



FOUR
FOUR
HORSEMEN
HORSEMEN

THE COMPLETE SERIES

SARAH BAILEY

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FOUR HORSEMEN

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CARNAGE

FOUR HORSEMEN
BOOK ONE

SARAH BAILEY

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Please note the spelling throughout is British English.

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PLAYLIST

Spotify Playlist

animal – GRASS
Where You Belong – The Weeknd
Secret Scream – The Black Queen
Apocalypse Morning – The Black Queen
Cocoa Hooves – Glass Animals
Wyrld – Glass Animals
Under the Fireworks – Sam Tsui
Dark History – Sonia Ammar
Pray – JRY, RuthAnne
Monsters – Lucy Daydream
Heart Made of Stone – The Tech Thieves
Bang! – The Tech Thieves, The ROU
Golden Throne – The Tech Thieves
If You Dare – The Tech Thieves
Hourglass – Hex Cougar, AWAY, josh pan
Evil Like Me – Hex Cougar
Chemical – KRANE, Lemay, Asha, Hex Cougar
Burn – Hex Cougar, Pauline Herr
Horns – Bryce Fox
I'm a Sucker for a Liar in a Red Dress – Adam Jensen
BLACKOUT - AViVA
HYPNOTISED – AViVA
Mercy – Hurts
Twisted - MISSIO
Despicable - grandson
AMNESIA – DREAMDNVR, Boy In Space

Secrets – Tribe Society
Outlaws – Tribe Society
Cross – Echos
Killer – Valarie Broussard
Do It for Me – Rosenfeld
The Witch – Rosenfeld, KHEMIS
Problems – Tribe Society
Stfu – Rosenfeld
Twisted – The People’s Thieves
Now That We’re Alone – The People’s Thieves
Sweat – ZAYN
STFD - TeZaTalks
Villains – TeZaTalks
SCORPIO – DREAMDNVR
Fuck You – Silent Child
Freak – UNDREAM, Silent Child, Hannabelle
IDFAF – Besomorph, Silent Child
I’m Gonna Get What’s Mine – Graffiti Ghosts
Psycho – VOSTOK
Love You Like Me – William Singe
Moondust (Stripped) – Jaymes Young
Often – The Weeknd
Will You Follow Me Into the Dark – Klergy, Mindy Jones
Animal In Me – Solence
Death Do Us Part – Solence
Foreign Dreams – Phantom Head
The Wall – PatrickReza
VILLAIN – MePemuro
Unthinkable – Cloudy June
Broken – Lund
Downhill – Lund
Poison – KLEINOD
Mind Games – Sickick
Kill Me Slowly - Sickick

Goosebumps – HVME
Animal – EMELINE
Sociopath – StayLoose, Bryce Fox
Can't Forget You – NEVR KNØW
Coquette, Kuoga., Ivy
Wrong – MAX, Lil Uzi Vert
Reckless – Lund
Sing Me to Sleep – Matstubs
Method – Big X
My Mind – Mickey Valen, Emily Vaughn
Double Life – Marina Kaye
Scream – Marina Kaye
By Your Side – Archie Summers
Me & My Demons – Omido, Silent Child
Love and Lies – Anthony Ramos

AUTHOR NOTE

This is a **DARK** romance and therefore it comes with a content warning. I don't give this warning lightly, so please be sure you want to read this before you continue any further.

If you want specifics, then please check out my [website](#) for full details.

This book is set in the UK, where I was born and raised, and is written in British English.

*To all my dark, twisted queens,
This one's for you!*

PROLOGUE

SCARLETT

The last memory I had of the life I lived before was of four boys. The way the sunlight glinted off their hair as our laughter rang through the trees. Of the heat of summer in Richmond Park. The smell of dry grass. And the haze of the London skyline in the distance. The world seemed so vast back when I was innocent and free.

A freedom cruelly ripped away from me by those who say they seek to keep me safe. Chains tether me to my new reality. One of loneliness and seclusion. It left me clinging to memories from so long ago; I forget they're only in my imagination. I forget I can't remember who I was before all of this happened to me.

Hours melded into days. Days into weeks. And weeks soon became years. Years since I'd laid eyes on anything outside of the four walls of the place I call my prison.

The life I'd been sentenced to weighed heavily on my heart. It kept me from experiencing everything the world had to offer. It kept me 'safe'.

But what is safety when you cannot see anything beyond your cage?

