

CHLOE KENT

2

LOVING IN NUMBERS



Two: A Dark Contemporary Romance

Part of the LOVING IN NUMBERS Series

Chloe Kent

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Chapter One

Mia Edwards kept reminding herself that there were people much worse off than herself.

She had a job, food, shelter, two very pretty pairs of real designer shoes, one loyal friend, and... money.

“So... you want me to take out the meat, the lettuce, the tomato, and the pickles from your burger?” She asked her new customer, pen, and notepad in hand and a smile plastered on her face. He was her last customer before she took her ten-minute break.

And by job, she meant she worked as a waitress at a cheap, 1950s-inspired diner, complete with a jukebox, chrome accents, checkerboard linoleum, and bright red booths.

Charlie’s Horse Diner and Jive-In looked charming enough, and even the layers of grease that, after more than forty years in the making, looked part of the furniture now.

Nestled in the rolling hills of upstate New York, they served the best food in the town, including Mia’s famous pecan pie, which she made at home in the squeaky-clean, little kitchen of the house her parents had left her when she was only three

years old. That's when Mia's parents died in a horrific car accident. Miraculously, she survived without a scratch. Her mother's sister, Rosemary Haynes, Mia's guardian, and godmother had taken her in and raised her since then, together with her husband, Paul, in the same house. It had been the only home she knew.

The pies were a great supplement to her wages and tips and helped her substantially with covering her aunt's medical care.

"Yes, no meat, lettuce, tomato, or pickles." The guy said.

"So that will be, just... the bun?" Mia asked as politely as she could, worried for some weird reason that voicing that question might offend the customer.

"And the sauce." The middle-aged man sighed, clearly exasperated at the amount of intel he needed to give for what turned out to be a bun and ranch.

"Right," Mia smiled overly brightly. "Hmm, would you like the bun and the sauce separate?"

"No. I want a burger with no meat, no lettuce, no tomato, and no pickles. Just the bun and the sauce."

So... the sauce inside the bun?

Mia didn't bother confirming the combination; she had already annoyed the man enough.

“Got it. Can I get you anything else?”

A cup of tea without the tea?

A milkshake without the milk?

Fries without fries.

A life without purpose?

Again, she didn't voice any of those suggestions. Her best and only friend in the whole wide world had accused Mia of having a very snarky internal narrator, whose comments she would never utter aloud for fear of not being liked. She wasn't wrong.

While the diner was almost empty after the lunchtime rush, the other waitress on shift, Charlene, was having a challenging time attending a table of Sundown Grove's local teen gang.

The group of six young men, with their pants hanging almost at their knees, homemade tattoos, and just general menaces all around, had only tried once to squeeze Mia's breasts and grab her ass while she had tried to serve them. The next day, they came in to apologize to her on their knees in front of a packed

dinner and called her Ms. Mia whenever they saw her after that.

Completely perplexed that a series of her problems seemed to just disappear before they had a moment to take hold. She had confronted the gang and asked them why they apologized to her and not the other waitresses or other people they terrorized whenever they pleased.

They refused to say a word to her.

Nothing had baffled her more.

Well, that and the thing about the money.

It took the cook under thirty seconds to get her customer's order ready, and after serving him his bun and sauce, she went back out to the kitchen, removed her apron, and got a bar of chocolate out of her handbag. Her diet consisted of noodles and chocolate six days out of the week. On Sunday, she cooked all her aunt's favorites and watched in sadness as her aunt barely ate enough to feed a bird.

She slipped out of the kitchen to the back of the restaurant and sat on a plastic chair in the shade of a sizzling summer sun. It was where all the waitresses sat during their breaks. Routinely, she pulled out her phone and made a call to Gail Brown, her

lovely neighbor, who was kind enough to come and sit with Mia's aunt while she was at work. Mia had no idea what she would have done without the generosity of Gail, who refused to take a cent from Mia and only insisted on a slice of pecan pie every other day, because she still had to watch her figure.

Mia had just disconnected the call from Gail after being assured everything was well with her aunt before her phone rang.

"Don't you dare be late," Bianca Carlson, her lifelong best friend, said on the other side. Bianca meant the world to Mia in every conceivable way. Bianca also couldn't hide the panic lacing her voice with every word she spoke.

"I won't, I promise," Mia assured her friend. "You're going to be perfect, B," she added sincerely.

Bianca was leaving for the other side of the world in two days to apprentice with a world-renowned painter. Just another way Mia's life tended to suck. She was going to miss the hell out of her friend, but she also couldn't be happier for her and swore she was not going to shed a single tear because Bianca would just change all her plans and stay.

Tonight was Bianca's last showing at a posh art gallery with her posh friends in the city. Ordinarily, Mia sat them out, but

this one mattered more to Bianca, so she sucked up her awkward social graces and promised to be there for her friend.

“You’ve got your dress ready?” Bianca asked. “I can’t believe you’re literally a millionaire if anyone looks at your bank balance, but you chose to pick up an evening dress from the thrift store. Girl, honestly, if someone did that for me, I would retire on some island, drink Mai Tais all day every day, and never worry about anything ever again. But no, you choose instead to continue working at a crummy restaurant, and you buy clothes from a thrift store. I mean—”

“You know why,” Mia said, laughing. It wasn’t as if she hadn’t heard those lines from Bianca before—a million times over at least.

“I wish you’d just use the money and live frivolously free forever. But you won’t because you have pride and you’re not someone’s secret charity case. I’m just worried about you, Mia. You work too hard, and I’m going away...”

“I’ll be fine. You know I’ll be fine, and I don’t need that money.”

Yeah, the money wasn’t quite exactly hers. Every month without fail, a huge check was deposited into her bank account

as if she were some secret heiress to a trust fund, she didn't know was hers.

Except she was the Heiress of Nothing, born and bred.

She had no idea where the money came from, who sent it, or why, but for the last six years, since turning eighteen, her phone beeped with a notification of the deposit every single month without fail. After two years of trying to figure out the source of the rather substantial and consistent deposits and hounding the bank for answers, she finally gave up, and now the money just sat untouched in her account.

Okay, maybe there had been that one time when the basement of their house had flooded, and she couldn't afford to have it fixed without dipping into the anonymous funds. It had killed her to do so, but she had replenished the sum with the exact amount she had taken by working a load of extra shifts. The banks told her they were under strict instruction not to reveal the identity of the sender, but it was all legitimate and legal, and she should just enjoy the money. It was all hers.

She couldn't and she never would. Accepting charity when she was able-bodied, determined, and proud was not something she was into, no matter where the money came from. And

when she found out who it was, she intended to send everything back.

The rest of her shift ended uneventfully before she drove herself home. A surge of guilt showered down on her at the thought of having to leave her aunt for something other than work. She didn't go out except to work and the grocery store next door to the diner. The rest of the time she spent with her aunt, reading to her, brushing her hair, doing her makeup, or having one-sided conversations with her, hoping a spark of recognition or lucidity would shine from her watery blue eyes or a sound would be emitted from her lips, but her aunt remained lost in some oblivion Mia couldn't seem to save her from.

She had half a mind to cancel her plans, but she knew she couldn't disappoint Bianca by not showing up. Not tonight, when it was her last night.

Gail had eagerly volunteered to stay with her aunt until Mia got back, and then she had to sternly send Mia to her room to start getting ready.

Mia kissed her aunt's forehead and reluctantly made her way to her bedroom.

She took a deep breath and sprang into action, not giving herself a chance to back out or to start crying because her best friend was spreading her wings and flying away. She couldn't afford to do either of them, so she took a brisk exfoliating shower, soaked her skin in her favorite special lotion, blow-dried her hair then slipped into the simple dark green gown she had paid almost nothing for from the thrift store. After cleaning it and altering it to suit her figure, the glimmering silk gown turned out as good as it was going to get.

She had never worn a dress like this before, not one with a slit down the middle that exposed so much thigh, but Bianca had approved and called it the perfect dress for the occasion. Mia hoped she wasn't going to make a fool of herself in front of Bianca's elite friends.

She applied her makeup, all from sample bottles and packets, slipped her feet into her prized black designer stilettos, and was ready to leave.

She was well within time. In fact, she was properly early by a lot.

Her pre-booked cab had arrived, and Mia said her goodbyes quickly to Gail and her aunt.

The night was warm enough that she didn't need a coat, and the only accessory she had on her was her evening purse, which contained her phone, tissues, and some lip gloss. She was also way, way too early. She stopped herself from texting Bianca to tell her she had arrived when the cab dropped her off at a warehouse-style building covered in haute graffiti. She planned to look around, find the entrance and then surprise her friend.

She glanced around, looking for an entrance, as she walked the perimeter of the building. Where was the damn door? Except for a few parked cars, she was quite alone under the dusk-lit sky.

Startled out of her wits, she almost fell over when a smartly dressed, middle-aged man approached her out of seemingly nowhere.

“Ms. Edwards? Please come with me.”

“I'm sorry. Do I know you?”

An ice-cold feeling washed over her. She could feel herself go pale as dread filled her veins. Something was wrong.

“Please come with me, Ms. Edwards.” The man started to approach her. Mia looked around frantically. There was no one

in sight. The longer she remained immobile, the greater the sense of doom washing over her grew.

She started to back away. Ordinarily, she'd tell herself she was being silly for always thinking the worst. But this situation pulled at her, instilling her flight mode at once.

She had to run. Where to, she had no idea. She turned around and fled, grateful that the deep slit in her dress allowed her the freedom to run without hampering her escape.

She turned to find the man following her at a brisk pace.

She kept pushing into the graffitied wall of the massive building, knowing there was a door somewhere that was just camouflaged by the art. She had to get inside.

Panic made her clumsy. She had to work extra hard not to stumble in her high-heeled shoes.

She looked behind her, and the man had gained on her.

She screamed for help, constantly turning her head to see how close he was.

What was happening to her? She lived a dull, boring life. An attempted kidnapping was not something she would have ever thought was in her destiny.

She was an hour early, which explained why the warehouse parking lot was still almost empty.

She picked up her pace.

She took her phone out of her purse, then dropped her purse to free her hands so she could type while she still tried to escape her assailant. She had to text Bianca, and then the police.

With her attention on her phone, still trying to escape the man chasing her, she knocked the breath out of her lungs as she collided into a solid brick wall of muscle, warmth, and expensive cologne.

Chapter Two

Mia couldn't believe this was actually happening to her. She braced herself against the human wall she had bumped into; her phone shattered to the ground, and her hands spread against his hard chest before she tried to push away. But she was trapped. With his arms around her, he pinned her body to his, imprisoning her in his effortless hold. The quality of his black suit screamed money and luxury as it accentuated every part of his broad shoulders, thick biceps, and the stunning power in his thighs, against which her own body nestled.

Mia looked up at the man, who was well over six feet tall, and everything inside her flipped as time came to a dead halt. The only thing between them was her strained and ragged breaths.

Her gaze roamed over the angle of his jaw; its perfect structure clearly visible through the dark, pristinely groomed shadow of stubble on his jaw. The symmetry of his face took what little breath she had left away. Then she looked up into his eyes.

A stormy shade of cold green and thick, long-lashed eyes stared back at her. She shivered with a different kind of fear.

The man who had been chasing her had been harmless compared to this man.

She struggled to get away. Dear God, she didn't want to go out this way. What would happen to her aunt? Who would take care of her?

Aunt Rosemary had been in a catatonic state for the last six years. It had happened the day her husband and Mia's uncle had died. Mia thought the grief of losing him had taken her spirit. Now she sat motionless and unresponsive. Her eyes wide open but glazed over, as if she were frozen in time, reliving her sorrow over and over again. There were moments when Mia thought she saw fear filling her gaze instead; her body tensed as she clutched the armrests of her favorite chair until the blood stopped flowing to her knuckles as if she were bracing for something terrible to happen. Then Mia would touch her hand, and for one tiny moment, she would look up at her, and her aunt's body would relax, and she would offer Mia a smile that broke her heart.

Who would take care of her aunt if something happened to her?

She renewed her attempts to escape the iron hold he held over her, struggling to free herself but failing completely.

“Ms. Edwards.”

Chaos reigned inside her. Her fear, coupled with the shock that the stranger knew her name, had her freezing up. This was worse than she imagined. This was more sinister. He knew who she was. But she didn't know who he was.

Everything inside her pleaded with her to find a way to escape. She had to get away from the man, whose presence alone seemed to tilt the world around her. She couldn't explain the rush of electricity coasting down her spine at the sight and scent of him. The tightness in her whole body, seemed to stem from her breasts down to the apex of her thighs, robbed her of breath and voice.

After one last look into his eyes, she realized she would never see anyone she knew again. Maybe not even live.

She twisted her head to the side as she continued to fight his hold on her. She bleakly wondered if the man who had initially been chasing her would help her. She found he had retrieved her purse and the contents that had fallen, and he had also picked up all the parts of her broken phone. He now stood at attention a little away from her.

“Would you like to do this civilly? Or not?”

The sound of his rough voice with those deep velvet tones penetrated every cell in her body.

She was running out of time. She had to get away. Her voice had turned hoarse out of fear, and her screams were lackluster attempts at calls for help. She then lifted her leg, her sole intention being to knee him in the balls, but she got no further than raising her leg.

Taking that as his cue, the tall, dark, mysterious, and scary stranger slipped his hand under her knee and scooped her up as if she were weightless. His accomplice had already opened the passenger door of a black limo, and soon she was laid on the seat, despite her frantic resistance. Tears started to stream down her face, and her voice continued to become choked with emotion, making it harder for her to be heard.

She was being kidnapped with no physical hope of beating the man who had shoved her into the car and then closed the door, sealing her in. Her mad struggle to get to the other side of her door failed, as within seconds, the man slipped his tall, muscular body into the seat next to her with the sleekness and grace of a king predator in the wild.

“I don’t want to hurt you, Mia, but I’m not above it. I suggest you calm down and do as I say. Or I’ll be forced to restrain

you with other means.”

The true reality of the situation sank in. She thought of her life in a heartbeat. She allowed so few people into her world. Her aunt and Bianca were the only two people she trusted. What could her catatonic aunt and an inspiring artist do to save her? She imagined Bianca’s fear and worry. No one else could calm her aunt down during those moments when she became riddled with fright.

Mia had to think with her head. It was the only way she was going to get back to her own life.

She wiped the tears drenching her cheeks and realized belatedly that in her attempt to escape, her dress had parted at the slit, revealing a vast expanse of her thighs. Worse, she found his gaze littering her exposed flesh, evoking a strange feeling of volcanic heat wherever he touched her with his eyes.

She jerked at the material to cover herself, sealing her legs as tightly as possible.

“What do you want from me?” she said, her throat hurting with every word she spoke. Dread settled deep in her belly as the limo started to pull away.

Fuck.

The stranger, who now sat opposite her, handed her a bottle of water. Her glance wavered over the bottle, wondering if he were going to drug her and unavoidably noting the brand of water on the label. She knew enough to know that was what poor people called designer water and cost more than her tips in a week.

“If I wanted to drug you, you would already be drugged. So no, Ms. Edwards, the water is sealed and untampered with. I need you lucid and in charge of all your faculties.”

There was something about his voice that instantly had her thinking he meant whatever he said, which wasn't the best thought to have about someone who had just kidnapped her off the street.

She took the water, but she shook so much that she couldn't unscrew the cap. He took the bottle from her and opened it easily enough.

She bit her tongue when her automatic response was to thank him. What was wrong with her? She took a series of small sips, one after the other. As the liquid flowed down her throat, it immediately alleviated the parched and scratchy feeling that had made her voice strained and hoarse.

