turn back to her, looking over her shoulder at the BMW. “It’s beautiful Sara, really, but I don’t really nee—”

She cuts me off as well. “Stop, you *do* need a car. What about getting home from school when Carson has practice, and if you want to go see your friends?”

I press my lips together as a smile starts to form, narrowing my eyes at her playfully. “Show me the inside.”

She smiles bigger, even as it seems impossible, and pulls a pair of keys from her pocket before leading me to the driver’s side. Opening the door and motioning for me to sit down inside, her eyebrows pull down a little. “You have a driver’s license, right?”

I slide onto the butter smooth leather, my eyes rolling back at the pleasure the smell of a new car brings. “Yes.” I rub my hands up the sides of the steering wheel as I get comfortable, letting my eyes run over every inch of the dash. Sara hands me the keys, and I slip them into the ignition without a word, cranking the engine and listening to my new baby purr.

The car rumbles with the power under the hood, the stereo starting up and playing some random pop song on the radio. Moisture fills my eyes, but I blink it back. I’ve never gotten a present like this before, especially for no reason. Throughout the years, my parents and I always did the same thing for birthdays and Christmases. A small gift and dinner at the diner down the street from the house. It was tradition, and it was enough. But this? This is so much more, and I’m not used to it.

Looking at Sara, I shake my head as I chuckle a little. “I can’t believe you got this for me.”

She leans into the car, wrapping her arms around my neck the best she can. “You’re family, Logan. I want you to have everything that Carson has.”

“I don’t have a sports car,” I hear Carson mutter from outside the door, making both me and Sara laugh. Sara pulls back, standing up straight to look at her son.

“You wanted a Jeep, you got a Jeep.” She clicks her tongue.

The sun has long set, the sky a vast darkness with stars sparkling between the trees. The only things lighting up the driveway are the house lights and now the headlights from my car. I breathe in the fresh air mixed with the smell of new car, feeling content and full of bliss for one of the very first moments of my life. Not because of the extravagance of the gift, but because of what it says. Sara loves me; she’s radiating joy from the sheer act of giving me a present, and that’s something I’ve never experienced.

It could have been a Hot Wheels car for all I care, but the fact she went out of her way to surprise me with something feels really, really good. It makes me feel like I really am a part of her family, like she really does see me as someone important.

I turn the car off, pulling the keys out before I get out to stand next to Sara. “Thank you.” I catch her eye, trying to show her without words how truly grateful I am.

She puts a hand on mine. “You’re welcome, Logan.”

“We’re taking your car to school tomorrow,” Carson adds, grinning from ear to ear.

“Yeah, we are.” I spin the keys around my finger, feeling a lot cooler than I probably look. Then I close the car door, pressing the button on the electronic key to lock it, and we all go back inside.

“Let’s go to bed,” Carson says as we’re shutting the front door again.

“Separately,” Sara adds quickly, giving us a disapproving look. “And please do not think just because I gave you a car,

that I'm not still angry that you skipped school today.”

“Of course,” I respond to both points. “We're really sorry, Sara. It won't happen again.”

She hums between her lips when Carson smirks, turning around to go back to the living room. “Goodnight.”

We both say goodnight, and once she's out of earshot, Carson slides his hands into the back of my sweatpants and grabs my bare ass. “We're not actually sleeping in separate beds, right?”

“Are you going to talk shit about The Hunger Games again?” I shuffle away from him, making his hands slip from my pants as I head for the stairs.

“I wasn't talking shit about the whole movie,” he points out, chasing after me. “Only Gale's pussy ass.”

I sigh, turning to face him. “*Really?*”

He laughs, grabbing me by the throat with one hand and sliding the other in the front of my pants and underwear, pressing a finger against my clit. “You wanna sleep in separate beds because I don't like a character from a movie?”

I swallow hard, letting him feel my throat flex against his palm as he starts rubbing little circles between my legs. My eyes flare, capturing his gaze, which has turned molten. He moves toward me, putting his face an inch from mine before he speaks again.