What is life when you cannot live it?

I thought I was destined to live in solitude forever. Then one day I was released from the castle I'd grown up in and given one simple task.

To seek, infiltrate and destroy by whatever means necessary.

I returned to the city I could barely remember.

I returned to find *them*.

To seek.

To infiltrate.

To destroy.

I will stop at nothing to fulfil my goal. To give them their heart's desire. Then I can finally experience the freedom I so desperately crave.

I will bring them the heads of the men known as the Four Horsemen.

Or die trying.

ONE

PRESCOTT

There's something empowering about seeing the kingdom you rule over spread out before you. The people going about their daily lives like ants foraging for their colony. That's what humanity is.

Ants.

There are those who toil day in, day out and those who reap the rewards. Who sit in their ivory towers watching the world go by, hoarding their billions simply because they can.

Which category do I fall into? The answer would be neither.

I do not reap.

I do not toil.

I infect.

The face of our company had to be a pretty one. It's how you win people over. Charm and charisma only come after one's initial impression. It's how you keep them interested. You hook them then you pounce, ensuring your claws are in so deep, they'll never be able to extract them. Humans aren't hard to work out. You appeal to their baser natures and soon, you'll get what you want, leaving them none the wiser about the manipulation they've undergone. Blind to reality.

It's really very simple when it comes down to it.

Women want to be with me.

Men want to be me.

I've got inside their heads. Made them see a perfectly constructed image of what it means to be rich, handsome, powerful and successful. Pity, it was all lies they'd been fed to keep them coming back for more. Like little lost souls

dangling on a string, hoping one day they'll be just like me.

I am an infection they'll never be free of.

It was how I liked it. Keeping them under my thumb while I bleed them dry until they're nothing but a husk. A shell of the person they used to be. Then I throw them to the wolves and watch while they're eaten alive.

It's the most rewarding part. Seeing your efforts finally end with their ultimate demise.

"You observing your playground again, Pres?"

I glanced back, finding Drake standing by my desk, his fingers brushing across the glass surface. The man could be called darkness personified. Midnight black hair with indigo eyes. Drake was never seen in anything but dark colours. It suited his temperament. Something he often kept hidden, but I knew the truth. His namesake was completely on point. A dragon disguised as a man. And not to be messed with under any circumstances.

I infected, but Drake? He dissected until there was nothing left.

"Perhaps."

Drake's lip twitched. I may be the face of our business, but Drake was the CEO. He made the hard decisions and took all the flack. He kept the fine balance between what we did above board and below from imploding on us.

Fortuity would not be where it was today without him.

"You ready for today?"

I inclined my head before turning back to the window. The city spread out in front of me as far as the eye could see. At the centre was us. The axis. Money made the capitalist society go around. And what did we deal in?

Money. Money. And more money.

It had never been about getting rich. It had always been about power. And we had it in spades. Money merely gave us the means to spread our influence. And spread it we did.

The four of us had built our company from the ground up. No one dared question our rule. No one stood up to us. Anyone who'd tried to do so learnt the hard way. We took no prisoners. We gave no second chances. Ruthless efficiency was exactly what we were renowned for.

"It's time we set the world on fire," I murmured, knowing he'd hear me.

He snorted.

“Isn’t it already burning?”

I shrugged, waving a hand at the window.

“This? This is nothing. They haven’t seen anything yet.”

“I hope you’re right.”

I grinned, turning away from the city and levelling him with my gaze. He wasn’t smiling. I could see the tension lining his brow. Drake never relaxed or chilled out. He took everything that went wrong as a personal affront. He wouldn’t stop until he’d fixed every last detail. The man left no stone unturned. It was why he ran our company, leaving me to be our public image. I had no patience for what he did.

“I’m always right.”

“More like always the arrogant narcissist.”

I spread my hands, giving him a wink.

“I have every reason to be.”

Drake rolled his eyes before he walked away towards the door. He was used to me. The way I never took life too seriously. However, I knew the market like the back of my damn hand. This was our only option to secure our future.

He paused in the frame, his back stiff and his hands twitching.

“We’re sacrificing everything. You can’t tell me it doesn’t concern you at all.”

I ran my tongue along my bottom lip. We had every reason to be afraid of future repercussions. However, we’d never done anything by halves. Always one step ahead of everyone else in this game we played. Luck had been on our side, but it would only last so long. One day it could run out. I planned to make sure it never happened.