“What do you want from me? Money?” Even as she asked the question, at least sounding more like herself, she realized money would be the last thing the man wanted from her. He had kidnapped her and stowed her away in his chauffeur-driven limo. She had already established that his suit and cologne cost a fortune. And those cufflinks on his shirt and his handmade leather shoes didn’t come cheap either. Besides all that, he conveyed an aura of sophisticated wealth, and arrogance, answerable to no one. If not money, what else could he possibly want from her?

He gave her a half-grin when she mentioned the word “money.”

“I want your time, Mia,” he said softly.

“To do what?” she whispered. Her heart pounded so hard that she thought it would burst out of her chest. She could feel the cold sweat on her palms and the back of her neck. She had never felt such terror before. What appeared to lie ahead for her was shrouded in darkness and deviance, and she was unsure if she could escape before it engulfed her completely.

“You’ll see in due course,” he said with a heaviness that added to her troubles.

The worst had already settled in her head. And it was worse than death.

“Please, just let me go. I’m not who you think I am. Please, please. I have a sick aunt at home, and I need to be there for her.”

“What do you think I’m going to do to you?” His frosty green gaze swept over every inch of her body. She should have been afraid and repelled, but instead an uncomfortable heat rose inside her while every nerve she had seemed to throb. But as she looked into his eyes, she saw something there that she couldn’t explain. It was as if he knew her secrets, her fears, and her hopes and dreams. He seemed to know things about her—things she wanted to be hidden from the world; all reflected in his gaze. Yet he was a complete stranger, and she had been the unlucky recipient he had found in a deserted area in front of a huge warehouse whose entrance she had failed to find. Wrong place, wrong time. That was all there was to it. It had just been her luck. If not for her, it would have been another poor, unsuspecting girl.

She had to stop looking at him. Her brain continued to live in a conflicted divide. She was mesmerized by her reactions to him

but also deathly afraid that this was the end for her and that it would come at his hand.

“If you think you’re going to take me to be your sex slave so you can act out your perversions on me, just because you’re rich and you think you’re above the law, I suggest you rethink things. I won’t go down without a fight,” she said forcefully, despite the quivering in her lips. She was making bold statements of empowerment while being hopeless and helpless. “I won’t go down this way,” she vowed.

“I own you, Mia. Every inch of you belongs to me, and that means I can do what I want with you, perverted or not. And yes, I am above the law.”

Haggard breaths poured out of her mouth as she started to hyperventilate. She may live in a small town where the biggest threat was a group of teens acting tough, but who would crap themselves if the local law enforcement decided to throw them into jail. But she wasn’t naive enough not to know that girls went missing almost every day. Sold into slavery, never to be seen again. What had she done to deserve this? She hadn’t even started to live yet. Her one dream had been to make a trip to Paris with her own hard-earned money to visit Bianca, and she planned to take her aunt with her.

Mia forced herself to remain calm. If she continued to panic the way she was, she was going to lose the advantage of coming across clues that would help her escape. She needed to keep her mind clear if she had any chance of surviving this.

God, help her, but she didn't want her life to end this way.

She couldn't calculate how long they had been driving or what roads they were taking. Looking out the windows and straining her vision proved futile, as the limousine's windows were tinted.

She felt the car sway and swerve and registered that they were probably driving up a mountain.

It wasn't long thereafter that the car finally came to a halt. The chauffeur opened the passenger door. Evening had been replaced with pitch-black darkness.

A new, fresh kind of panic surged in the pit of her belly.

It was now or never. Her only opportunity to escape lay between the car and wherever else he planned to take her.

"Please don't think about running, Ms. Edwards. You're unfamiliar with the terrain, and in those heels, you'll risk breaking your ankle, breaking your neck, or just falling off a cliff. Let me put it to you this way: If you try to make a run for

it, I'm going to come after you. And that will annoy me, so when I do find you, you'll face much bleaker consequences than a broken ankle or a broken neck. Don't make me have to come after you." He delivered the final line of his threat with such darkness that Mia swallowed the spiked ball of fear in her throat.

"Who are you?" she asked, terrified and bewildered at the same time.

"Do as I say, and once I'm done with you, you will be released back into your world."

"How? Broken and scarred?" She piped out her tone with fierce loathing. This stranger who had kidnapped her off the street held all the cards, and she had none. The imbalance in power rattled her. She didn't have enough life experience to beat him with her wits. All she had was hope and a prayer, both of which paled in comparison to the power he had over her.

"That depends on you."

Chapter Three

Mia clenched her fists and closed her eyes for a moment, desperately hoping that when she opened them, she would realize it was only a dream—a nightmare, but one she could wake up from. Her eyelids parted, and instantly her vision was filled with the image of the man who had taken her as if he had every right to do so. Her body was yet again consumed by the unusual blend of apprehension and profound curiosity, which warred within her at the sight of him.

He was right. Running blindly into the night was not the best option for her right now. She just had to bid her time and hope she was able to find an escape relatively unscathed.

She stepped out of the vehicle and glared at him.

“Thank you,” he said softly, leaning down and whispering the words into her ear. The fragrance of his aftershave and the scent of his cologne hit her harder. Gooseflesh sprang all over her skin, and her blood ran hot beneath her skin. Who was he? Why did he have such a polarizing effect on her? How dare he thank her for not trying to escape?

She stood on the tips of her toes, despite her heels, wrapped her hand around his nape, pulled him down to her level,

and then whispered in his ear.

“Fuck you.”

She then stood back and folded her arms over her chest, every inch of her incinerated by the contact.

He grabbed her around the waist, crushing her body to his as he reached out and ran his thumb across her bottom lip. She stopped breathing as his minty-clean breath lingered over her. He looked as if he were going to say something, but he released her instantly, leaving her suddenly ice cold and disoriented.

Wide-eyed, she watched him walk away, her gaze following the wide expanse of what could only be his muscle-packed back beneath his suit.

They had been driving for hours, she was shocked to discover. The moon had already risen high in the sky. Its pale white light illuminated a path leading up to what looked like the silhouette of a castle in the distance.

Shivers sped down her spine, despite it being a warm summer night. The eerie silence around her beckoned more ill fate.

“Ms. Edwards,” the chauffeur said politely a pace away, beckoning her to follow his master. Mia took a glance behind

her, beyond the curving driveway, and was met with nothing but darkness. Clenching her fists and forcing herself not to start biting her lips until she succumbed to peeling off the skin, which was what she'd done when she was highly stressed, she pursed her lips and followed her abductor, more determined than ever that she was going to find a way to escape.

She hated that he boldly assumed she would just follow him when he'd had the audacity to kidnap her off the freaking street. But again, riling herself up that way was not going to help her in the long run. She needed to be quiet and observe her surroundings. It was clear she needed a car if she had any hope of a successful escape. It also mattered nothing if she started to scream until her lungs burst. No one would hear her. And he'd probably shoot her on sight. She had to stay calm and stay alive.

She followed him up a short flight of stairs to a massive double door. A chill coursed through her as her gaze settled on the iron cast into the heavy wooden doors in the shape of an embossed skull, one on each door. Instantly, her dread doubled. Why two? The moment the question slipped into her head, she reprimanded herself for being silly. What did it

matter to her if they had two skulls on their doors? She just wanted to go home.

He swung the doors open, and a cold draft hit her as he stepped inside. She hesitated to cross over the threshold, which prompted him to turn and face her.

Frantically, she glanced all around her again. What if she had been wrong by agreeing with her thoughts that running wasn't a good idea? What if this was going to be her only chance of escape? She glanced up at him, her pride sliding as a plea entered her eyes. She found herself looking at him imploringly.

“Please just let me go. I swear, I won't say anything to anyone. Please, just let me go.”

“I said I would when I was done with you, Mia.” He stood back as he slipped his hands into the pockets of his suit pants, his legs braced wide apart. In the background of the gloomy castle behind him, he looked like a beautiful beast who would break her neck without blinking an eye.

He wasn't going to let her leave, not even after he was done with her. If she started to believe him and trust his word, she was as good as dead already.

She stepped into the grand entrance hall and was met with a fusion of the old and new. Soaring ceilings and imposing stone walls evoked a sense of old tradition, but the furniture was sleek with a minimalistic touch.

Sucking up her tears, she swore that would be the last time she ever begged him to release her.

She took note of everything inside the castle as she followed him down a long, dimly lit passage. There were no other doors except the ones at the entrance.

The cold draft followed her everywhere. She brushed her hands down her arms to warm up, afraid her teeth would start clattering soon. As they approached the end of the passage, he led them into a hall with high ceilings and large windows that let in the black night outside. Also decorated with a mix of modern and traditional elements, medieval-styled tapestries hung from the walls, while contemporary art pieces graced side tables around the room.

A massive stone fireplace, with plush armchairs and sofas arranged in intimate groupings around it, was lit and roaring. The flames cast a deep orange glow over the breadth of the room. Mia stopped herself from gravitating toward the fire, despite its heat calling to her.

Instead, she turned her attention to an ornate table that had been set with an array of cloches, around a serving for two. The table was covered with a white linen tablecloth, while silver candelabras with flickering candles, lined the middle. The scent of rich, extravagant food, freshly baked bread, and roasted meat reached her. At that moment, her stomach turned with hunger. The last thing she had eaten had been three bites out of a bar of chocolate during her ten-minute break at Charlie's Horse.

The cold in her bones soon started to thaw, and she was grateful for the small mercy.

"Sit," he ordered her.

"Who are you?"

"You may refer to me as Sir. Now sit. You're hungry."

"Don't tell me what I am and what I'm not."

"Ms. Edwards, perhaps you misunderstood my need for you. Whether I treat you with courtesy or whether I throw you in a cell in the dungeon below, I will still get what I want from you. It's up to you to decide how you want to play it."

She bit her lip, her teeth sinking into her flesh until she tasted blood. No. She wasn't going to become a nervous wreck

again. She had already gone through that when her uncle died, and her aunt lost her will to live.

She released her lip and took the seat he offered her. She didn't doubt him when he said her other option was a cell in his dungeon. He seemed like the kind of man who would have a dungeon meant for imprisoning innocent souls in his castle.

The fact that someone had prepared all the dishes of food he revealed meant there was someone else in the castle. Maybe she wasn't completely alone.

He lifted the cloche covering the plate before her to reveal a perfectly seared piece of steak alongside a bundle of asparagus on a bed of mashed potatoes, except she knew that was actually pommes purée. He also unveiled a few extra side dishes she wasn't interested in.

“Eat.”

She needed her strength if she was going to escape. She'd be no use to herself if she collapsed from being lightheaded because she was stubborn enough to not maintain her blood sugar. She nodded surreptitiously, proud of herself. She was thinking logically and calmly, doing everything in her power to aid her escape.

They ate in silence, but she tasted nothing. The only thing she concentrated on was putting food into her mouth to help her prepare for her battle ahead.

She couldn't finish her steak, but she went through the vegetables. She then placed her knife and fork down, uncaring if that was the correct etiquette placement or not. She was certainly not trying to impress her kidnapper with her table manners. That said, her gaze glinted over the sparkling cutlery. The steak knife was sharp enough, but she had no place to hide it on her person.

“Why did you take me? Why am I here? What do you want from me? I want to know. Or else, you can release me.”

After dabbing at the sides of his hard, beautiful mouth, he rose from the table to his full height.

Mia couldn't help but feel the flood of fear engulf her all over again. She was reminded yet again of her precarious situation under his command. He could kill her. Right there. And no one would know what had happened to her.

He came toward her. She clenched her whole body to stay seated instead of fleeing away from him out of fear... but also out of those strange, unfamiliar sensations, his nearness evoked inside her.

He stood behind her and pulled out her chair. She rose on shaky legs and followed him out of the grand dining hall, down another dimly lit passageway, up a flight of stairs, and then finally took an elevator to the bottom of the castle. But as the doors slid open, her heart stopped beating.

Oh god.

It hadn't mattered whether she remained good and civil and obeyed his instructions. He was still going to imprison her for his sick pervert pleasure in a cell in his dungeon.

"No," she cried, trying to back away from him, but within the small confines of the elevator car, she had nowhere to go, not that it mattered much when he easily wrapped his hand around her arm and forced her to remain standing close to him.

He maneuvered them out of the car. Her struggles were now more frantic but futile. He almost had to drag her over the slippery cobbled floor. The cold returned to her bones as she took note of her surroundings in the wall and floor stone structure. They passed a series of cells, barred but empty.

Then suddenly, the frosty coldness gave way as they stepped into another part of the dungeon. A thick red carpet replaced the cobblestone. Sconces littered the walls on either side of them and seemed to emit heat as she passed them by.

What she saw next shocked her more than anything in her life.

Mia's heart raced as she stood frozen on the spot, unable to comprehend what was happening before her very eyes. Her mind raced as she tried to make sense of the situation, but all she could feel was more deep-seated fear and more confusion.

Who was this arrogant man who called himself Sir, and what kind of sick game was he playing with her?

This part of the dungeon was a far cry from what she had just walked through, with its heating system, and bright lights.

Until her eyes locked with a man she had never seen before, enclosed in what appeared to be a glass cell.

Cold blue eyes, simmering with rage and hatred, stared back at her. But not only that, his gaze penetrated her to the root of her soul and beyond. For a split second, she felt as if he knew her. Her secrets, fears, dreams... But then his eyes changed into a glint that reflected nothing but loathing.

What was going on?

Who were these men?

Her gaze slid over the features of his face. With his strong, rugged planes and angles, Mia couldn't help but be stunned by his sheer brutal male beauty, the same way she had been

affected by her captor's sophisticated appeal, yet instinctively knew he wasn't a gentleman of any sort, despite the way he dressed and spoke.

Wearing only a pair of black drawstring pants, the man's shirtless torso gleamed with perspiration, as if he had just done an insane number of push-ups. But at the same time he also emanated as much frightening power as the man who had kidnapped her.

The thick, sinewy muscles in his arms seemed to burst with strength. His eight-pack, brick-layered abs tapered into a zero-fat waist.

She couldn't help but notice the scars that ran down his chest—deep gashes that had just about healed not that long ago, which made her think it had been their captor who had inflicted them.

What horrors lay ahead for her under his hand?

Chapter Four

Vincent Sinclair stood with his legs spread and his hands in the pockets of his pants as his gaze vacillated from the stunning dark-haired beauty to the man he had captured and imprisoned in a cell.

Fuck. This wasn't supposed to happen. Not this way.

Her perfume had wrung itself around his very soul, and it had required everything inside him not to grab her, strip her, and fuck his ownership into her.

But no matter how hard the thought made him. No matter how much torture she created by being so close to him yet so untouchable, he would rather die than give in to this maniacal need to have her.

She was supposed to be theirs. Except they had vowed never to touch her. She had been too young; at seventeen, they were twelve years older than her and far too dangerous for her, too. Her innocence would be tarnished by their jadedness and by the harsh, cruel realities of their world, where a human life meant little if they got in the way. They had lost something vital along their journey, while she remained untouched by the

darkness that had consumed them. She was a ray of sunshine in a world filled with doom, savagery, and death.

They also knew that once she was within their reach, they would take her innocence and replace it with their depraved ways, and there would be no turning back for her. She would forever be a part of their darkness. Which is why they had sworn to leave her alone.

Until now.

Vincent meshed his teeth against each other until his jaw rippled. He had no choice but to bring her into their worlds. She had become his bargaining chip against a man he loved like a brother.

He heard her trying to catch her breath while she fought her need to start biting her lip until it got to the stage where she ended up peeling off the skin.

His own mouth ached to touch her. To take command of her, to be the one to punish her lips instead, until they were crimson red and swollen before he kissed her all better again.