“I need to be inside you.”

I feel wetness pool between my legs as he presses his finger harder against my bundle of nerves, making me moan through the hold he has on my throat.

He moves again, teasing me by keeping his mouth a hairsbreadth from mine as he keeps rubbing my clit. “You want your big brother inside of you, Logan?”

My eyes roll back as I bite onto my top lip, holding a moan in the back of my throat as I nod at him.



“I want to tie you up, use your body any fucking way I want,” he breathes, his voice a hushed whisper that radiates through me like fire. “Will you let me?” His eyes flare as they connect with mine.

“Will you let me tie you to my headboard and fuck you into submission?”

His finger moves faster, pushing me further and further into ecstasy. My legs shake, my knees going weak as pleasure washes over me. I moan, the noise vibrating through my throat and into his palm. He loosens his grip. “Answer me, Logan.”

I nod, letting my head drop back a little with the freedom, as his fingers continue to play with me under my pants. “Yes, anything you want, Carson.”

He slides his hand around the back of my head, grabbing my hair and pulling my face back to his. “Say it. Say you’ll let your big brother do whatever he wants to you.”

His teeth grind, making my stomach flutter with need. “I’ll let my big brother do whatever he wants to me.”

“Good girl.” He removes his hand from my pants, and I sigh in protest. “Get upstairs, get your clothes off, and wait for me on my bed.”

I spin without another word, taking the stairs two at a time as I race toward his room, pulling my clothes off one by one as I do.

*forty-seven*

## CARSON

I wait a minute before I go upstairs, giving Logan the chance to do what I said, and to make her sweat a little. I want her to have a knot in her stomach, want the suspense to climb inside of her and make her clench, wondering when I'll finally come through the doors.

Getting a bottle of water, I drink half of it leisurely at the island in the kitchen with my fist clenched. My cock is a rock in my pants, pulsing and leaking as I keep myself downstairs. I'm torturing myself as much as I'm torturing her, and it's going to be explosive when I finally fuck her.

I scroll through the notifications on my phone, responding to a few and ignoring the rest, and after ten minutes, I finally start walking slowly toward my girl. Crossing the house, I take my time as I step light on my feet, then climb the stairs one by one and go down the hallway at the same pace.

As I push into my bedroom, I'm pleased to find Logan sitting on the edge of my bed, completely naked. I ignore her, though, closing and locking the door behind me and walking past her to my dresser. I pull open the second drawer, fingering at the many ties I've collected over the years before I finally pull a plain black one free and wrap it around my fist.

Turning, I let my gaze collide with hers and take a step forward. Continuing to wrap the tie around my fist playfully, I grin when her eyes ping from my hands to my face a few times. I see the muscles in her toned stomach flex as I near her, and my smile widens when I catch her thighs parting a little more.

Instead of touching her, I keep walking past her to grab my phone from the side table next to my bed. I scroll my playlist, looking for something loud to drown out the screams I plan on pulling from her lungs tonight. Once I've clicked on a song, I crank the volume and drop my phone back onto the table.

I turn, climbing onto the bed on my knees. “Come here, Logan.”

She crawls from the end of the bed, her eyes on mine. Once she reaches me, she tries to grab the hem of my t-shirt to remove it, but I pull back, slapping her hand a little. “Lay down.”

“Carson, let me touch you,” she whines, her eyes big as she breathes heavily through parted lips.

“Lay down, Logan.”

She blinks a few times as she stares at me, unable to obey as sass and dominance run through her veins. I hold her stare, my fists tight as I keep myself from touching her.

“*Logan,*” I warn, unwrapping the tie from my hand and letting it hang loose in the air between us. “Do I need to make you?”

She smirks, shuffling on her knees to the center of the bed, putting her back against the headboard when she finally lies down for me. She parts her thighs, showing me her glistening cunt before she slides a finger through her slit, pulling a moan from her lips.