“I leave the worrying to you.”

He shook his head. Drake would currently be wishing he could throw me off the roof of the building for my lack of fear in the face of adversity. He’d called me reckless on more than one occasion.

Where would we be without my insistence we take risks and throw caution to the wind?

No-fucking-where.

I made us who we were.

“I guess it’s time to bait the trap and watch the cards fall.”

He didn’t give me room to respond, walking out and leaving me alone with

my thoughts. I shoved my hands in my pockets and glanced back at the windows one last time.

The world wasn't ready for us.

They never had been.

Some called us monsters in suits.

They'd be right.

We weren't kind or nice. We ruthlessly pursued our goals, not caring who we trampled on to get there. The casualties and collateral damage didn't keep me awake at night. All part and parcel of who we were and what we did.

If you want power, you cannot afford to have the same morals the little people keep. You have to step outside the boundaries of right and wrong. Walk into the grey and never look back. It's where you'll find the darkest and most depraved among us. Those who will sooner rip your throat out than lend you a hand.

Drake, West, Francis, and I were no longer seen as men.

We were gods.

We'd stepped into the grey, proving we weren't to be trifled with. And no one dared go up against us.

They called us the Four Horsemen.

A title I took and ran with it. The men who'd end the world had always fascinated me, but the whole idea of us being such men amused me to no end. We weren't the harbingers of the apocalypse. Or were we?

It didn't matter either way. Once you have a certain image, you have to keep up with it. And it was time we lived up to our name once and for all.

TWO

FRANCIS

I stared down at my watch, wondering not for the first time why I even put up with this shit day in, day out. They should be here by now. Don't know why I expected anything different. Those three had no timekeeping skills, nor did they care how long they made people wait.

Prescott, the narcissistic fuck, would probably be primping and preening his dark blonde hair to make sure no strand was out of place. As if he cared about anything else other than his appearance and getting his own way. He had every reason to. He was the face of our company, but by fuck, did he need to learn a lesson in humility. Or maybe he simply needed to rein his shit in.

I looked up to find Drake strolling in, his shoulders tense. At least he knew what was at stake here. The guy took life far too seriously if you asked me, but it meant he got shit done. He nodded at me as he came to a standstill by my side.

"They're late," I muttered.

"What else do you expect?"

Prescott liked to make an entrance. But West? Well, he was a fucking loose cannon. It took all three of us to control him when he went off the rails, which happened far more often than I liked. If West went out on his own anywhere, he'd end up bloody, high on pills, balls deep in pussy or a combination of all three. Only last week he'd broken a guy's nose for daring to look at him the wrong way. It was why we rarely held press conferences involving the four of us. You never knew what would set him off.

Drake, West and I stayed in the shadows while Prescott took the helm. It was how it had always been. Until now. Everything was different now.

"I expect better of you for starters."

Drake's lip twitched.

"Someone had to make sure Pres isn't going to fuck up."

"And our warmonger?"

"Fuck knows. I heard him come back late last night and he wasn't alone."

I stifled a sigh. West and his ever-revolving door of women. The four of us lived in the penthouse at the top of the building. We could oversee our kingdom from here. Exactly how we liked it. Being fully in control of everything. We ruled and the rest followed.

"Trouble sleeping again?"

"Always."

Drake had suffered from insomnia for as long as I could remember. He tended to be up at all hours because of it. Stress worsened his condition, so it didn't surprise me. We were all under immense pressure right now.

"Soon."

His lip quirked up.

"I know."

Drake flexed his hand at his side as our wayward friend walked in. West had his tattooed hands shoved in his pockets, his light brown hair slightly dishevelled as usual, and his amber eyes were dark with irritation. At least he'd actually put a suit on and looked reasonably smart. You never knew what kind of mood he would be in or whether he'd actually be presentable. Some days I found him lounging in his office in nothing but trackies and a dressing gown. When he did dress up, he turned heads. We all did. All of us only wore the best when it came to suits. You had to look the part in our business.

"Don't give me shit, Frankie. I'm not in the mood," West grunted as he came to stand on the other side of me from Drake.

I glared. He knew I hated being called Frankie. Only one person had ever got away with it and it certainly wasn't West.

"Don't rise to his shit," Drake whispered.

Usually, I'd haul West out of here and give him a talking to about his conduct. Today was far too important for him to fuck up, but we were already running behind schedule. I didn't have time to deal with his attitude.