He watched with a mixture of fascination and ferocious desire as the pulse in her delicate throat bleated rapidly, like a wild animal desperate to escape the confines of the predator behind

her. Her body struggled to contain her fear and trepidation and the chaos inside her head as she tried to figure out what was going to happen to her. What part was she going to play in his sick game.

Her skin, like warm satin, was supple and unblemished, flushed with a deep, crimson hue that seemed to intensify with every pound of her heart.

He couldn't help but feel a sense of reckless wonder and violent awe at the stunning creature before him.

Fragile. Sweet. Perfect.

Breakable.

The first moment they laid eyes on her, she hadn't even turned eighteen yet. But the impact of her effect on them felt like the most sacred, powerful, and torturous form of trauma to their heads, bodies, and hearts because they instantly knew they couldn't have her.

She had done nothing but breathe, and they declared her theirs. And then she smiled, and pure innocence shone from her like the halo of an angel.

She hadn't even known they existed until now.

They had been sent to finish a job in Sundown Grove, a sleepy town in upstate New York, where the residents had no idea what had happened in their town and to this day still don't know.

She had been serving customers at the town's popular diner, wearing a checkered uniform and her long dark chocolate-colored hair tied up, the length swaying against her back with every movement she made.

The smile from her lush pink lips had reached her mesmerizing golden eyes, and she had caught them by their hearts and their bodies and refused to let go.

It had happened instantly, simultaneously. They had found the woman they hadn't even realized they had been looking for, but they were everything that was wrong for her. Since that very moment, they have known everything about her. How her parents had died in a car accident that had left her untouched when she was only three years old; She liked to read romance novels and eat chocolate. She didn't date, and fuck, they hadn't yet decided if they were going to have to kill the guy she chose or just throw him in a cell in another part of the world. Her best and only friend was Bianca Carlson, an aspiring artist whose loyalty to Mia both Vincent and Caden

approved of. They had silently broken off the fingers of three of the six-man local gang in Sundown Grove for daring to touch what was theirs.

She had no idea how they orchestrated her life from afar, so nothing bad happened to her.

But physically leaving her alone while protecting her had been their best decision. They had planned to do that for the rest of their lives. No one would touch Mia Edwards without a death warning first. They would take down the whole world to save her. And they had kept their vow to themselves never to take her; something they could do so easily, being the men they were. They kept their silent promise to her—never to disrupt her life, never to take her away from everything that had been familiar to her. Seven years had been a long time to keep their promises.

But things had changed. Now the man he knew as well as himself—his brother for life—had turned into his most dangerous enemy yet. They stood on opposite ends, a war raging between them, and Vincent was left wondering who would give up first because that was the only way there was going to be a winner.

In one year, hate and fury had divided them and broken their trust and loyalty to each other, perhaps irreparably. But all Vincent wanted was a name.

Caden Hemsworth and he had been friends since birth. They had grown up next door to each other in a wealthy neighborhood full of old money. They went to the best schools and colleges and were never apart. As the children of their parents, they had forged a bond stronger than if they had been brothers.

Then they joined the military, and one tour later, they could never go back to the way things had been. They could never resume their traditions of taking over the family business, getting married, and producing heirs.

That one tour had changed them irrevocably into a different breed of men, for which they had not given their permission. Cold. Hard. Merciless. They became highly trained machines that were moved around like chess pieces, and their families were threatened with death if Caden and he didn't abide by the rules of the secret government organizations. Going back home was impossible. Their families were told they had died in combat. Their identities had been wiped clean. Non-existent.

But it didn't end there. Governments and villains both used them to accomplish the same task and as a result, their abilities to put aside their emotions and anything else human-related to complete the task made them highly sought-after.

After paying their dues, they started to buy their freedom back, pitting agency against agency and villain against villain.

It had been little wonder that they had become fixated on Mia Edwards with such protective fierceness. She made them feel less like monsters and more human. The fact that they had kept their word and not just taken her was the only thing that they had held onto. The idea that they could still be honorable and good changed the way they lived their lives afterward.

By the time they had gotten back home, they discovered their families and their legacies had died with their own false deaths. All that had been left was a fuck ton of money in their names.

All they had left was each other. Until that stopped being the case. A strategy to turn allies against each other to disintegrate power sources had been used against them in the same way.

Vincent Sinclair and Caden Hemsworth were now enemies.

And all he wanted from the man was a name. Just one name to end this all.

Caden dropped his gaze from Mia and turned it onto Vincent. They glared at each other before Caden growled and slammed his fist into the shatterproof glass.

Mia jumped back in startled shock and almost collided with him. She stood there quivering, her eyes sparkling with a stream of panicked emotions. His heart twisted, hating to see her that way. But he had a part to play.

He tilted his head, his gaze cascading down the length of her sweet body. The image of the satiny skin on her thighs, when her dress parted, was imprinted in his mind. His fingers flexed, aching to run their tips over her flesh, then his lips, then his cock. And where she had laid her palm over his chest when she had been trying to outrun his chauffeur, there would forever remain the print of her hand, with all its profound purity and goodness, on his heart.

She was never going to be the same again. Vincent intended to keep his promise to her. He would release her. He had to. Once this battle with Caden was over, he was going to let her go, even though it would be the hardest fucking thing he'd ever have to do.

But this wasn't supposed to have happened.

Standing between him and Caden, locked in a glass, inescapable cell, Mia's attention swung from him to Caden.

Words seemed to fail her, and the terror on her face grew more and more.

"What are you going to do with me?" she whispered, as a single tear rolled down her cheek.

"Like I said, whatever I want to."

"I don't understand... Please. I can't anymore. Just tell me what you're going to do to me. I have to know. I can't not know anymore. Please."

The more words she spoke, the more resigned she seemed to become to her fate and the more determined she became to overcome it, as long as she knew what she was going to be put up against. But she now understood he had brought her there for a reason, and the fact that she didn't know what that reason was, seemed to be killing her more than her fear of dying at his hands.

There were very few he had encountered who had resigned themselves that way. The lack of knowledge exceeded their pleas for their lives. She was one of the very few with a deep-

rooted resilience in her spirit who believed she could overcome anything if she overcame just the next hurdle. But would she, in this case?

How far was Vincent willing to go to be victorious over the man who had once been his best friend, his brother in arms, and now his worst enemy?

And now Vincent was going to use the woman they had fallen in love with and sworn to protect from afar to become a pawn in his game to beat his friend.

If there had been even the slightest degree of recognition in Caden's eyes when he had looked at Mia, Vincent would have won their war already. But then again, they'd had the same kind of training, and they'd been in the same situations where they didn't know if they would come out of it alive. Caden could hide his emotions the same way Vincent could.

No. He needed to use other means to draw out his new enemy. Blood heated beneath his skin at the thought of what those means required.

And he couldn't do that without tainting her.

Not without destroying the innocence they had sworn to safeguard from themselves.

He would have to touch her naked body.

Chapter Five

Mia wrestled with overwhelming intensity not to crumble to the ground under the sheer disturbing weight of the circumstances that she had not chosen to be a part of.

She could no longer comprehend anything. Her brain hurt to think. She had resorted to silently weeping on the inside for the people she loved and what they must be going through, wondering where she might be, and thinking the worst.

She couldn't bear the thought of Bianca thinking she had died.

And now she had no idea what her purpose was. The man who had instructed her to call him Sir and nothing else had flipped the narrative on her when he introduced a third party to his scheme, and clearly that third party was going to be an active player in whatever plot he had thought of, or there wouldn't have been any reason for him to show her the man he kept imprisoned in a glass cell in the depths of his castle.

Who was that man? What did both of them have to do with her?

Why her?

Surely by now, he should have realized he had taken the wrong kind of girl. Why was he still keeping her? Why was he

still going on with whatever sick plans he had?

Mia couldn't believe how unbelievably tired she was. It felt as if she hadn't slept in years, but she supposed the mental payment for being in such a highly volatile situation, where she didn't know if she was going to be killed or violated, was the same no matter the fact that she had only been taken hours ago.

She just needed to know what he wanted to do with her.

"Come," he said, taking her arm yet again and steering her along. Mia couldn't help her gaze from falling back onto the man in the cell as she looked behind her.

He was a victim, too. She had to help him. She tried to convey as much in her gaze that he should not give up hope and that she would find a way out for both of them and beat the man called Sir. But all she was met with was that same fury in his wintry cerulean eyes before she realized it was directed at the man keeping him captive.

She jerked herself free of him when they were back in the elevator and crossed her arms over her chest.

They took the elevator back up. He didn't touch her again.

Instead, he led the way and expected her to follow. Shaking

mad and at her wit's end, she obeyed his silent instruction.

They walked down another passage, but Mia could see that they had stopped off on the third floor. She had no idea what else he planned to show her.

She shivered as the cold took hold of her again. God, she was exhausted, as if she had been physically punched in the ring all day long, yet no one had laid a hand on her. Yet.

A few minutes later, they came to a closed door, varnished in pale blue with pink embossed roses on the border of the wood. There were again two skulls next to each other on the door. It seemed to be the castle's insignia. How appropriate that it signified death.

He swung open the door and waved her inside what appeared to be a bedroom bigger than her whole house back home.

In keeping with the combination of new and old, the room was decorated with a few vintage pieces in a Victorian-English style, coupled with some modern art pieces. A huge, lit fire warmed the entire room, and the bed in the center of the space was the biggest she had ever seen in her life.

Her heels sank into the thick, fluffy carpet at her feet. The extravagant chandelier hanging from the middle of the ceiling in the room casting pretty little shadows all around.

Taking a last sweep across the room, she turned and faced him, only to watch him walk across the vast expanse of the room to open another set of double doors.

“Your clothes,” he gestured to the walk-in closet. “The bathroom has everything else you’ll need. The fridge is fully stocked.”

“Just tell me what you want from me,” she said, sounding as tired as she felt and depleted of all patience.

“We start tomorrow. Be ready at nine. Dressed and waiting. Good night, Mia,” he said and left the room, locking her inside.

Her frustration tipped over. She didn’t even know how to handle the flood of fury and confusion contaminating her usually placated self. Even in her darkest moments, she had self-preserved her emotions and tucked them away until they withered and could no longer hurt her.

But this time, she wanted to scream and throw things. So that’s what she did. In her blind fury, she lifted a vase filled with sweet-smelling roses from a side table nearby and hauled it against the shut and bolted door of the bedroom. She picked up another ornament, then another. She couldn’t stop. She screamed until her throat started to hurt all over again. And

then she started to cry, crumbling to the floor in her thrift store-bought evening gown, with her skin still smelling of her special occasion lotion and the sample packets of perfume she had used.

She sobbed until she ran out of tears. Until she was even on her knees, her body couldn't keep her even marginally upright anymore. She laid her head down on the pristine, lavender-scented white carpet and just stayed there.

What was going to happen to her tomorrow at nine o'clock?

She imagined Bianca going out of her mind, worrying about her, and having to cancel her trip. She imagined needing to go home to her own house and having to leave her aunt alone.

Oh, God, help her.

Rosemary was the only mother she had known, and so many of her mannerisms seemed familiar to Mia because she was so similar to her sister, Mia's mother.

Her aunt needed her to soothe away the moments when she panicked, always at night and at the same time. The exact same moment Mia's uncle Paul and her husband had left this world. Only Mia could bring her back from the terror she experienced.

She couldn't lose her aunt. She wasn't going to.

She was going to get out, and it didn't matter if she was broken when she escaped or was released, whichever came first if the latter even stood a chance of happening.

The green-eyed, dark-haired man with the strange hypnotic pull on her, who managed to both heat her body and freeze her in place with fear, was not going to destroy her.

And she was going to take the stormy blue-eyed, dark-haired man, who seemed to have the very same effect on her as his captor, with her.

Those were her final thoughts before her tear-wracked eyes closed and sleep engulfed her. But she was too tired to wake herself from the cradle of nightmares that consumed her.

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Mia woke with a start, deeply disoriented. She glanced around the room, and instantly her worst nightmares became her living reality. She chucked the covers off and then scrambled off the bed, only to realize she was naked, save for her underwear.

Whirling around the room, feeling as if she were suffering from a hangover of the worst kind, she tried to piece her night together.

She distinctly remembered falling asleep on the floor on the carpet in the middle of the room after she had broken down completely.

She couldn't remember removing her dress, her shoes, or getting into bed. She pushed her hands through her hair and pulled, shouting at herself to remember, but failing.

She then stopped moving, and releasing her hair, she slid her hand down her face and shook her head. It was better to think she had done all those things despite not being entirely convinced, than to have someone else do them for her.

She glanced around the room, looking for hidden cameras.

What difference would it make? She was his prisoner. He planned to do worse things to her, then undress her and put her to bed.

The antique clock on the wall told her she had half an hour to get ready. For a minuscule second, she thought about disobeying him, then rethought her strategy. She would have come across as pliable and accommodating if she had planned to negotiate her release with him once and for all.

Gathering a sheet to cover her nakedness, she stepped into the walk-in closet and stood there in mute shock. Racks and racks of clothes filled the closets. Brand new, with the price tag still on them. She whimpered at the prices of them all, but more scarily, they were all in her size, and so were the shelves and shelves of shoes. The underwear drawers were filled with designer panties and bra sets in every color imaginable and every style available.

She went into the bathroom and gasped aloud. The brands lining the vanity were hers—cheap drugstore brands but nonetheless ones she used, and all the combinations of creams and lotions were there too. It was as if someone had slipped into the bathroom in her house and made a list of everything in it.

This time, the cold dread that dragged through her body hit differently. She was in way, way worse trouble than she thought.

She wasn't a random girl he had picked off the street. Her kidnapping had been premeditated. Yes, he had known her name, but now, with all this, it felt too personal, too intimate. She was here for a specific reason, not just to do a task any other girl could have done.

Forcing herself to breathe through her panic, she silently told herself nothing had changed. She still had to keep her wits about her and not miss any opportunities that might help her escape.

Without wasting too much time, she pulled a dark orange-colored, long-sleeve, wrap-around dress from the closet. Next, a pair of black lace panties and a matching bra. She also chose to wear a thick pair of socks and boots. If she didn't need to be cold in his godforsaken castle, she wasn't going to be.

After showering and washing her hair, then blow-drying it into its natural soft waves, she tied her tresses into a ponytail, got dressed, and waited.

It was his chauffeur who came to fetch her and then led her to the same dining hall as the night before.

Her kidnapper was already seated at the table, laden with full breakfast dishes.

She couldn't help but drift her gaze toward him. Dressed again in a fresh black suit, his hair still slightly damp from his shower, the tightening feeling in her belly lowered to between her legs, and the heaviness in her breasts all settled in her nipples. Did he have to be so smooth and yet so dangerous at the same time? He was no different from the man he held in

the cell below. And the man in the cell he held below seemed no different to him either. The only thing that separated them was a suit.

It bothered her that she couldn't start thinking of them as two different entities. Or that she couldn't think of one of them without the other. She was losing her mind.

"I'm here," she said unnecessarily since he had already risen from his chair to pull hers back. "Do you honestly think you're fooling me by being a gentleman?" She took the seat nonetheless. She wasn't going to start being stupid now. The same thing applied as the night before. She needed sustenance, and today she probably needed it more than ever.

"If I'm not a gentleman, then what am I?" he asked as he made his way back to his chair and sat down.

"A monster," she said as she helped herself to a serving of scrambled eggs.

In answer, he nodded with a grin on his face.

"I'm here because you wanted me, specifically to be here. Tell me my purpose. Are you going to kill me?"

"No."

“Then what? You said if I did everything you asked me to do, you would release me?”