I move quickly, grabbing her wrist and removing her hand from between her legs as I pull it above her head. “Bad girl.”

As I grab the other wrist and hold them together above her head, she nips at my chin with her teeth. “Show me what you do to bad girls, big brother.”

My cock pulses against the confines of my pants, making me bite down on my lip as I blow a breath from my nose. Grinning, I wrap my tie around her wrists, securing them together before I thread it through the metal bar on my headboard. Once I’ve tied it and tightened it enough that I’m satisfied she won’t break free, I slide down her body and sit myself between her open legs.

She shifts on the bed, moving her body like waves of need are rushing through her as she stares at me. “Baby,” she begs, her voice tight and desperate.

I slide my gaze from her wet pussy to her eyes. “Do I need to gag you as well?”

Shaking her head, she presses her lips together as if to show me that she can be quiet. I slip a finger through her center, rubbing a circle over her clit before I slide back downward. “Good girl.”

She groans in her throat, her legs widening as I touch her. I push my finger inside her, then pull it back down, sliding my finger down farther to her asshole. “Maybe I should fuck you here tonight.”

Rubbing tight circles around the puckered hole, I grin when she lifts a little, as if she’s trying to get me to enter her. I find her eyes, wild and bright as I play with her flesh, and when her mouth drops open like she’s going to speak, I pull my hand away. She slams her lips closed again, moaning through them as if she’s unable to help herself from begging.

Her pussy is dripping, soaking my sheets and making my mouth water, so I slide myself down and start to lick her like a popsicle. Up, down, up, down, through her slit, against her clit, past her entrance and through the crease of her ass to flick my tongue against her asshole.

She moans above me, gyrating her hips mindlessly.

My eyes move to meet hers as I suction around her clit, focusing on the pleasure that spreads across her face as I do. She’s a fucking masterpiece, gorgeous and breathless underneath me as I tease her.

I pull back, kissing up her body slowly. I lick at her flesh, bite her nipples, and suck against her neck to mark her before finally reaching her lips to kiss her.

Her tongue swirls around inside my mouth, her hands tugging on the tie that keeps her attached to the headboard. “You like tasting yourself on my tongue, baby?”

She nods, diving back in to kiss me again, but I pull away before she can. I yank my shirt over my head, throw it across the room, and then undo my pants quickly.

“Need to feel you come on my dick,” I grunt out, freeing myself and pushing inside her in the next second.

She moans loud and long, the inside of her pussy sucking me deep as I push to the hilt. I sit back on my knees, keeping myself secured inside her as I rub her clit in hurried circles. I watch her squirm, her arms pulling tight against the headboard as pleasure takes over.

Her legs shake as she holds them up, and when I feel her cunt tighten even harder, she lets out a scream as her orgasm washes over her.

Bucking her hips, her legs go lower as she’s overcome with her climax. Her head rolls back, her back arching as much as it can with the confine of the tie keeping her in one place, and then I start thrusting – hard and fast through her orgasm.

She screams again when I move, her hands tightening into fists above her head as I fuck her. Her pussy is so tight around my cock that I start to feel the tingle and pressure of my orgasm at the base of my spine.

“Fuck.” I drop my head against her chest. “You’re fucking milking me, baby. I’m about to explode inside of you.”

Her hips grind in circles as I fuck her faster. “Fill me with your cum, baby. I need every drop.”

The breathless moan of her words sends me flying over the edge, making my dick pulse as I spurt ropes of cum inside of her. “*Jesus, Logan.*”

She yells as I jackhammer into her through my release, her shaking legs tight around me like she needs to hold on to me in some way. I fall onto her once I’ve come down, still deep inside of her while I try to catch my breath against her bare tits. “*Jesus Fucking Christ Almighty, Logan. I wanted that to last longer, but your pussy is so goddamn tight.*”

She laughs, her chest making my head bounce up and down. “I’m sorry?”