"You know what's at stake," I said, ignoring Drake. "And my name is Francis."

“Oh, I’m fully aware of the bullshit we’ve put up with for years. If this goes wrong, we all go down,” West hissed. “But whatever you say, Frankie.”

I gave him another dark look. I would not react to his taunt. Fuck knows it would only lead to trouble.

“What a sunny mood you’re both in today,” Drake said, smirking.

“I don’t know why you’re giving me shit when Pres isn’t down here yet.” West rolled his eyes. “Oh wait, I remember, you let the prick get away with everything.”

Do not rise to it. Do not do it.

I clenched my fist when said prick finally made his presence known, walking through the doors with a flourish. His blue eyes glinted as he nonchalantly strolled towards the podium. Prescott gave us a wink before he turned to the press.

Jesus Christ, he never stops.

“Apologies for my tardiness,” he said into the mic.

West scoffed next to me. I stamped on his foot to shut him up. He glared at me.

Prescott wasn’t sorry at all. He always left them gagging for his presence. The man captivated his audience and played up to his image of a successful businessman all too well. Underneath his perfect exterior, he was as rotten to the core as the rest of us.

We were not good men.

We were monsters who’d become gods.

Gods of the financial industry.

And it would stay that way if I had anything to do with it.

I fought against the urge to roll my eyes as Prescott went on about how we were expanding our business with a new acquisition and how we were planning on supporting the younger generation in finding new careers in finance. Bringing in new blood, giving them opportunities and cementing our status as a progressive company. Pity all of it was a lie we perpetuated for our own gain.

Drake gave me a sidelong glance as West ground his teeth next to me. The noise grated on my ears.

“Quit it,” I muttered under my breath.

“How about you take that stick out your arse, Frankie,” he hissed back.

“Don’t,” Drake whispered to hold me back from knocking West on his arse.

It wouldn’t be the first time West and I came to blows. I had scars across my knuckles on my right hand from the time I’d missed and smacked my fist into a mirror, which shattered on impact instead. The fucker had ducked.

“For the last time, it’s Francis.”

Thankfully, the assembled crowd was clapping at something Prescott had said, so no one else heard me.

“West, quit being a cunt,” Drake added. “Now isn’t the time.”

West snorted, flexing his tattooed hands by his sides. I ignored him, turning my attention back to Prescott. Everything he’d said was all part of our plans. To the casual observer, it may not sound like much. Pledges to do more in our industry and help the economy grow. But to us, it meant the culmination of years of waiting, biding our time until we could strike.

We’d come from very little. By all accounts, we shouldn’t be where we are today. The four of us were nothing if not determined. None of what we’d achieved had been obtained without sacrifices, or legally for that matter. Diving into the underbelly and using it to our advantage. We were unapologetic in stepping on everyone in a bid to find our way to the top. Probably why we’d made enemies. Many, many enemies.

Power is what we sought and power is what we’d gained.

My lip curled up at the side. We had made our fortune because of me. Prescott was the face of Fortuity and the Director of Marketing. Drake was our CEO. West, when he actually turned up, was the Director of Operations. And me? The Director of Finance. I ran our money and did my job fucking well. I took the small amount we had when we started Fortuity and turned it into billions.

Prescott might like to think we were here because of him, but really, it took all of us to make this company a success. We thrived because we stuck together and worked fucking hard. And now, we were moving forward with our plan to get what we all really wanted. What we’d waited for. It would only be a matter of time now.

Prescott had laid the trap, baited the bear and we would be patient while we reeled in our ultimate prize.

“You look happy,” Drake murmured as we stepped forward to stand behind

Prescott when he'd finished his speech.

"I am."

I glanced over, spying his indigo eyes twinkling. He knew exactly why. We all did. Even West, who looked like he wanted to bathe the entire room in blood. And he would as well. The guy took no prisoners.

"You think this will really work?"

Drake sounded hesitant.

"It has to. I'm not waiting another ten years."

His grim smile told me he felt the same way. We'd had enough.

Prescott glanced back at us, his blonde eyebrows raised.

"You three need to cheer the fuck up," he said under his breath, so the microphone wouldn't pick up his words.

I plastered a smile on my face as Drake and West did the same. A united front. It's what we had to show. Hiding our darkness underneath a carefully constructed façade. The face of Fortuity. And the men who ran it.