“That hasn’t changed.”

“Why am I here?”

“To help me get a name from my prisoner in the dungeon below.”

“The name of someone who is your enemy?”

“In a way, yes.”

“You think he’ll give me this name? Why would he do that? He doesn’t know me. I don’t understand.”

“You don’t need to understand, Mia; you just need to do as I say.”

“Then tell me what I have to do.”

He paused and sat back in his chair as he contemplated her, shattering her nerves with the intensity of his gaze.

“I want you to take the elevator down to the dungeon below. I want you to walk to the glass cell. I want you to stand before him and take off your clothes. Everything.”

## Chapter Six

Mia stared at the man sitting on the opposite end of the table in the dining hall of an honest-to-goodness castle in the middle of nowhere.

Snippets of their conversation swarm around in her head as she tried to make sense of everything.

He had instructed her to go down to the dungeon, to the cell where he kept his prisoner, to stand before him and remove her clothes. All of her clothes.

Apprehension, mortification, and defeat unmasked her previous false bravado.

A choking sob rose in her throat at the thought of her aunt dying alone, uncared for. And Bianca, who would forever wonder what had happened to her. She couldn't let that happen. She would sell her soul to this man if it meant she had a chance of going back home, at this point, she just needed to go home alive. She would deal with her demons on the inside by herself, and no one who loved her would know any better.

She was in a position now where she had to fight for her life if it meant she could return to her world.

“Can I trust you to keep your word that if I do everything you say, you’ll let me go?” He could do things to her body, but not to her mind. Or her heart. She would make sure of that.

“I’m a man of my word, Mia.”

She couldn’t understand the strange and unfathomable need to trust him. He didn’t play those kinds of games. It didn’t suit his persona. No, he was too arrogant and superior to lie about his intentions. He wanted the truth to be known. It was his power over her.

She raised her head and locked her gaze with his, then nodded. Already quivering uncontrollably, her breathing erratic, she rose from the table and walked out, following the same route he had taken the night before. By the time she stepped into the elevator alone, she clutched her tummy with one arm and had to use the other to balance herself against the steel wall of the car.

She was still a virgin. Not out of some moral code or something like that. She didn’t date because she didn’t want to fall in love. Because people she loved tended to die on her or lose their will to live. That was why, apart from her aunt and Bianca, she invited no one else into her life. She didn’t have any more room for pain and sorrow.



Now she was going to take off her clothes in front of a man she didn't know.

The elevator pinged, and the door opened. She couldn't move and was forced to press the button to open the doors again when they pulled close.

She had to do this. And she had to do this without overthinking it. All that mattered was the outcome. He would release her.

As if she were trudging through a lava pit, Mia slowly made her way to the glass cell where Sir held his prisoner.

Not daring to look at him, she made her way even slower to stand in front of his cell.

He regarded her with disinterest, but somehow Mia felt that when his gaze slid down her body, he did so deeply and thoroughly, exposing her to him and unearthing her. It bothered her even more that two men on opposite ends of the spectrum of freedom had the same effect on her body.

His gaze reached her, and she immediately lowered hers. She couldn't keep looking at him, no matter how strong the force was to keep staring at his face in wonder at his rugged male beauty.

She closed her eyes, her chin tucked into her chest, as she untied the knot on the side of her waist and pulled the band through the loop to separate the two parts of the fabric.

Goosebumps littered her flesh as she exposed herself to him, but she was also consciously aware that the temperature in the space had been turned up and that her reaction wasn't because she was cold.

From beneath her lashes, she watched him move a little closer to the glass wall, a little closer to her.

Her hands trembling as much as her limbs, she shrugged the dress off her shoulders.

Bending over, she removed the boots, then the socks she wore. She had painted her toenails a brilliant red to go with her dress for Bianca's show. It seemed like a lifetime ago. She was an entirely different person now, and she couldn't explain how.

Divested of her dress, socks, and boots, she stood in only a bra and a pair of panties.

Everything.

His instruction echoed in her head, followed by his promise to release her if she did everything he told her to do.

She reached behind her and unclasped the bra before removing it. Throughout it all, she kept her eyes on the carpeted floor in front of her. But that didn't negate the bubbles of heat that flourished under her skin.

She didn't need to look at the prisoner directly to know he stood with his legs apart, his hands in the pockets of his drawstring pants, still shirtless.

The stance could have been taken by the man who called himself Sir; they were so uncannily similar.

She had asked the same question of her captor about his identity. Now she asked the same question of him. Who was this other prisoner?

The panties she wore came off next, and the embarrassed flush she experienced returned tenfold. She straightened, and her first instinct was to cover her breasts and the area between her thighs. She had only gotten as far as raising her arms when a voice startled her.

"Don't," her captor commanded. She whipped her attention toward him as he pushed away from the wall as if he had been standing there watching her strip. He took off his jacket and flung it onto a chair nearby. He then loosened his tie and started to roll up his shirt sleeves, that sleek predatory power

dripping off him meshing with the same power his prisoner emitted.

Unable to remain unaffected, Mia struggled to get her breathing under control. Her chest heaved with every hard and fast breath she drew. Her skin exploded with heat. She had never been more out of her depth before.

She had never been naked, standing between two powerful men, despite one being imprisoned and the other being the captor.

She dug her fingers into her palms as he approached and stood behind her.

Close.

So close, she almost lost her will to stand and leaned against him. The backs of her naked thighs brushed his powerful ones. Her butt lay nestled a breath away from his cock. Until he wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her even closer.

Dear god.

She would never know why she turned her gaze on the man in the cell when their captor had touched her that way. What she saw seemed to first rival, then complement, the sensations her captor evoked in her. The prisoner's hard blue gaze had

darkened, his long, thick lashes glimmering under the artificial light of his cell. His angled jaw, adding a ruggedness to his features, clenched and rippled, and while he kept his breathing slow and measured. Mia didn't imagine, for one split second, she had seen his naked chest rise as she had gasped under their captor's touch when his fingers splayed on her belly and then swept up her body. Her nipples hardened into painful peaks. Her legs turned to jelly, and when she pressed her thighs tightly together, she became instantly aware that she was wet.

What was wrong with her?

His fingers crept up higher, up her belly to her chest. She gasped aloud again as his thumb slid over her swollen nipple, causing her back to arch. Her teeth sank into her lip, and she bit down hard on her flesh.

He then rolled her nipple between his fingers, making her ache with a kind of rapturous torture that uprooted every sane, safe thought in her head. She could feel the prisoner's attention on her as he watched her nipple grow tauter and more swollen while she became filled with an agonizing need to be released. It was a feeling she couldn't contain since she had never felt it before.

She gripped the wrist of his other hand as it started to travel downward toward her neatly trimmed mons.

She whimpered as his finger slid just a little between the wet folds of her pussy.

“Please,” she whispered so softly, she couldn’t be sure she had said it out loud or had it echoed in her head. She had no idea what she was pleading for, but when her captor removed his finger and licked the tip, gleaming with her wetness, she closed her eyes in pure shame.

She wasn’t supposed to be wet.

Her nipples were not supposed to be so hard and aroused.

She wasn’t supposed to be this way for two strange men she hadn’t met before, even though only one of them was touching her.

When she opened her eyes again, it was to find the prisoner and the captor warring in a battle she knew nothing about.

The intensity of the looks they exchanged and the volumes of hate and history between them shook the whole floor of the dungeon beneath her.

The sheer degree of brutal power in the body of the man holding her would undoubtedly match the brutal power of the

man enclosed in a glass cell.

Every cell in her body seemed to have magnetized itself to both of the men. Whether it was the one man yielding all the power or the one imprisoned who gazed upon her with dark, sensual sadism in his eyes as if he owned the world and could look at her any way he wanted.

Moments ticked by, and only her ragged breathing filled the silence. Just when she wanted to collapse from the strain of being between them, her captor took her wrist. She glanced down in shock as he clasped a thick band of metal around her wrist. She tried to pull away, except her arm was being lifted by the chain attached to the cuff.

Her mouth dried. A new fear instantly unlocked as she frantically glanced up. To her horror, for the first time, she noticed that there were chains with restraints hanging from the ceiling. She hadn't noticed anything else about the place before, and certainly not the chains that hung from the ceiling, ready to restrain whoever their master wanted at his mercy. But, then again, her life as she knew it had found a new way to unravel, she had been too busy trying to keep it together to observe her surroundings other than to only notice the man in the glass case and her captor.

Oh god. Oh god. Oh god.

He did the same to her other wrist, and soon she found herself forced to balance on the tips of her bare feet as she strained to remain stationary.

She had to bite back on her plea for him to release her. She hated that she wasn't strong enough to accept her fate long enough so that he could be done with her. She refused to plead with him again. But if this broke her completely, she would leave with a portion of her pride in place because she refused to beg for mercy.

But her humiliation seemed to increase with every harsh beat of her heart. Tears dripped from her eyes at the position that rendered her completely vulnerable.

She squeezed her thighs so tightly together that she made herself go rigid with ignominy and anger.

She kept reminding herself that her body was on display for two men she didn't know. There was nothing to shield or protect her if they wished to look at her.

She tried to hide her face in the crook of her arm, but it wasn't enough to conceal her from the humiliation.



No man had ever looked at her body that way before. Now there were two. And no matter how hard she tried not to make her body react, the more her body seemed to respond to them, Her breasts were so heavy, and her nipples throbbed with mind-blowing agony. The slickness between the folds of her pussy now slid down her inner thighs. She wished she could have wished it away.

But nothing prepared her for the moment when he unbuckled his belt and whipped it out of the loops of his pants with one smooth, fluid motion. The sound of leather whipping the air startled her as if she had been the one targeted.

Mai's heart pounded as a wave of panic washed over her. She could feel her body turn ice-cold and her hands sweaty with fear. Even though she hadn't for a moment underestimated what kind of danger loomed ahead of her, she had underestimated the danger he posed. Her mind raced with possible scenarios, each one more terrifying than the last. She tried to steady herself, but her body trembled with fear, and she couldn't stop herself from displaying her anxiety. She was overwhelmed with helplessness, and fresh tears began to form in her eyes. She refused to shed a tear in front of them both. She knew that what was about to happen to her would hurt; it

was just a matter of the extent of it. Still, she couldn't bring herself to accept it; the need to beg for mercy was thick on her tongue, but she managed to prevent the words from spilling from her mouth. Her fear had taken on the scent of her body, her aroused body, and for that reason, because she had been unable to stop herself from giving into their effect on her, she deserved this. There wasn't going to be any miracle that would save her from her doom.

## Chapter Seven

Mia gave herself a mental shake. Whatever he planned to do to her, she would handle it.

Sealing off every emotion and trying her damndest not to let her apprehension seep out of her again, she braced herself as her captor wrapped the buckle end of his belt around his fist, leaving only the thick strap of leather dangling from his hand. She licked her lip as he moved into the side of her.

She could take this.

Except when he touched her again, her skin melted into a million pockets of fire. Standing on the right side of her, he curled his right arm around her waist, keeping her steady. His cologne sent her spiraling down a different path. His breath lingered against her hair and her ear. Her eyes were fixed on the man in the cell. He hadn't taken his attention off of her.

The first strike of her captor's belt on the flesh of her backside seared her skin with a sharpness that just awakened the nerves there. The shock of the impact robbed her of sound, and she ended up purring instead.

The next one wasn't as restrained. This time she wailed under

the savage hotness of the strike, which rekindled the fire inside to rage with more fervor.

Red-hot in the cheeks, she stole a glimpse at his prisoner. The man hadn't moved from his spot. His hands were still in his pants pockets. His legs were still braced apart.

She raised her gaze to his directly, and she caught his eye. But at that moment, her captor struck her again and again. The leather of his belt dipped into her flesh under his hand and left behind a sting that she felt in every other part of her. She cried out in shame and agony. And something else.

She didn't know if it was a verbal display of her response to being belted or not, but this time, the prisoner yanked his hands from his pockets. Tension scaled up his body, and his chest expanded as he moved around the cell. She soon realized he was trying to see behind her and that he couldn't, which evoked a fierce, growling agitation in him.

But every time she was struck, he looked at her, and she looked at his hands, flexing as if he himself had delivered the lashing, and what little of her control and her coherence remained dissipated.

What was happening to her?

She hadn't realized that with every strike, she had also moved closer to her captor until his whole arm covered her waist and

his hand reached around her.

She couldn't stop herself from feeling the need to crawl into the warmth of the same man who was inflicting her with pain that had morphed from sheer horror to a sensual burn. A burn that ebbed and flowed through her, transporting her further and further away from her reality and placing her in a space she didn't recognize but was drawn to more intensely each time.

Her body felt as if it were floating, and with each new lashing of his leather, she was fueled higher and higher. And wetter.

She could not deny that what had started as a flood of wetness from between her thighs from his first strike was now a steady stream that drenched her folds and throbbed in her clit.

She was incapable of hiding her shame. No matter how tightly she closed her legs, all that did was smooth her inner thighs with the arousal that was pouring out of her.

She lost count of how many whips with his belt he delivered.

It didn't matter how many more he planned to issue, either.

She had found a way through it, despite the fact it added a gleaming sense of arousal to her entire body. She had never known she was capable of such profound feelings.

But, he stopped, and a blanket of ice consumed her immediately in the time it took him to throw his belt aside and move in behind her. But not before their eyes collided and

cinched together. This was the man who had given her pain and forced her to find the tools within herself to turn that pain into something else. There was a haunting glint in his gaze that penetrated her before he erased it completely.

She caught her breath as he spun her around, once, twice, fast. She knew what he was doing. He was taunting the man in the cell, who had changed into a caged bear, as they stared off.

Her captor did it again, but the chains above her head started to untangle too quickly and sent her spinning around instead. He caught her from behind, her back against his chest, but he hadn't taken his focus off the man they both faced.

His hand slipped over her breast again, then his thumb over her nipple, repeatedly. Her belly caved inward as she sucked in a huge gulp of air when his other hand drifted to her mons. This time, he wasn't so gentle. Pushing his leg between her thighs, he forced her to open her legs for him.

No. No. No.

His long, hard, calloused fingers stroked over her clit. She staggered back toward him. The sensation of his rough touch on her created more arousal in her.

Please no.

She would rather die than have him know she was wet.

But it was too late. No matter how hard she tried to close her

legs, she couldn't, not with his thigh keeping them apart. His fingers soon dipped between her folds.

She cried out at the foreignness of his touch, drowning under his spell for her to open up for him and knowing she was going mad for obeying him.

He had taken her from her world and brought her here, where he intended to use her against another man he held prisoner.

She couldn't accept this kind of darkness. She wasn't that kind of person. She was good and honest and tried to live her life as best as she could, being the way she was.

She rattled at the chains, wanting to break free but afraid that if he continued touching her, she would step into the abyss with no hope of returning.

She tried so hard to move out of his grasp, but that only forced him to hold her tighter and draw her body as close to his as he could.

She closed her eyes at the hardness of his cock against her backside. Heaven help her.

She whimpered, purred, and moaned as he stroked his finger up and down her slit, to the shallow entrance of her pussy.

She looked at her single spectator for help, but instead, she found him observing her as if he were doing the same things to her, stroking her clit with his knuckle while his fingers dipped

into the wetness that gathered in her pussy.

Her captor pushed a little deeper and caressed her clit a little more forcefully. The bundle of sensations he erupted imploded inside her and turned up her chaos.

She didn't want to come.

She couldn't.

Please, God, don't let me do this.

She struggled with more frenzy the closer he got her to the edge.

She couldn't...

"Please don't," she sobbed, sounding pathetic to her own ears.