I smile against her skin, rolling my head to suck her nipple for a heartbeat before I pop off and sit up. Shaking my head

and grinning, I start to undo the tie around her wrists. “Such a dirty girl.”

Her wrists fall free, and I take my time kissing each one before she slides them around my head and threads her fingers into my hair to pull my mouth to hers.

She kisses me slowly, her soft lips creating another burning fire in my chest.

As she pulls back, her lips turn up. “Are you getting hard again?”

I nod, thrusting my dick in and out a little as I kiss her again. I’ve never gotten hard again this quickly, and the feeling of fucking her with my seed still leaking out is making everything slippery. The sensation is amazing, so as I speed up my hips, I rest my nose against hers and stare into her wide, golden eyes. Her mouth drops open, her breath fanning against my lips as she moans and slides her hands to my ass to grab the globes.

She squeezes my flesh, grinding her hips and pushing me into her harder so my pelvis rubs against her clit. We stare at each other, moaning together as we move. When I feel her start to fall over the edge again, I kiss her hard, morphing my mouth to hers as her nails dig into my skin.

This time feels different, and when I have my second orgasm, I recognize it for what it is.

We’re making love.

*forty-eight*



## LOGAN

I pull into Carson's spot in the school parking lot in my new car, throwing it into park before I glance at where Carson is sitting in the passenger's seat. Hayden's Maserati is in the spot next to us, as usual, with both Hayden and Levi sitting on the back, waiting.

"Ready?" Carson asks, threading a hand into my hair.

I nod, lifting my hands. "I put on some rings just in case Cassidy wants to fight."

He laughs, throwing his head back. "There's my little hood girl."

I giggle as I open my door, then step out and slam it shut. Carson does the same, and we meet at the back to twine our fingers together.

"They're alive!" Levi shouts, sliding down from the back of Hayden's car to run over to us. "When you guys didn't show up yesterday, we figured your parents killed you."

Carson slaps hands with him, then Hayden when he walks over as well. "Nah, we just needed another day for ourselves."

Levi shakes his head. "Well, you gave Cassidy an extra day to spread information, so be prepared."

"I tried to shut her up," Hayden adds, slipping his hands into his pockets.

"You tried?" I question. It's unbelievable that Hayden would ever fail at something he set his mind to.

He doesn't say anything else, just gives Carson a look that I can't read and turns to head toward the school. Levi laughs at whatever unspoken words were just exchanged and follows behind Hayden.

Carson's hand tightens in mine. "Let's go."

I fill my lungs with air, blowing it out slowly before I start walking. I'm not a weak bitch, but anyone would need an extra second in this moment. I'm about to face the entire school, an entire school of people who have still not grown to like me, who just found out I've been sleeping with my stepbrother. My stepbrother who had a very public and serious relationship with the most popular girl in school until this weekend. Whether it was fake or not, that's not going to change the way they see me.

I'm the new girl, the tempting seductress who stole Cassidy's boyfriend. Even without the insane factor that he's my stepbrother, I don't look good.

Carson opens the door for me, holding it open so I can pass through. I shake out some nerves as I step onto the wood floor of the corridor, telling myself I'm going to keep my head high and my confidence even higher.

Once Carson is through the door as well, he throws his arm over my shoulder and kisses the side of my head reassuringly, like he's trying to remind me that he's right here with me.

All eyes are on us as we walk to my locker, and when I'm done pulling my books out, we make the short walk to Carson's to get his. I spot Cassidy down the hall while Carson types the combination into his locker, a group of very Cassidy-looking girls surrounding her, and she catches my eye with a sneer pulling up her top lip.

She leans to the side, saying something to the girl next to her, who turns and spreads the words like wildfire down the line. When they all have matching grimaces on their usually pretty faces, Cassidy grins and starts walking toward us.

I turn to Carson, who's digging in his locker, looking for something. "Incoming."

His eyebrows pull down, but when he spots his ex-girlfriend heading our way, he groans and slams the locker closed.

"Carson," Cassidy greets him, ignoring me. "Can we talk?"

“Sure, go ahead,” he answers, raising his eyebrows.

She looks at me, but speaks again to Carson. “*Alone.*”

“No,” I answer for him, a smile touching my lips. “You can talk with me here or you can fuck off.”

“You’re his *sister*, not his mother,” she snaps at me, making me chuckle.

Carson grits his teeth as he threads his fingers through mine and starts to pull me away. “Now you can’t talk to me at all.”

We start walking, but she’s quick to follow. “Wait! I’m sorry.”

I look at her over my shoulder, finding her face a mix of sad and desperate. She’s hurting, and I never wanted to hurt her to get my happy ending. I sigh, hating that part of me that constantly cares. “Just hear her out,” I say, looking at Carson.

He turns to face Cassidy. “What is it?”

“Are you guys like, official or whatever?” she questions, and her hands hanging at her sides start to play with the hem of her skirt.

“Yes,” he answers, gripping my hand harder.

“Is she going to come to the games?”

“I’ll be at every one if Carson wants me there,” I tell her, making Carson look at me and grin.

“Could you not?” she snaps again, making my blood boil a little. “Sorry, I just... Like, that’s *my* thing.”

Carson crosses his arms over his chest. “You’re really doing this? Because I’m sure they need the QB there more than the head cheerleader.”

She steps toward him, her voice getting lower and more hushed. “When is this insane phase going to end, Car? I mean, you can’t seriously think you could have a future with your *sister.*”

“*Stepsister*,” I growl, closing the gap between us and putting myself between her and my boyfriend. “We don’t have to have problems, Cassidy. Just back off.”

She huffs, looking over my shoulder at Carson. “You know where I am when you need me.”

Cassidy spins on her heel, stomping back to her friends and falling into their collectively open arms for comfort. I growl, “Let me fuck her face up again.”

Carson chuckles, rubbing his hands up my sides as his head goes into my neck. “I like it when you get all protective and possessive. Turns me on.” He flexes his hips against my ass, showing me that his cock is inflating in his pants. “Should we just skip first period and find a closet?”

I laugh, wrapping my hand in his hair behind me. “We haven’t been in school for two days, Carson.”

He kisses my neck, breathing heavily. “I don’t care.”

My skin pebbles with goosebumps. “We can have lunch in my car, christen the new leather.”

Humming against my skin, he nods his head before he pulls back and threads his fingers through mine once more, pulling me to his side so he can walk me to class. We find Levi sitting in the desk next to mine when I get there, and it seems to send heat running through my man because he grabs my ass and squeezes extra hard when he kisses me goodbye.

Levi laughs when I sit down next to him, and I wave him off with a laugh of my own. “Caveman.”

*forty-nine*

## CARSON

After a nutritious meal of my girl's pussy for lunch, and a vigorous workout in the janitor's closet between fourth and fifth periods, I'm exhausted by the time we get home from school. I'm benched for the next game, so I skipped practice even though coach told me the bench was reserved for *dickheads like me*.

My mom's car is in the driveway when we pull in, which is confusing since she's normally working until later, but when we walk in and see boxes, we both sigh loudly.

"Mom?" I call out, making her appear from around the corner with her hair tied up on top of her head, and a sweatsuit on her body. "Skip work today?"

"Packing," she grumbles, embracing me and then Logan.

"For?" Logan asks, her face a shade whiter than normal as worry and anxiety run through her.

"Your dad is going to move into the rental in Franklin for longer than we planned."

"Oh?" I ask, sliding my arm around Logan's shoulders. "And Logan?"

"Staying here," my mom clips. "Same as before, no use uprooting you again when nothing is set in stone."

Logan blows out a heavy breath. "Thank God. Is my dad here?"