It was her own weakness at play. She had no pride left. No sense of right and wrong. What kind of girl would she be if she orgasmed?

"Please don't," she begged again. But nothing could stop her.

She came so hard, she drew blood from her lip, and she tasted her own tears. She had entered a dimension of shame. Her body was still hot and her climax still pulling at her, she hardened herself and tried to rip herself free of the restraints.

But he wouldn't let her go.

"Again. Come for me again," he instructed her softly. She shook her head, hating this weak, uncontrolled person she had become.



She shook her head, hissing at him. His prisoner slammed both his hands on the glass, causing the whole floor to rattle.

“I can’t let you go until you come for me again. Again, Mia.”

The huskiness in his voice awakened her, and wetness drizzled from her pussy onto his hand. Her clit still throbbed with a fresh need to be released. And all it took was one stroke of his thumb for her to fall apart again.

“I’m sorry, Mia,” her captor said so softly into her ear that she wondered if she had misheard him. But he repeated those words again, crushing her body to his the instant she completely splintered apart, the flesh of her pussy drawing taut before she started to spasm on a spiral of no return.

He held her until the last wave pulsed through her, and then he released her to walk up to the glass cell.

“You want to taste her? You tell me the fucking name,” he said calmly.

“Fuck you!” his prisoner roared, repeatedly slamming his fists into the glass until droplets of blood splattered against it.

“Fuck you.”

Her captor, only known to her as Sir, licked the fingers of the hand he had touched her with before he turned and came toward her again. She dropped her head in new shame.

He released her from the restraints on her wrists, gathered her

in his arms as he scooped her up, and carried her out of the dungeon.

She fought him, but her body had grown weak and her strength had been diminished with everything that had happened to her, so her attempts were feeble.

She hated him for doing this to her. For taking away her control and leading her down this path with him.

She didn't want to be here anymore.

He carried her up to the bedroom she had slept in before, noticing that the mess she had left behind the night before had been miraculously cleaned up.

He set her on her feet at the side of the bed, but she wasn't done with him yet. She punched her fists into his chest, and he let her.

"I hate you. You had no right to do that. I hate—" She carried on pounding her fists into his hard, unyielding chest until she spent every last ounce of her energy.

Defeated and angry, she turned away from him only to have him lift her again and place her in bed.

She was already sobbing herself to sleep by the time he pulled the covers over her nakedness.

Mia slept half the day away. By the time she was forced to leave the bed to use the bathroom, it was already sunset. A

tray of food had been brought up to her, and she still didn't know if there were extra staff on hand to clean up after her and prepare the meals or if there were only the four of them in the gigantic castle. Her captor, his prisoner, his chauffeur, and her. She nibbled on some food, took a shower, pulled on a pair of silk pajamas, and went back to bed.

Despite everything he had done to her, she still believed he would release her when he was done with her for whatever sick game he was playing with his prisoner.

She just had to have a better hold on her body and her emotions. She wasn't that weak of a person before, and she wasn't going to start being one now just because she had been kidnapped.

She was serving a sentence. She would be released.

She slept through the night, waking only twice to add a soothing layer of Vaseline to soothe away the sting his belt had left on her backside.

She woke up an hour earlier, determined to take charge of her destiny herself, she showered, changed into another dress, socks, and boots, and headed to the dining hall.

She took tremendous pleasure when she surprised him by entering the hall before he had summoned her.

She pulled out her own chair before he could rise from his,

forcing him to sit down again.

She filled her plate with eggs, bacon, and pancakes. She sipped her coffee slowly and then leaned back in her chair.

“What do I have to do today? Go down to your prisoner in your dungeon, strip off my clothes, get spanked with your belt, then make me come twice? Is that going to be a daily thing here?” She rose as she spoke, ready to go and do whatever he asked her to do.

“No,” he said, his gaze washing over her before he turned his attention to the screen in front of them.

“Today, you’ll talk to my prisoner?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I said you will talk to my prisoner today. Go down to the dungeon and have a conversation with him; play a game with him.”

“That’s all you want me to do?”

“Yes,” he said, but he was too distracted for Mia’s liking.

She nodded once and left him alone at the table. She felt his gaze follow her out of the dining hall, but she didn’t turn around to see if she was right.

She took the elevator down to the dungeon, tucking her shame and humiliation away. She was never going to see these men ever again but she was done wearing any kind of emotion on

her sleeve for them to see.

She didn't bother to look at him as she took a seat in front of his cell.

“He says I should talk to you. Have a conversation. What do you want to talk about?”

Minutes ticked by, and the man behind the glass said nothing. He turned his back on her while she described the weather outside.

It really was a beautiful summer day. And she would never admit it to anyone, but there had been a charmingness about the castle that had snagged her attention. When she had glanced out the window and taken in the gardens, she had immediately thought her aunt would love to sit amongst the roses and contently breathe in their scent.

“I never knew there would be such pretty summer days here around this house of horror, but what do you know, the sun does shine here, despite the insignias all over depicting—”

“I can show you six ways to kill him in his sleep.”

## Chapter Eight

Caden Hemsworth had memorized every sound, every word, and every gasp and staggered breath she took. From his glass-walled cell, he could pick out the tones in her hair, whose hues were almost golden against her dark tresses. He could pick out the hazel specks in her beautiful eyes. He had imagined what the weight of her breasts would feel like in his hands—the throbbing ache in his cock that would drive him insane as her nipples brushed against the center of his palms.

He had envisioned her spread wide open for his pleasure. Wet and hot. And the need for his giant cock to slide between her folds, driving deeper and deeper into her until he touched her innermost part.

But he had been tortured and tormented, confined to his cell, unable to smell or taste her. Unable to slide his fingers into her pretty pussy and feel her clutch hotly against his finger. He couldn't get out of his mind what his cock would look like inside her.

He had never seen her in his life before, but from the moment she walked into the domain of his cell, he knew he would kill to have her. He planned to do exactly that, too. Once he was free, he was going to take her with him. He pushed aside his

thoughts about escaping for later. It was hard to think of escape and murder when she sat before him again, fully clothed this time in a long black skirt with red roses on the bottom and a soft sweater he thought was made of cashmere. She wore the same boots she had worn yesterday, and he wondered what kind of socks she had underneath.

His cock hardened a fraction further as he recalled her slipping her socks off to reveal her perfect little feet and toes.

Fuck, she was stunning in every way possible. She was as much a prisoner as he was, but he enjoyed seeing defiance burning in her eyes. She may have fallen apart in the bastard's arms when he made her come, but her gaze had glittered with fury, and he could see it through the daze in her beautiful golden orbs.

Who was she?

Why had his nemesis chosen her? How had he known that of all the women in the world, she was the one who would make Caden take a second glance before he took her for himself?

But that thought brought a feeling of unease inside him. As if taking her would have been the wrong thing to do. That thought, too, he pushed aside. It didn't matter.

She was frightened of him. Maybe it was because he had punched his knuckles into a bleeding wound because the need

to touch her had stamped out his control and instead released the monster inside him.

Or maybe it was because the first words he said to her were six ways she could pull off killing the bastard in his sleep who had captured them both.

Shock had lined the gorgeous features on her face. She was repulsed that he would say something like that, but she couldn't deny that this was the world she had been brought into. He watched her roll his words over in her head before she mentally spat them out. She wasn't capable of murder. Her purity wouldn't allow it. But not him. Subconsciously, he glanced down at his hands, the hands of someone who had touched death more times than he cared to count. And yet he was still alive—captured but breathing.

The man who had put him in the cell had the same kind of hands as Caden had. He didn't know how he knew it; he just did, which explained why he hadn't made any rash attempts to escape. The man was an equally matched adversary. The likes of which he hadn't come across in his time.

“Do you like to read?” She asked, changing the subject from how to kill her captor.

“Yes, sometimes.”

“What's your favorite book?”



“The Count of Monte Cristo.”

“Right.”

“Have you read it before?”

“Why do you ask? Because I seem like the kind of girl who only reads romances? I’ll have you know I have read The Count of Monte Cristo, and yes, I also read romance novels.”

She raised her head. There it was again. Her defying spark.

His fingers flexed with the maniacal need to trace the streaks the bastard’s belt had left on her lovely ass so he could bring the sting back to the surface again, only to hear her sweet whimpering.

“How’s your ass?”

She couldn’t stop her gasp from escaping, and he was ruined by the need for her to turn around, lift her skirt, pull down her panties, and let him look at her.

“Perfectly fine, thank you very much. Yours?”

He chuckled this time before he turned around and walked to the bookshelves in his cell, lined with a copious number of books. He flipped The Count of Monte Cristo from its place, then slipped it into the glass box and sent it to her end. “Read it to me.”

She rose from the bench with the grace of an angel to collect the book before she returned to her seat.

Without another word, she turned to the first page and started to read.

Her voice lingered in the air with every word she uttered. Her soft, silky tone penetrated the hardness of his soul. He laid himself down on the bed in his cell on his back, then crossed his ankles and slipped his hands beneath his head.

He closed his eyes, but it was fucking disgustingly sacrilegious that his cock had been hardened by the sweetness of her voice. She was meant to remain untouched, shielded from his darkness, but she was here now, brought into the fold of his sinful existence, and there was no turning back for him. She read for more than twenty minutes. Her voice grew huskier with every word.

“Why are you here?” She asked, closing the book and breaking the spell. He didn’t answer her.

“He wants a name from you,” she insisted, but she didn’t need to add the silent plea for him to know what else she meant. If he gave the man a name, she would be set free. It had become glaringly obvious that he had picked this girl to mess with Caden. As if he knew intimate details of Caden’s life no one else was privy to.

“I don’t have a name.”

“When I was three years old, my parents died in a car

accident. Do you remember things from when you were three years old?" She asked the question, then answered it herself. "I do," she said.

Caden rose from the bed. He stood directly in front of her. His arms were folded over his bare chest.

"I remember I had started crying over some stupid thing. I see myself doing it as if I'm right there, at this very moment. My mom turned to comfort me. My dad took his eye off the road for a split second to see if I was all right. I know they adored me. And then a truck knocked us off the road and down a cliff. I still see the bloodied images of my parent's faces as they lay motionless on the rocks. I had something real to cry about then."

She stopped talking and shook her head, then sucked up her tears. "I have to get home to my aunt, the woman who raised me and loved me as much as my mom would have," she added with sheer determination.

Then she turned her attention back to him, rising from the bench and closing the gap between them.

She leaned into the glass. Her closeness unleashed the feral side of him. He bumped up against the glass, his face turned down, and were it not for the partition between them, he would have been able to inhale the scent of her hair. And let his lips

brush against her. He growled, scaring her, but she stood her ground, trembling and afraid of him. Fuck, he didn't know what he would do to her if he got to touch her. He wasn't sure he wouldn't hurt her with his brutal need to have her. She was too soft for him to mar. Too pure. Too precious. But he would erase the world for a breath of her scent.

Still panting in fear, her lips quivering, she asked her question.

“Do you have any romance novels back there?”

He stepped back from her immediately, staring her down.

She lowered her eyes, and the thick expanse of her eyelashes spanned her cheeks, and nothing looked lovelier to him than her.

He turned and faced the shelves of books, then dragged his hand through his hair.

She was safer with him on the other side of the glass.

“Jane Austen?” he said, his throat hoarse.

“Perfect. Any Jane Austen will do.”

He took the hardback version of the book and sent it to her.

She took it from the tray and returned *The Count of Monte Cristo* to him the same way, then sat back down on the bench, the book on her lap.

“You must know why you're here. Because it's clear, I'm here because of you. Why are you here?”

“Say my name,” he said instead.

“I don’t know your name.”

“Caden. Say it.”

“Caden,” she said softly.

“Again,” he ordered her. “And look at me this time.”

She lifted her gaze to him. “Caden,” she said, even softer than before. His name, from her lips, cleansed his soul. A memory shifted through his mind. Sunshine and goodness The aroma of something rich and sweet—caramel and butter. But the memory had been fleeting and had disappeared from his mind as instantly as it appeared.

“He killed my family. And I’m going to kill him.”

He was Caden’s enemy. And he deserved to die at Caden’s hand.

“Read,” he ordered her. He turned and laid back down on the bed.

Pages flipping softly echoed around him. She couldn’t hide the wrought emotion lacing her voice, defeated that she had been caught between two men she couldn’t trust if she wanted to make it back to her world.

Caden closed his eyes, his body trained to instantly fall asleep but also to remain 100% alert at the faintest hint of danger.

She was his. And he was going to take her with him.

## Chapter Nine

Mia read to Caden until thirst overtook her. She looked at the man laying down on his prison bed, facing away from her. She rose from the bench and approached the glass tentatively. He looked as if he were sound asleep. From her viewpoint, she could only see the rise and fall of his muscle-laden chest and down the length of his body—all six feet plus of his length. If she thought he was a helpless victim, she had to rethink her thoughts about him completely. It didn't matter that he was incarcerated; it did nothing to dent his pride and ego. He even walked around the cell as if he owned the land on which he stood.

She didn't know anymore. She didn't know who was worse.

The man above or this one here below.

She placed the book on the glass tray and sent it back to him.

He didn't move. Or was he just pretending to be asleep?

Taking the elevator back up, she headed straight to her own prison. Her mind had numbed itself, desperately trying to protect herself from the turn of events that just added another layer of catastrophe to her situation.

Had the man who kidnapped her really killed Caden's family?

What name did he want to know? Everything made less and less sense. She shook her head. She couldn't become embroiled in their problems. She just had to concentrate on saving herself. And she needed to obey the person in charge for the moment. And given her time spent with Caden, that role of power was easily interchangeable.

She sat on the bed and tried to sort her thoughts out, but came up with nothing. Dissatisfied, she marched out of the room in search of her captor.

She didn't expect him to be in the dining hall; it wasn't even lunch yet. She tried a series of doors on the same floor. The castle was so big she risked getting hopelessly lost, possibly never to be found, but she had to find him. He had to release her today. There was nothing more she could do for him. If he thought Caden would give up the name if he used her as a pawn against him, her captor had grossly miscalculated her sway over his prisoner.

What if her captor wasn't here? What if she was alone with his prisoner? The thought made her more frantic than she imagined. On some bizarre plain, she needed to be between the both of them. They were the only things familiar to her in this chasm of pandemonium.

Panic gripped her as she tried another floor. She opened door

after door, all of them empty, their furniture covered with white sheets, like ghosts.

“Mia.”

Swiftly, she turned around and came face-to-face with him.

Their eyes connected in a locked stare.

“Did you kill his family?” she asked, utterly unaware that had been the first question she was going to ask him.

“No,” he replied, maintaining his focus on her for a few more intense moments before he turned and slipped into a room whose door she may have missed opening in her haste to find him.

She followed him and found herself in what appeared to be his study. An imposingly large desk sat in front of an equally imposingly large window. Again, a mixture of old and new lay scattered around the massive room in the form of art, ornaments, and furniture. The castle’s insignia is everywhere she looks.

Why was she so fascinated by its shape and form? Why were there also two skulls, the same yet somehow different? She couldn’t ignore the creeping feeling that rose from her skin at the sight of it. Why? She had never seen it before or anything like it, had she?

“He seems to believe you did,” she said, watching as he



rounded the desk and took a seat.

“He’s mistaken.”

“And I’m supposed to believe you?”

“Yes.”

“Did you have anything to do with his family’s death? Even indirectly?”

“No. And I say that because I am a man of my word.”

She opened her mouth to say something contrary but knew it would come out as a weak defense. She didn’t know what to do anymore. She believed her captor when he said he had nothing to do with Caden’s family’s death. But she couldn’t ignore the depth to which Caden believed it to be true.