"No, I've been packing, and I hired someone to drop everything over there later. He's at work." My mom sighs, rubbing a hand down her face. "I don't want you to think I'm some monster woman who sends her husband packing, Logan... I need you to understand that I've been alone for a very long time, and I respect myself too much to let him off the hook so quickly. I need time to figure this out, and I'm really sorry you got caught in the crossfire."

Logan shakes her head. “Sara, it’s okay. I’m mad at him too and spending some time alone will make him realize he’s fucked up. I get it.”

My mom smiles, then looks at me. “Why aren’t you at practice?”

“I’m benched.”

She waves a hand in the air. “I know, so go sit on the bench.”

I shrug, laughing. “For what? I’ll be back to normal next week, no need for me to waste my time watching the second-string fumble the ball.”

My mom sighs. “Whatever.”

She’s stressed out. I can see it in her features that this situation with Gary is taking a toll on her, and when she gives us a sad little smile before she turns to head back to packing, I feel really sorry for her. My mom has always been strong, always been the shoulder I’ve needed and the provider for me, and it kills me that she’s hurting.

“Mom, you want to have dinner tonight?” I call out to her, making her turn and give me a hope-filled smile.

“How about tomorrow? Just the three of us? I need to get this done tonight.”

I nod. “Sure, mom.” Logan nods too, giving her a big smile before she goes back to her task.

Logan runs her fingertips down my arm. “You’re a good son.”

I kiss her. “I love you.”

She rubs her nose against mine, smirking at me. “I love you too, caveman.”

I kiss her once more, letting my tongue slide against hers slowly before I pull back again. “Now get upstairs, get naked, and be a good girl for your big brother.”

*epilogue*



# LOGAN

## *Four years later*

Turning the key in my front door, I balance Chinese takeout in one hand and my books from the day in the other. Once I've pushed the door open, I walk into the dark apartment, using my sense of familiarity to guide me into the kitchen, hoping I don't drop anything. When I've placed the food on the counter, I turn to flip the lights on so I can get it ready for when Carson gets home from practice, only to find him sitting in the dark living room on the couch.

I scream at the top of my lungs in surprise, tossing my books in the air and making him burst into laughter. "What the *fuck* are you doing sitting in the dark?"

When he finally controls his fit of laughter, he stands up and walks toward the bar that separates the kitchen from the living room. "I was trying to surprise you."

I press a hand to my chest. "You could have fucking killed me, Carson!"

He laughs again, rounding the bar to wrap me in his arms. "Don't be so dramatic, baby."

I take a breath, pushing him off of me. "What are you doing here? Don't you have practice for another ten minutes?"

He grabs me again, refusing to let me get away, and stuffs his face into my neck to kiss my skin. "I left early. Wanted to spend time between my favorite set of legs."

I sigh in pleasure as his wet mouth suctions on my skin. "I brought dinner."

He wraps his hands around my ass, lifting me and placing me on the counter. "We can heat it up after." His mouth finds mine, his puffy lips assaulting mine as he kisses me hard and

quick. I thread my hands into his hair as my heart races, spreading my legs so he can fit between them.

Even though we've fucked on every surface of this apartment since we moved in last year, when he takes me in the kitchen, it always hits like the first time. Like he can't wait the fifteen seconds it would take to get to our bed to be inside of me. It sends a jolt of lust down my spine and makes wetness pool between my legs.

"Carson," I moan, pulling my mouth from his to rip his shirt over his head. He's more shredded than ever since he spends every day in the gym and every weekend on the field playing for UCLA. My man is a statue of muscles and sex, and it still makes me itch with need whenever I see him naked.

Once his shirt is tossed to the floor, he pulls me forward and yanks my leggings and panties down my legs in one swift motion, making me moan when my hot skin meets the cold marble countertop. His large hands lift my shirt over my head, then reach behind me to unfasten my bra. I lean back on my hands when it's fallen to the floor as well, staring at him with heat in my eyes as he unbuckles his belt.

Once he's shuffled his pants down to his ankles, he reaches out and presses a finger to my center. "Look how fucking beautiful you are." He bites one of my nipples and pops off. "Spread out on my fucking counter like a four-course meal."

He drops to his knees, pressing his face to my pussy and lapping up my wetness before he swirls around my clit. He moans in the back of his throat, his words rumbling into me. "Never had a four-course meal taste so fucking good, though."

My head drops back, and I let my back fall down so I'm flat on the surface while he eats between my legs. He plunges his tongue inside me, flicking the muscle hard as he thrusts it in and out.

I grab my tits, squeezing them as he fucks me from below. "Carson, come fuck me. I need your dick."

"Come all over my tongue, baby. Then you'll get my dick." He dives back in, sliding three fingers inside me as he

laps my clit. I yell, my body burning with pleasure. He knows exactly how to pull a scream from me, so when his other hand joins in and he presses a finger against my asshole, I fall over the edge of my orgasm.

He plunges the finger in, making me scream and buck against his face. As my climax takes over, I shout obscenities loud enough that the neighbors can probably hear me. His fingers slow as my orgasm does, his tongue still making languid circles around my clit when he removes the finger from my ass.

“Get up here,” I beg, my chest heaving.

He pulls from my pussy, ignoring my request and lining his cock to my entrance before he flexes his hips and sinks deep inside me.

I moan, looking at him as he thrusts his hips, and when he holds a hand out for me, I take it so he can pull me back up into a sitting position. Wrapping my legs around him, I push myself to the very edge of the counter and match his thrusts with ones of my own.

He kisses me, licking and biting at my tongue as he fucks me toward his release, making my hands dig into the bare skin of his back when pleasure washes through my womb again and starts to build another orgasm.

“Logan,” he groans against my lips. “I love you.”

I lick his lips. “I love you too, babe.”

His hips slow, and he kisses me passionately as his hands slide up my sides. “I want to be with you forever.”

I nod, arching my back to press my tits against his chest. “Me too, Carson.”

He slides one hand between us, pressing a thumb to my clit as he grinds his hips against mine. I cry out, wrapping my hands around his face to direct his mouth back to mine. He speaks against my lips. “Marry me, then.”

I clench around him, caught off guard by his words, and he groans. “What?”

He moves his other hand between us, hovering it in front of my chest. When I look down, I find a large, sparkling ring in between two of his fingers, making the air shoot from my lungs. “Marry me, Logan.”

“Carson,” I breathe, feeling my eyes fill with tears. “This isn’t the time to propose to someone.”

He laughs, bucking his hips and making his cock hit my G-spot. “Why not?”

“*Carson*,” I moan. “We’re fucking!”

He thrusts a few more times, hard and quick. “This is our favorite thing to do. It’s the perfect time to propose.”

I laugh, squeezing his face between my hands. “You are not a normal man.”

“Logan.” He kisses me once as he grinds his hips. “Next year, I’m going to get drafted, and you’re going to be off saving puppies and shit, and I want to do those things with a ring on your finger. I want everyone to know that you’re mine, and I’m yours.”

“And what if you get drafted across the country?” I ask, kissing his cheek.

He thrusts his hips. “Then you’ll come with me.”

“Carson...” I breathe, staring at the ring.

He presses his mouth to mine. “Say yes.”

I look into those blue orbs, feeling our love exploding around us in tiny little fireworks. “Carson.” I laugh. “*Yes*.”

Grabbing my hand, he slides the ring onto my finger, then starts bucking his hips like a madman. I scream, holding onto his shoulders to stay in place as his finger swirls around my clit to make sure I meet him at the finish line.

He kisses me, hard and wet, his tongue stroking against mine as I start to fall over the edge of my orgasm, and then I feel his cock start to swell inside me. He moans against my mouth, fucking me through both of our orgasms.

When he pulls back after he's come down, he nips at my nose and chuckles. "I'm gonna put a baby in you next."

I grab his flesh, digging my nails into his skin as I laugh at him. "The fuck you are."