She shook her head again. This wasn’t her concern.

“I want to know the exact day I’m being released. I’ve done everything you asked.”

“A week more is all I require.” He then picked up a tablet from the desk and, rising from his chair, handed it to her. She took the device with grave suspicion. She would handle anything else he threw at her, as long as he didn’t touch her. As long as he didn’t let his prisoner watch as he touched her. They had broken a piece of her soul, and it could never be replaced with anything else. If she was touched again, she would never be able to find her way back.

The thought now seemed to drown in the realization that he meant to keep her longer. Her aunt would not survive it. Who was going to take care of her? And Bianca. She had to let them know she was okay. Somehow.

Tilting her head down, her eyes widened as she realized he had started a video connection with Gail, her neighbor, the woman who kindly watched Mia's aunt when she was at work at the diner.

"Mia," Gail's bubbly face, appeared on the screen.

Entirely stunned by his latest move, she tossed her shocked expression at her captor, only to find he wasn't even looking at her. He had sat down again and seemed to be working.

"Oh my god, Gail. Is my aunt okay?" Mia took in the background behind Gail and realized it was her house. Gail was still with her aunt.

"Rosemary is fine and well. Don't worry, dear, I haven't left her side, and I won't until you return. See?" She moved her phone to capture the image of her catatonic aunt sitting in her wheelchair with a handful of nuts on her lap.

"Aunt Rosemary." Mia cried, tears dripping down her face. Her aunt looked up sharply all around her at the sound of Mia's voice.

"I'm here, Aunt Rosemary," she said, but her aunt grew

agitated when Gail brought the device closer to her.

“It’s okay, Gail. Please just stay with my aunt until I get back.”

“You got it, my dear.”

Mia nodded through her tears. The call got disconnected, but before she handed the tablet back to him, she was startled yet again by another incoming video call.

She answered it immediately.

“Oh fuck, Mia,” Bianca said on the other side. “You have no idea how happy I am to see your face. The man promised me you were okay, but this is proof enough. Are you okay? For real?”

The jolt of seeing her friend’s face again hadn’t subsided enough for her to formulate full sentences in her head.

Two people she thought she might never see again, despite being determined to hold onto every last shred of hope there was, had spoken to her in real-time and they were okay.

“Yes, I’m fine.”

“Whew. I still can’t believe it. A man I had never seen in my life before walked into the gallery way before show time, took me aside, and told me you were going to go with him and that nothing bad would happen to you if we both did as we were told. Mia, I was going out of my mind, wondering if trusting him had been a mistake. But here you are. Oh, my fucking

pants. You're okay. He told me I had to go to Paris, carry on as normal, and wait for this call. Are you really okay?"

No, she wasn't. She didn't know how to react to him letting her speak to the people she loved the most, and it bothered her and displaced her. He had granted a mercy bigger than she had thought him capable of delivering.

She chatted further with her friend. It seemed futile to tell Bianca to call the cops; she wasn't okay, and they had to look for a castle, hours away from the city in all directions, to find her. But she didn't for some reason.

Somehow, it felt as if he were waiting to see how well she kept her word. He said he was going to release her after a week or so. She planned to earn that release. She didn't want to analyze her reactions too closely because they would leave her undone. "Thank you," she said softly as she placed the tablet on his desk.

He gave a noncommittal nod, which she interpreted as being dismissed. She found her way back to the room that had been allotted to her for her stay and was even more surprised to find her phone had been repaired, and next to it lay another tablet that housed all the contacts on her phone as well.

She could make a call to anywhere in the world—any law enforcement office, nearby or far away. She would name him

her kidnapper and have him answerable to the law.

But would a man vulnerable to lawful intricacies give her such power? Innately, she understood and believed wholeheartedly that her captor was a man untouchable by anyone, human or law.

She called Gail and Bianca again just to be sure he hadn't tricked her. She made a call to the local law enforcement office in Sundown Grove to see if the call would go through. It did.

She apologized and said she dialed the wrong number. She called in at work and discovered she had taken extended leave without a date to return. Her boss was happy she got to do that.

She didn't know how to feel about him controlling her life.

Over the next few days, she fell into a strange rhythm. She spoke to her aunt, Gail, and Bianca, every day. Then she would spend her mornings with his prisoner. She was ordered to finish reading Jane Austen's, Emma. And all he would do was lie on his bed or stand in front of her, unnerving her with his stance, his legs spread wide, and his arms folded. The cell in which he was kept was furnished with everything a studio apartment would have, and it came equipped with an enclosed bathroom with a shower. Books lined the walls. But the only clothes he was allowed to wear were drawstring pants, and sometimes he donned a T-shirt.

He would also ask her strange questions. As innocent as her favorite color, to where she lived and who she trusted the most. She asked him the same questions back, but he didn't bother answering any of hers.

She had no idea what she was doing anymore. After her mornings with Caden. She spent her afternoons in the room until the chauffeur came to collect her for dinner.

She could hardly understand why her heart would break each time she discovered her captor had gone from the dining room, leaving her to sit by herself and finish a meal that required a top-notch chef to prepare.

After the fourth day and three days since she'd seen him, she surprised herself when instead of going back to her room after dinner, she took the elevator up to the second floor, where she remembered his studying being.

She couldn't fathom the bizarre nature of her actions, especially when she didn't bother to knock and just opened the door.

Her captor stood up from his chair immediately. For a moment, his enigmatic features filled with something similar to surprise. She had surprised him, and that made her grin.

Surreptitiously, she allowed herself to take in every part of him. Seeing him again brought her a sense of relief. She had

felt incomplete, half complete, these last days. But when a new truth dawned on her, swirling panic engulfed her. She would have felt the same, the very, very same way if she had only seen her captor and not his prisoner for the same number of days.

How had she become entwined in their dangerous worlds to this degree? Why?

What was it about the captor and his prisoner that had consumed her to the point where she no longer worried about her life?

Now that she was in his office, she needed a reason to be there. Her attention fell on an antique chessboard. She walked toward the table and sat on the chair.

“You play?”

## Chapter Ten

Vincent had seen a man's life slip from his body countless times. He had faced similar challenges immeasurable times himself, only to come out on the other side alive and more damaged. So had Caden for that matter. But nothing displaced him more than Mia Edwards.

Obsessed with her from afar was one thing; having her within his reach, listening to her talk, and touching her had rocked him to the core of his soul. He could remember the sweet scent of her pussy on her fingers. That one taste hadn't been enough. He wanted everything that night. Stopping himself from making her come for the third time required more control than he had exercised even in a life-or-death situation.

She didn't know that he had sat down and watched the live feed of her time with Caden from the cameras he kept in plain sight in the dungeon.

She didn't know he had seen her pulse pick up; her eyes grew darker every time Caden looked at her and challenged her. His cock had stirred every time she tightened her legs as if she were denying the wetness he knew was seeping from her pretty pussy and drenching her panties.

And then he saw in his friend the same intense, ferocious



desire to possess her that Vincent had in himself. He had seen in his friend the same need to part her folds, to dip his tongue into her, and to suck up her wetness into his mouth. He knew Caden wanted to know what his cock would look like pulling in and out of the wet, hot center the same way Vincent wanted to know. They had both shared that violent need to feel their dicks getting wetter with her arousal the deeper they pushed inside her. Opening her up with the heads of their shafts so they could bury themselves as deep inside her as her body would allow.

But the difference was this, Vincent knew who she was; he remembered her. All of her. All her innocence. Her purity. Her beauty. But Caden didn't. His reaction to Mia happened in real time as if he had seen her for the first time. But the memory of her—the one he and Caden shared of Mia—had been erased. Caden didn't remember her as the girl they had sworn to love and protect until their last breath. He couldn't remember that they had sworn to each other that they would never taint her sweetness with the murkiness of their worlds. They wouldn't part her and fuck their seed inside her because she wasn't meant to be tarnished.

Caden couldn't remember Vincent as the boy he had grown up with, the man he had fought alongside, or the brother who

would die for him without question.

A year ago, they had been beaten by a past enemy.

Caden had been taken, and it could have just as well been Vincent if he happened to be at the same spot at that time.

This enemy had joined forces with a rogue government operative, hell-bent on revenge on him and Caden for repeatedly breaking his nose and also dissolving his illegal arms manufacturing plant.

Caden had experienced months of torture. He had been electrocuted, brainwashed, and fed military-grade experimental drugs. He had been held in a facility in Serbia, deep in the mountains, untraceable. But Vincent hadn't stopped looking. And when he found him, the Caden Hemsworth he knew, no longer existed. Now his friend only had a death mission, and that mission was Vincent. Body83. That was how Caden had referred to him. Body83. His next kill.

Their enemy had inflicted months upon months of brutal mental and physical torture on him. Planting in his head that Vincent had killed his parents, authenticating their story with made-up images of Vincent with a gun in his hand pointed at his mother. They had shown Caden videos of the killings, all

doctored to indicate Vincent as the assassin. Then they would subject Caden to flash images of the shootings, day in and day out. Depriving him of water and food until he started to call Vincent, Body83. Feeding him footage of Caden actually getting his revenge on Vincent with a bullet to the head or a twist of his neck, then offering him a reward like a glass of water to seal in his satisfaction, and they would do it again and again. After 355 days, in Caden's tampered mind, Vincent was just a target with a triggering code name.

All other memories they shared, their once unbreakable bond was erased from Caden's mind as if they hadn't existed. As if Vincent had always been his enemy. And he didn't know how else to reach his friend.

Mia had insisted they play four games of chess last night, just so she could win one of them. Her laugh still echoed in his head and punctured his heart. She had asked him if she could bake a pecan pie. She missed doing it, then boasted in the most adorable way that her pies were the best, and he would think that once he tasted them. At that point, he knew what he had to do.

He stood a little away, his legs spread, his hands in his suit pants, watching them. Mia was reading to him; clearly, she herself chose the book to read to him, because he couldn't

imagine his friend picking something like that.

Her sweet voice reverberated off the dungeon walls as if it were music. She was wearing a black dress today that reached to her knees and hugged her curves. And of course, those boots of hers, which had clearly become her favorite.

She had noticed him instantly, and her voice had caught a little as she tucked a thick, glossy curl behind her ear. Vincent's cock hardened at the sweet, innocent gesture. How could he want to do such utterly bad things to her body that would drive her over the edge, into a sea of deviant pleasure but at the same time want to protect her from his carnal, savage needs?

But it was time he stepped aside.

Nothing he did seemed to have any sort of effect on Caden. He couldn't break through the false narrative that had been inflicted on him, to the reality where Caden would recognize him as the brother he had known all his life.

He had to accept that he had lost his friend forever. And now they would have to fight to the death because he couldn't keep Caden imprisoned forever. He couldn't keep Mia here forever. A fight to the death would destroy them both, but that was the nature of their worlds.

He swung his focus on Caden, tensed and angry, his stance mirroring Vincent's.

“The end,” she said softly, then rose from the bench, indicating her intention to return to the book to the glass compartment that would slide into the other side of the cell.

All he wanted was a name from Caden. One name.

Mia placed the book on the tray. In his pocket, Vincent’s thumb slid over the fob.

It was the end. For him.

He pressed the button. The sound of gears shifting away from each other filled the silence of the dungeon.

The glass cell he had used to contain Caden, hopeful he would be able to bring his friend back from the other side, was unlocked.

It didn’t surprise him when Caden acted with lightning speed. His senses were still 100% in sync with his surroundings. The instant the glass door unlocked, he had breached their hold.

The first thing he grabbed was Mia.

Vincent knew he would do that. He also knew that while Caden wanted him dead because he thought he killed his family, he knew Caden as a man, and that meant he would never hurt Mia, not without her consent.

He crushed her body to his, his hand around her waist, his other curled around her nap, her hair flowing over his fingers. He was protecting her from Vincent. The man Caden thought was his enemy. Vincent clenched his jaw as Caden started to become affected by her nearness and her scent. He watched his friend lower his forehead to hers. His lips were inches away from hers. Vincent could feel her thawing in Caden's arms as if she were in his own.

He could feel her staggering breath, the sweet quiver of her lips, the joint sharing of both uncertainty and curiosity in her eyes, and her entire body trembling against Caden's powerful one.

Caden reached down and touched her lips.

There wasn't anything else he could do for his friend except give him the woman they had vowed to love and protect forever, to take as his own.

Vincent turned around, grinding his teeth to stop his lips from aching to feel hers the same way Caden's was.

He didn't know where he was going or what was going to happen next. But Mia no longer belonged to both of them. She belonged only to Caden. She was no longer their little swan.

Swan had been their code name for her. Nothing fitted Mia

better.

“Vincent.”

Vincent stopped. He was too highly trained to imagine things.

He turned around and faced his friend.

## Chapter Eleven

Mia understood enough about the two men to know that something huge had changed between them.

Nothing had scared her more than Vincent releasing his prisoner and Caden acting with the lethal speed of a predator in the split second he was set free.

She hadn't thought she would be the first person he would grab. His arm wrapped around her waist, and his hand curled around her nape as he crushed her to him, as if he were protecting her from Vincent.

She experienced the same ferocious thrill through her body that she had experienced when Vincent touched her, and now again with Caden.

Her mind chose to fixate on that and only that. How was that possible? In a situation as dangerous as the one she was in, her body reacted in a purely feminine way. Her breasts swelled, and her nipples ached to be soothed. Wetness seeped from her folds onto her panties. She couldn't stand on her own, and Caden was the one holding her together.

She drowned in the pool of darkness in his cold blue eyes, shivering in fear and desire all the same.

She whimpered as he brushed his thumb over her lip before he



leaned down and touched hers.

Her body stopped working. She forgot to breathe and panicked against him, but she didn't pull away because she couldn't.

Because it wasn't what she wanted.

She couldn't stop him when he ripped the dress off her body, the row of delicate pearl buttons falling to the carpeted floor.

He bit his way down the side of her throat. She hung onto him as he flipped her around against the glass wall of the cell he had just been released from.

She moaned as he slipped his thigh between her legs, parting them for him. He touched her the way Vincent had, and her body answered his call.

"If you're wet, it belongs to me," he growled at her before his hand crept up her thigh and slipped into her panties. She quaked at the contact, at the thickness of his calloused fingers and knuckle-bruised hand as it dipped into her soaking hot wetness.

"You're mine," he rasped, licking the wetness off his fingers and then dipping in for more, stroking her clit to make her wetter for him.

He bent his head and sucked on her bra-clad nipple; the thin fancy lace was no barrier for his hot, wet mouth, and soon he drenched the fabric to the same degree she had soaked her own

panties.

She whimpered as he took possession of her clit, looking deeply into her eyes and forcing her to do the same. A layer of embarrassing heat covered her cheeks; she wasn't supposed to get this wet.

“More,” he ordered, teasing her, and pulling away the instant she thought she was going to come. He peeled her panties down and impatiently pulled them from her legs, then slipped them into the pocket of his pants. Without the restriction of her underwear, Caden touched every part of her pussy, unhindered.

She was never going to survive this.

And yet there was an unevenness in the way she was held. She was only half full. She still needed...

Vincent.

She whispered his name silently as she clung to Caden, opening her mouth for him as he kissed her with deep, powerful strokes of his tongue in her mouth. The closer he drew her, the more she opened for him, his fingers resting at the entrance of her pussy as he frowned at her tightness.

But she felt Vincent leave. She felt his presence start to disappear, and she saw his back as he walked down the passage.

Vincent.

She chanted his name in her mind, hoping he would hear her but unable to do anything else but accept Caden's all-consuming kiss.