THE END

Thank you so much for reading The Star! I hope you loved Carson & Logan's story as much as I loved writing it!

If you could, please leave a review on Amazon, they make it so indie authors can keep doing what we love.

xo, R

## *acknowledgments*

To the readers, bloggers, bookstagrammers, booktokkers – thank you. For reading, making edits, reposting my stuff, liking, commenting, blasting my DM’s with excitement. You are the reason.

My STREET TEAM!!!! You ladies are **ROCKSTARS**. I truly, truly, truly do not know what I would do without your support. Thank you for everything. I love you guys so much.

*Kenz* – you are the best editor in the world. you take my jumbled mess of shit & make it pretty, while also being the biggest fangirl of my characters. I am so fucking glad I found you, and I am so fucking glad you took a chance on Nightmare, because I never want anyone else to touch my work.

*Tash* – my soul, my heart, my best girl. You inspire me without trying. If I didn’t have you, this book would not have been written, 100%, no fucking cap. You brought these characters their happy ending just as much as I did. Thank you for your constant HONEST & REAL feedback, your suggestions & positivity, your humor & wisecracks. You get me like no one else. I love you more than you know, bitch.

*Vanessa* – It’s been a long road, hasn’t it? From Travis to Beckham to Carson, you love my guys so much and they love you right back. You are my best friend, without a doubt, no fucking competition. I can text you one word and you just GET IT. Hockey, football, music, book boyfriends, drama, secrets. You are gracious and selfless. You give your all to every single person you meet, and that is a quality that is so rare. Thank you for balancing my Virgo with your Aries. I love you endlessly.

*Amanda* – he licked her ass, for you. Every time I write an ass scene, it’s for you, honestly. Little freak. Your INTENSE and THOROUGH insight of everything I write is so valuable.



You're never getting rid of me, and you will BETA for me forever. I love you.

*Kasey* – you catch things even Tasha & Amanda miss LOL which is hard. Your BETA work on this manuscript has been so unparalleled and important. & your support goes such a long way, I appreciate everything you do. Thank you for letting me add you to my Street Team without permission, and for always posting even when you're busy as fuck.

*Nina* – thank you for being my real-life confidante & letting me obsessively send you remake after remake of covers. You get so excited about my books, and I can't thank you enough.

*Sheryl* – you are my love, my life, my soulmate, my best friend. Thank you for reading the football scenes and making sure they're correct, because I'm an idiot who is just now getting into sports. You're the GOAT, the Queen, the sun & all the stars. You complete me & balance me in every way. I love you more than life. Thank you for letting me be me – for the first time in my life I am not ashamed of the person I am... and that is because of you. You accept me no matter what, no matter what dumb shit comes out of my mouth, no matter what decision I make, no matter how needy or obsessive or insane I am. You're the best friend, boss, & family I have ever known. You are going to be the best mom in the world.

As always, I'd like to recognize my cat – Leonidas (formally: Fat Boy, king of the jungle, prince of Egypt, or Light of My Life.) He gets me through the day. He's the reason I wake up in the morning.

Also, thanks to G-Eazy for being zaddy.

And to he-who-must-not-be-named, for inspiring Levi... which started me on this journey of the Sinful Series. I'll never tell you, but thanks anyways.

## *about the author*

Rosie Alice is a twenty-something, dessert-loving, romance author who thinks she sings really well in the shower & her car and is always speaking in different accents.

If you're looking for her, you can find her hunched over her laptop, taking a nap or working one of her other jobs. She's mad-obsessed with all types of music, and you'll find her living room covered in her favorite vinyl records.

Born in the UK, she currently lives in Florida – where sweet tea & sandy nights are a religion – with her 20lb cat.

Find her here: <https://linktr.ee/rosiealice>

*also by rosie alice*

- Nightmare – Fate Book One
- The Hallows Boys – The Dark Duet (*Coming soon!*)
- TW – Sinful Book Two (*Coming soon!*)