Heaving until her breaths rose and fell against his chest, Caden pulled back and touched her lips with his fingers. She tasted herself, and her flush generated more power.

But Caden looked up. His attention seemed to fixate on a spot on the glass behind her. He stopped touching her. Could he see the reflection of Vincent walking away from the dungeon?

Caden looked back down at her, at the spot on the glass, and back at her again.

"Fuck," he roared. "Mia," he then said, touching her lips with his fingers, then kissing her again. "Mia," he breathed against her. He said her name with such familiarity. Such intimate potency, such power, and such fierce protectiveness.

And yet, she had heard her name spoken the same way before, but she hadn't had the knowledge she now had to understand it.

Vincent had said her name the same way when he had made her come in his hand.

Oh god.

They knew her with a level of familiarity that startled her, yet she hadn't known they existed until now.

Caden set Mia aside. “Stay,” he ordered her, then turned away from her. “Vincent,” he called to the man walking down the dimly lit passage of the dungeon.

Vincent turned around, and they slowly closed the gap between them until they stood facing each other.

Tears dripped from her eyes as she was choked with emotion.

Was that the name he wanted from Caden? His name?

Vincent?

She didn’t need a verbal explanation to piece together what was happening in front of her. They were not enemies. They never were. Instinctively, she knew there had been other factors at play that pitted them against each other.

She had no clue what her role here had been. How or why they had known her. She only knew her purpose had been served.

Vincent would release her.

A surge of power rose from the two men and merged them into one. The air around them thickened with fury, relief, revenge, and pain.

She felt as if she were intruding on a moment that should have been private. Lowering her gaze so she didn’t feel so intrusive, she still managed to catch a glimpse of them as they reached out and clutched each other around the neck, the silence around

the stone-walled space speaking volumes in unspoken words.

Vincent had brought her for a reason. She was no longer needed.

She tried to close the front of the dress, but Caden had broken off too many of the buttons. Even the slit in the dress had ripped up further than where it should have stopped. Caden had taken her panties... But all thoughts ceased to exist in her head as they both started toward her, like kings of their castle.

That's why there were always two skulls. Two of everything. Vincent and Caden. Caden and Vincent.

Her gaze wavered between the two men as they neared. She pressed herself into the glass, knowing full well she was no match for them. Their collective darkness poured over her like liquid fire. She whimpered involuntarily, out of her depth and afraid of what she wanted them to do to her. Petrified of the thought of never seeing them again. She couldn't pinpoint the origin of her fears, only that the thought of never seeing them again crushed her soul.

"Please," she whispered frantically. Her body still burned in all the places both Vincent and Caden had touched her. What was she asking for? To be touched? To be taken before she was released back into her world? To be changed? Because she didn't know who she was anymore.

“Ours.” Both men growled at her before they charged toward her.

“Your safe word is coal, Mia. Do you understand?”

She nodded. She did understand.

“Please, please, just now. Here...” she sobbed frantically, knowing she was on borrowed time. She was so pathetic, she wanted them to take her here, in a dungeon where Caden had been kept a prisoner. Now nothing had been the way it was portrayed. It wasn’t a place of darkness and evil. It was a place to find the light. All that mattered to her was that they had touched her here. And she wasn’t ready to leave to face her own reality. To live with her aunt and take care of her aunt. But inside her, without them, she knew she would undoubtedly wither and die.

“Take your dress off, Mia,” Caden said. Butterflies fluttered in her stomach at his instruction. Relief that they hadn’t sent her away already soared through her. But still, her pussy contracted, and droplets of wetness slid to her thigh.

Without hesitating, she unbuttoned the remaining buttons, then shimmied the dress to her hips and off before stepping out of it, until she stood in only her bra and boots.

“Everything,” Vincent said, his rough, deep voice sparking off

her skin and making her crazier.

She bent over and removed her boots, her socks, and then her bra. Then, standing back up in her nakedness, she closed her eyes as their gazes flooded her with heat.

She wanted to hide her flaws, but she had so many that she didn't know which ones to choose. So there she stood, naked for them, whimpering and sobbing and begging them to take her, knowing her life would never be the same again.

Vincent scooped her up and carried her to the bed inside the glass case, no longer a prison but instead her liberation.

## Chapter Twelve

Mia closed her eyes, soaring in bliss and splendor as two mouths took possession of her body, caressing every inch of her with open-mouthed kisses and sharp bites of her flesh.

They gathered her nipples in their mouths as they lay on either side of her, soaking her breasts, lashing her hardened peaks with their tongues, and then sinking their teeth into her.

She arched her back, crying in wonder and sweet, sweet agony.

A trail of bright red teeth marks littered the length of her body as they made their way to her between her thighs.

Struck with shyness, she tried to close her legs as they nestled between her thighs, only to receive a sharp slap that unfolded a new reel of arousal.

“Keep your legs open for us, sweet little swan,” Vincent said, her body at once, rising in heat at the sound of those words.

Sweet little swan. Caden had called her that just moments ago, and it would have been impossible for Vincent to have heard him say that.

She kept her legs parted, her skin sizzling, and her breasts so full and heavy she couldn't bear the throb anymore.



Then she sobbed in chaos as they took a mouthful of her pussy, drawing her in between their lips and flicking their tongues over her clit. Her head whipped off the pillow as she tried to both push them away and draw them closer. She wasn't quite sure.

But Caden sent her back down again.

“Stay,” he growled at her, then joined Vincent as they continued to feast on her.

She couldn't stop the tightening of her womb and the way her body grew still and then rigid until it exploded with an orgasm they caught in their mouths. But it wasn't enough for them.

Barely recovering from the one that ripped her asunder, she had to contend with another violent stream preparing itself to completely obliterate her with pleasure.

Her skin started to glow, and her limbs failed to work by the third orgasm.

She couldn't take it anymore. She needed them. Inside her.

“Mia, this is a taste of what you're going to feel when we are inside you,” Caden said. He twirled his middle finger over her wetness, soaking his digit, and then he slowly started to penetrate her with it.

Her eyes sprang open. He had gone deeper than she thought her body could take. The fullness unraveled her, and nothing

stopped her body from creating more liquid arousal.

“This is only a taste, little swan,” Vincent said, wetting his finger the same way Caden had.

God, she wasn't going to survive this.

Vincent slipped his finger in next to Caden's. She thought she was going to splinter apart in every way imaginable.

Double the fullness.

Her quaking body immediately went still, too afraid to move.

“These are only our fingers, little swan. And we haven't even reached how deep inside you we have to go to take what is ours. Your sweet little innocence.”

She shook her head, unsure and scared that she was going to disappoint them. But then they started to move inside her, taking turns licking at her clit, while sipping from the wetness that couldn't seem to stop pouring out of her.

Her blood ran as hot as lava. She clutched onto their wrists, not sure if she was pushing them away or trying to make them go deeper to the part where she ached the most, but also worried that she wasn't going to be enough.

They played with her that way, knowing they were luring

another climax out of her. Then they changed the game.

“And this way, little swan. We’re also going to take you this way.”

Vincent slipped his finger from her pussy and she shuddered in embarrassment at the sound her drenching wet flesh made. Every muscle inside her tensed as Vincent lifted her a little so he could prop his wet finger into her backside.

Panting shamelessly, she bit her lip, then her own finger, to stop herself from screaming as Vincent broke through the tight, puckered hole of her butt.

“Relax, sweet girl. I’m not going to go any deeper than this, not without lube.”

Caden started to pull his finger out of her pussy and Vincent pressed into her without going further than he promised.

The crazy, insane sensation destroyed her. How was she receiving pleasure from being touched this way?

It wasn’t long before they made her come again. Even as she climaxed, she did so in awe and flushed with shame, knowing that no matter how they touched her, she was going to come for them.

“Please, I need you inside me now!”

Her frantic command had them growling at her from deep in

their chests. They stood up and removed their clothes.

She died and went to heaven at the sight of their nakedness.

She was equally amazed and thrilled at the power they both maintained in their bodies. She also panicked that there was no way they were going to fit inside her body.

An unsolicited tear slipped from her eyes.

She was never going to see them again. She didn't know what this was, but it would be over in a heartbeat. Sadness washed over her, and suddenly she wanted their pain. She wanted her body stretched so it hurt because she remembered pain better than happiness.

She brushed aside her fears and welcomed their touch.

Vincent laid his body over hers. She parted her thighs and bravely pushed up against the thick length of his cock.

He soothed her hair, and for the first time, he captured her lips with his mouth, kissing her until he set her soul on fire.

Releasing her lips, he balanced himself on one hand and then guided the wide head of his cock into the entrance of her pussy.

Without taking her eyes off him, she pushed up, bracing herself, needing to feel every inch of him inside her, uncaring that she was still only a virgin.

“Mia,” Vincent said, straining, not wanting to hurt her.

“Please, I need to feel the whole of you all at once. Please,” she cried.

Vincent dropped his forehead on hers.

“I’ll hurt you.”

“I want it to hurt. Please, Vincent. I need it to hurt.”

“Do you know what the fuck you’re asking me? Do you know what monster you’re unearthing by giving me this permission? Do you fucking know, Mia?”

Growling at her, Vincent captured both her wrists above her head, pinning her down to the bed.

They had been treating her with a gentleness she didn’t want. It wasn’t who they were, and if she had only this one time with them, she wanted them as the beasts they were, in their true form.

“Hurt me,” she whispered, panting and crying her eyes out.

“You gave me a safe word, and I know how to use it.”

“Fuck,” he shouted, but his cock grew harder, longer, and bigger against her.

“Stop me, Mia. Tell me to take your pussy gently, sweet little swan.”

“No. Hurt me, Vincent.” This time she sounded more forceful, determined, and adamant.

Vincent slammed into her. The thick width of his cock invaded the tightness of her body with one single, magnificent blow that took her breath away and left her shocked to her core. He was so deep inside her that she felt his touch on her cervix. She felt her body give up and hand itself over to him as he broke her down and took her virginity.

She rose up to the brutal splendor inside her, bravely meeting his darkened gaze, filled with fury at her for making him hurt her but also with a touch of satisfaction that she could only have given him in this way.

He crushed her body against his. She basked, then melted beneath him as he hammered into her, taking every part of her with him. He cradled her to him, his lips gentle on her while he couldn't stop his cock from branding the walls of her pussy as his. Theirs.

He took her over and over again, his cock feeling bigger every time he penetrated her.

Pressing her leg down on the bed, he changed his angle, and Mia's head lolled from side to side. Despite the delicious, raw pain of his taking her innocence, her body still found a way to become ever more aroused.

“Come on my cock, Mia. Show me, you want me this way.”

She threw her head back, offering her throat to Vincent. He

sank his teeth into her, sucking on her flesh, and with that, she came for him, all over his cock that was embedded so deep inside her, and she became one with him.

Vincent pressed his lips to the part of her throat where he had sucked her red. His body tensed. His cock hardened even further.

She couldn't stop looking into his eyes as he came inside her, showering her with his cum, lash after lash. But his cock continued to remain rock hard inside of her still. It wasn't enough for him, and she was determined to be there in every way for him.

"Fuck," he whispered hoarsely. "Not enough," he said as he fucked her again, pulling out of her and then pushing back in until she felt his balls draw up against her. He came inside her again, emptying himself, and she received every drop he gave her.

She had never known such emptiness before Vincent pulled his cock from her. She had never known such emptiness before when Vincent pulled his cock from her. But then his hand traveled to between her thighs. As if she were a delicate flower, he cupped her pussy, holding her that way, as if he wanted to take away her pain before he finally released her completely.

From Caden, she knew she wanted something else.

She wanted them to take every part of her. And she wasn't above begging, pleading, and screaming to get what she wanted. But she couldn't go back to her existence knowing that had changed who they were for her. She wanted their true selves.

Those were the men whom she had unwittingly fallen for—head, heart, and soul.

### Chapter Thirteen

Mia had never felt more alive, more exhilarated, or more herself.

She embraced the ache in her body, the delicious throb of having her virgin body penetrated so hard and so deeply, adding a sublime layer of wonder to her heartache.

She was never going to see them again.

Still trembling uncontrollably, the highs of her orgasm fueling her, Mia climbed off her bed, and on legs that felt like jelly, she walked up to Caden and threw herself at him.

His already harsh breathing should have been a warning to stay away, but they didn't understand how badly she needed this. How badly she needed to feel this degree of feeling. A part of her had always remained numb, since the day her parents died. She felt like a ghost. For one stolen moment, she didn't want to feel that way. She wanted to feel this way.

Alive.

Unbroken.

Wanted.

She wrapped her hand around his nape and rose to the tips of



her toes. Her lips sought his, but he refused to give in.

“Mia, I’m not—”

“Please, Caden. Here. Please, take me here.”

She could have used the excuse that she had no idea what had come over her, but that wasn’t the case. Her mind was clear, her thinking was straight, and her needs were desired beyond anything else in the world.

She reached for his hand and placed it on her butt. She became dauntless in her quest to feel. Her shyness washed away her inhibitions.

She guided his hand down her backside.

“Mia, I’m not going to hurt you. I’m not taking your virgin ass. We don’t even have fucking lube.”

“My mouth,” she said softly, dropping to her knees in front of him, in front of the full, hard, massive width and length of his cock. She opened her mouth and slipped him between her lips. Her eyes closed, and she ran the tip of her tongue over him. His taste immediately prompted her to take another. Her licks turned to long, inexperienced sucks as her attempts grew bolder.

“Fuck,” he breathed.

Her throat opened and she tried to push him down, but then she gagged and was forced to release him while she caught her breath back.

Caden’s own erratic breathing spurred her on. Until he threaded his hand through her hair and pulled her back. She looked up at him with a silent plea in her eyes. He had to give her this.

Her lips parted. She held out her tongue for him.

He roared like an angry bear before he drove his cock back into her mouth and controlled her by pulling on her hair.

The pinpricks of pain on her scalp seemed to travel straight down to her pussy. Fresh wetness flowed from her. Her thighs soaked through as she carried Vincent's cum with him.

She licked until he dripped with the wetness from her mouth. She learned how to breathe to take him a little further down her throat, but even that released her gag reflex.

"Enough," Caden said, lifting her off the floor and enclosing his arms around her tightly. He kissed her, and she opened her mouth for him obediently. She then pushed at him to be released, determined to get what she wanted from him.

With her naked body and her thighs wet with Vincent's cum, she turned and leaned into the bed, offering him her backside and silently pleading that he just take her that way.

Caden released a string of expletives before he grabbed her around the waist and carried her that way. He placed her over the headrest of a chair, her knees on the seat; the width of the chair wasn't broad enough to allow her to spread her legs.

"You don't know what you're doing, Mia. Like Vincent said, you don't know what you're asking us to release."

"I want this, for god's sake, I want this."

"Tell me what you want," Caden said, then punctuated his question with a resounding spank to her ass.

She immediately curled her lips inward at the shocking impact.

"I want you to put your cock inside my asshole, Caden, please."

"And then do what, Mia?" Tell me what you want me to do with my cock inside your ass?"

"Fuck me, Caden, please." She closed her eyes as she said those words. The only reply she received from him was a double growl that pierced her nerves in the most delicious

way.

“That’s not all you want me to do, little swan.”

“I want you to fuck my virgin ass with your cock, Caden, please. Please, do it now.”

As if there had been some private conversation between the two men, a bottle of what could only be olive oil from the cell’s kitchenette flew over her head and was caught by Caden in one hand.

He hesitated. She arched her back, swaying from side to side, knowing she was running out of time.

Cool liquid slid down her cheeks. When Caden parted them and poured the oil directly into her hole, she buried her head in her arm.

“Now, please, now. Caden.”

“Why?” Caden asked.

“So I can feel the hurt?”

“Why?”

“Because it would last forever,” she said. The sentiment evoked more tears from her eyes.

But when Caden pushed the head of her cock against her most private hole, her embarrassment rolled over and quadrupled.

“You want this, little swan?”

“Yes.”

“How much?”

“Everything, Caden. All at once. I want to feel. I need to feel, please,” she begged, clenching her cheeks against his cock.

That seemed to send him over the edge.

“I’m going to hurt you, Mia. Fuck. I’m going to hurt,” Caden repeated as he drove the head of his cock into her, pushing through her body’s natural resistance to refuse his entry into the forbidden part of her body.

She hadn't realized how much she tensed up or how rigid she had gone until he spanked her again and released her suspended breath.

"You're so fucking small, I'm going to break you." Mia sobbed as the stinging burn spread to all parts of her. She couldn't see through the tears pooling in her eyes, but then her gaze caught on Vincent. She blinked, and a flood of tears washed over her cheeks until she could see him clearly.

She also couldn't deny that every time Caden pushed inside her and she wailed in pain, his cock grew that much harder.

"I'm going to break you, little swan." This time, he delivered the words as a warning, not a caution. And every cell, every nerve end inside, blazed with the sheer, life-depending desire to be broken by Caden. Because that was the only way they would leave a part of themselves inside her.

Caden lifted her up against his chest, his arm wrapped tight against her waist, her tears now spilling over his arm as he pushed in a little more. He must have felt her tears wash over his arm because he raised his hand and, gripping her chin, turned her face to the side, where he could see her wet eyes and cheek.

"Hurt me, Caden," she said softly, and that was all he needed to hear. Mia's howling cry scattered echoes around her. She dropped her body over his arm, but he brought her upright again, his hand in her hair as he yet again turned her face. How he kissed the sides of her face, her neck, and her shoulder was in direct contrast to the way he was taking her ass. His lips were soft and soothing. His cock was ferocious and demanding, dominating and kingly. She was a vessel for his pleasure. Pleasure he would take her any way he wanted from her, leaving her with little pockets of pain that would burst

whenever she relived these moments.

This was how she wanted it.

Untamed pleasure. Transcendent pain.

Both things she could take with her.

Her body had heated up to what felt like a million degrees. She rolled into the pain instead of against it. She didn't fight him.

She gave herself to Caden the same way she had given herself to Vincent.

Mia had forced her body to defy its limits for these two men.

But that couldn't stop her from banging her fist against Caden's hand as he finally penetrated her tiny asshole with the full colossal weight of his cock.

All he did was hold her tenderly, kiss her gently. And all the while, his cock raged with the need to fuck her inside her asshole.

Controlling her body like he owned her, Caden dragged his thickness from her then slowly shoved it back inside her, reacquainting her internal flesh with a new burning sensation each time.

She could show no shame for the wetness dripping from her pussy. Or that her nipples were so engorged they peaked at almost their size.

As attuned as she was to the two men who had destroyed her body like kings, leaving her only with the memory of the touch to last her a lifetime, she didn't miss the look Caden and Victor passed.

Her roaring heart missed a beat as Vincent closed the distance between them. He reached out and tweaked her nipple, and she hissed and moaned at the attention.

Suddenly, Caden, without severing his cock from her ass, lifted her out of the chair. Vincent took the seat she had just

vacated. In the next instance, Caden placed her over Vincent's fully erect shaft.

Vincent gripped her hips and slowly lowered her onto the tip of his cock.

Oh, god. Oh, god.

But she was so wet, still dripping with his cum, and her folds parted for him easily enough. Except for the thick fullness in her ass, taking Vincent's cock inside her felt as if he were taking her virginity all over again.

"Will you take this like this, little swan?" Vincent asked.

She nodded. Nothing would stop her.

Vincent lowered her a little more, then a little more. Caden pulled out a tiny bit to give his friend a bit of space. And she, in the middle, just closed her eyes as the two men used her body to do what they wanted.

Caden played with her nipples. Vincent stroked her clit.

Mindlessly, she felt her body give way, then tense up. They worked her that way until they were both almost half-way inside her, and she couldn't control the hyperventilating breaths wracking her whole body. They were too big. She was too small to take them inside her.

She panicked and purred, moaned and grunted, begged and pleaded for nothing and for everything.

She then caught the reflection of herself in a mirror she hadn't seen before. She was sandwiched between two magnificent male creatures who owned the world and ruled it too. And then there was her. A nobody. Someone they had used to bridge a gap between them. That gap had been bridged. This was all she had.

And now she wanted, with the same ferocity as she wanted to feel their pain, She wanted this because nothing would ever

beat this.

She squeezed the walls of her pussy and heard the grunt around. She did it repeatedly until they tightened their hold on her and took over.

A million sparkling stars exploded behind her closed eyes as their bodies drove into her, their cocks to her hilt. She forced to breathe through indescribable fullness. She became awed with the idea that she had taken them inside her body in exchange for a memory.

This time when she came, she cried silently. When they came she closed her eyes and stored the feeling.

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Mia glanced around the room that she had used since Vincent had kidnapped her. Now it was time for her to leave.

The name Vincent had wanted from Caden was his own name. If Caden remembered him as Vincent, he would also remember that Vincent loved him like a brother and would never do anything to hurt his family.

She had been the catalyst for some unknown reason, but that didn't matter anymore. It was over. Vincent was a man of his word, and he would release her. She had to go back to her aunt.

She called Gail to let her know. It was something to keep her mind off them and the dark, sultry ways they had taken her the night before. Also, something to keep her mind off the fact that, stupid as she was, she had fallen in love with two men and not even one of them would love her back.

“Oh, how wonderful. Are you done with the nice gentlemen?”

“Gentlemen?”

“Yes, there are two of them. Very good-looking and very

generous too.”

“Gail, what do you mean?” How could Gail know about Caden? What did she mean about them being generous.

“I mean. Nothing. I thought you knew.”

“Knew what?” And then it hit her like a ton of bombs.

“They’ve been paying you to come and sit with my aunt every day.”

There was silence. “I thought you knew, now that they are out in the open.”

“How long?”

“Since... since day one.”

Day one was six years ago. The phone fell from her hand.

How stupid could she have been?

Taking her anger with her, she marched to their study to find them.

“You,” she said, taking turns to point at them. “You paid Gail to stay with my aunt?”

“Yes.”

“Oh god. The money? Every month I get a deposit—”

“Yes.”

“Oh god. The gang. The broken fingers?”

“Yes.”

“Oh my god. You have been orchestrating my life as if I were a puppet.”

“No. We did because we fell in love with you from the first moment we laid eyes on you. You hadn’t even turned seventeen yet.”

“But...”

“We vowed never to take you or touch you because you were too young and innocent for our jaded ways.”

“But then fate forced our hands, little swan.”

“And now we’re never letting you go. Do you understand all that?”

She had stopped listening at the point where they said they had fallen in love with her.

“You love me?”

“Every single part of you. For now and forever.”

“You were ours all along. You just didn’t know it yet.”

She stared at them.

“We love you, Mia Edwards.”

“And I’m keeping my word of releasing you. Not when you’re going to become our wife.”

She must be dreaming. That was it. She pinched herself and felt the pain. This was real.

“Say it again,” she said softly.

“We love you, little swan.”

“Now say yes and marry us. Or we’ll have to keep you here until you do.”

“You can’t just going around kidnapping people to get your way, Vincent.”

“He can,” Caden answered. “Say yes, right now.”

She bit her lip. They advanced on her until she was corner against a wall.

They loved her.

“But...”

“Wrong answer.”

She smiled. “I love you. I loved you since the moment I knew you existed.”

“We’ll take that as a yes then.”

“Yes,” she cried. “Yes. Yes. Yes.”

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Also by Chloe Kent

The Big Bad Brother Series:

[Her Best Friend's Big Bad Brothers Book 1](#)

Alyson Edwards has her own set of problems. Not only is she barely making ends meet, when her father gets involved with some really bad people and makes some really bad decisions, she's the one who is going to end up paying for them. With her life. It sucks to her, and those are poor people problems, but the one thing she keeps is her pride and doesn't need anyone's help, money or pity.

But then her best friend, heiress Sienna Gallagher, who respects the boundaries of their friendship, has her trust fund privileges taken away by her big, bad brothers, and Alyson's whole world changes.

When she can't talk Sienna out of the crazy plan of tricking each of her brothers out of a tidy sum of money, involving an

age-old Gallagher family tradition, Alyson is left agreeing to help her and becomes the star of her show.

Except no one triple-crosses the Gallagher brothers and gets away with it. And now Sienna has been sent away to the middle of nowhere and Alyson is left behind to face the brothers alone.

Spice factor: Edgy and a bit more than a fistful.

EXCERPT:

They spanked her until she was so sore, her body didn't know how to react so she just became wetter. She banged her fists on the table in humiliation when the scent of her arousal filled the air around her.

She shook and quivered. Her nipples were on fire and needed to be pinched... or sucked and her clit...

Her clit throbbed and swelled and worried that if she continued to keep her thighs so tightly shut, futilely to prevent her wetness from permeating the air, she was going to come.

That—her orgasming because they were issuing corporal punishment on her as if she were a naughty child—would

serve to kill her and the cause of her death would be through embarrassment.

While Eric and Blake still rained down on her ass, retelling her crime in detail every time, she did the only thing she could do to save herself. She had to part her legs, to reduce the pressure on her clit throbbing for release as if she had never had an orgasm before. She had. Yes, they were self-delivered ones, but that didn't matter.

She slid her legs apart. A cool breeze brushed over her hot wet pussy. But then they stopped spanking her and she didn't know if she was relieved or sad at the turn of events. No, what she was, was fucking mad to be thinking she was sad they had stopped spanking her.

The sounds of their grunts echoed around her. She didn't need to be able to see behind her to know that all three of them, including Grayson, had his gaze fixed on her dripping wet pussy, now on full display. She had swapped one piece of embarrassment for another.

Defeated, she tried to close her legs again but Eric put his foot on the inside of hers and prevented her from doing so.

“It's time we made sure you don't forget your lesson. Stealing from us. Pranking us. Helping our sister run away.”

She didn't like the tone of Eric's voice. Yes, there was a tightness to his words, a sort of hoarseness too that made her skin break out in goosebumps, but they were going to do something else to her. Something worse than a hand spanking.

Panic soared inside her.

"I'm sorry. I learned my lesson. It won't happen again. I—"

The sound of paper rustling behind her caught her attention and produced a heavy frown on her face. What—

"Breathe," Blake said softly but it was too late. She was already holding her breath from the moment they both parted her ass cheeks and then pressed something into the tightly packed rings of her asshole.

No. No. No.

What was happening? What were they doing to her?

"Nothing would have given Eric more pleasure than carving out a piece of ginger root the exact size to create the most discomfort for you, little kitten. Unfortunately, we had to improvise, given time restraints..."

[Their Best Friends' Bratty Little Sister Book 2](#)

Sienna Gallagher needs to face her past and forgive herself, but when her brothers shove her into their private jet bound for a ranch in Montana, this after her last stunt involving her best friend, Alyson, she is beyond furious.

Not only did they send her to the middle of nowhere to face her demons, but she also now has three equally infuriating and way too dominating brothers watching over her who aren't afraid to rub dirt in her face and tell her how they like things run.

Spice factor: High with a hint of ginger and tiny sprinkle of medical play.

EXCERPT:

“I just don't want to be holed up here with you three cavemen when I could be shopping in London, having spa treatments in Hungary. I've already missed one of my friend's birthday parties. My skin is going to shrivel up if I don't get properly hydrated. My hairdresser is going to have—”

“Enough,” Rowan thundered. “If you won't tell us what trouble you're in, we have other means of getting it out of

you.”

“Oh, please. Are you going to spank again?” She directed the question at Lawson. “Go right ahead,” she dared.

What on earth was she doing?

Her breath dried up as an unhurried flutter of movement occurred around her.

Lawson left the den. Cameron seemed to be examining items of furniture, particularly chairs. Rowan opened a drawer and withdrew a pocket knife.

The constant quiver that she felt in her bones at their presence, erupted into a full-scale tremble.

She chewed her bottom lip. Somehow this didn't feel like just a spanking.

Her belly dropped. Her nipples hardened into pebbles and poked through the thinness of the T-shirt.

She shifted her weight from her left foot to her right and then back again, all the while squeezing her thighs together in a vain attempt to stop the wetness dripping from her pussy onto her skin.

She gasped when Lawson returned carrying a gray bag in his hand. He brought it to the table where Rowan was now seated

and flicking the blade of the pocket knife open and close. The clinging sound added to her strange but overall arousal.

For the life of her, she couldn't understand why her body had created a dark glow around it. As if her fear were a form of foreplay. The unknown too had that effect on her.

Was she mad? They could hurt her.

Yes, they could.

They could hurt every part of her. But it wouldn't only be her body that would be affected. Her mind and her soul were at risk too.

Nothing could have prepared her for the moment Rowan reached into the bag. She stopped breathing in utter confusion when he withdrew a piece of ginger, then another one much bigger. She might not know what to do with ginger, but she could recognize the vegetable if she saw one.

Why was there ginger root on the table? What did it have to do with her?

She took a step backward, her confusion increasing tenfold.

What were they going to do with it?

She whimpered in surprise when Cameron finally settled on a chair, closed the distance between them, and set it down

behind her.

Panting now, she dared not breathe as his fingers brushed against the skin on her thighs.

He had his head lowered, and close to her face. She was dying on the inside from his nearness.

With exaggerated slowness, he pulled up the fabric of the T-shirt.

She gave a small sound of denial, but couldn't stop him.

She was entranced. His breath whispered against her mouth, he was so close. He smelled like spearmint and the hints of his cologne caressed every part of her.

But he soon broke the spell.

Startled out of the haze he had wrapped around her, she gasped when he spun her around, one hand of his had bunched up the fabric of the T-shirt and he kept it secured as he forced her to bend over the backrest of the chair.

He had positioned the wicker chair with the seat facing the opposite direction. She was curved over the backrest and her hands rested on the seat of the chair.

“Wait a minute,” she started, trying to get back up. But Cameron had already pulled coils of rope from his pocket and

with lightning speed, he had each of her ankles bound to the legs of the chair.

It wasn't a standard-size chair. It was high-backed and broad which meant that he had to part her legs quite a bit to get them bound to the chair legs.

Oh God help her.

The position put her on full naked display. She was almost standing on the tips of her shoes, her back was forced to curve deeply over the headrest which put her ass in the air.

With her legs parted, her pussy was equally on full, unrestricted view.

[Their Forever: A dark menage romance.](#)

You have my permission to touch my wife...

Sophisticated mafia billionaire, Liam Stone knew the moment he saw the innocent Olivia he had to own her. She didn't love him. How could she? In her eyes she was sold from one cruel tyrant to another. She was grateful to him and she obeyed him because he demanded it but she couldn't love him, and he was just too ruthless to ever let her go.

But when he introduces her to their new chauffeur, and he notices the subtle catch in her breath, Kade Tremayne, a man as dangerous as Liam, becomes the only man he'd ever trust enough to share his wife.

Publisher warning: This book contains explicit scenes including medical play. Please don't purchase if you are sensitive to such material.

About the Author

Chloe Kent has been hooked on romance for as long as she could remember. And now she gets to write them too. Her books always feature a fiery heroine who has no idea what she's been waiting for until she meets the powerful and dominant hero... or heroes because sometimes it takes more than one.

Her favorite things to do are reading and consuming chocolate.

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