My smile became real when I thought about what they called us. The Four Horsemen. As if we were going to bring the apocalypse. Perhaps we would. Perhaps we wouldn't.

All I knew was... our time had come. And none of us would allow anything to stand in our way any longer.

We're going to have so much fun. We're owed this.

We only had to exercise a little more patience and restraint... then we could let it all out. And watch the world burn around us.

THREE

SCARLETT

I swallowed when I stopped outside a building. The tall, imposing building, which towered over me, was made of black stone and glass and housed the company of four men who had risen from the ashes to take over the financial industry. Or so I'd been told. That's the thing. I didn't really know anything about the men I was here to see, other than what I'd been told. And those things didn't make me feel anything other than disgust towards them. However, I knew deep down there were always two sides to a story. While I had a goal in mind, there would always be doubts plaguing me.

Nothing in life was simple. And revenge? Well, it led down a path I wasn't sure I wanted to follow, no matter what they'd done.

I stared up at the sign above the doors.

Fortuity.

My reasons for being here were simple. To secure employment. Gain their trust. And to destroy them.

I shook myself. I could not afford to give the game away. It would be time to put on a façade. The one I'd worn most of my life. The parts of my life I could remember anyway. My childhood was a blank space in my memory. And anything I could remember felt like a fuzzy dream as opposed to reality.

I walked into the building, holding my head high, and went right up to the reception desk. The man sitting there looked up with a smile on his face.

"Hello, welcome to Fortuity. How can I help you?"

"Hello, I'm here for an interview with Mr Ackley... I'm Scarlett Carver," I replied, keeping my voice even so as not to betray my nervousness.

The man nodded and scanned something on his computer before looking up

at me again.

“Of course, if you’d just like to sign in here.”

He indicated a tablet on the desk in front of me. I tapped on it, typing in my name and signing a box. He issued me with a visitor’s pass and told me to head up to the twenty-eighth floor. The men who owned Fortuity lived on the top two floors of the building. The floor below where I was headed must be their offices.

The Four Horsemen.

I didn’t understand why they’d been given the name. It seemed so ridiculous. But what did I know? I’d been kept locked away on an estate in the Kent countryside for the past ten years by my parents. They’d told me it was for my own good, but sometimes I wondered if it was true.

I walked over to the bank of lifts and pressed down on the button. Someone strolled up beside me as the lift arrived. The doors slid open. I walked in with the man. He tossed a glance my way, stepping up to the panel.

“Floor?”

I took him in then. He had dark brown hair, slicked down on his head with gel in this rather suave manner, his dark grey suit complete with a waistcoat moulded to his body like it was made for him, and his eyes were silvery-grey. I don’t know why, but something about those eyes tugged at my memories. They seemed almost familiar, but they couldn’t be. I’d never seen him before in my life. The need to step closer and work out why I felt this way drove through me. My fingers twitched to trace a line across his jaw and angular cheekbones.

What is wrong with you?

I didn’t understand this at all. Then again, I’d never been allowed to go near the opposite sex other than the staff at the estate and my family. I inwardly scoffed. Yeah, so I was a twenty-six-year-old virgin. It embarrassed the hell out of me. I didn’t care what my parents said. I intended to remedy it while I was here. Finally able to take control of my life, now I was free of their overbearing nature. The way they coddled me and kept me locked up away from the world. And yet, I was still chained to them in so many ways. Hence why I was here in the first place. In this building. Going to this interview. They were the reason.

The man’s hand hovered over the panel, and his eyebrow curled up. The curve of his lip had me staring at it. The bottom one was full.

What would it be like to experience a kiss from them? Would it feel as good as the books I've read said it does? Would he be gentle or demanding?

"Twenty-eight, please," I blurted out in a rush, realising he'd been waiting longer than a minute for me to answer and completely mortified by my wayward thoughts.

He dropped his hand. I noticed he'd already pressed that floor. He was going to the same place as I was. Did it mean he might well be one of the four men who ran this company?

He stepped back and stood next to me, his muscles tense and his body rigid. I fidgeted with my handbag, tugging on the strap, my fingers rubbing the leather as I tried not to allow his proximity to affect me. The scent of his cologne filled my nostrils. This heady mix of cinnamon and apple. A favourite combination of mine, reminding me of the apple crumble our chef, Gio, made most Sundays for dinner. I wasn't sure when I'd get to eat it again, considering going home to the estate filled me with dread.

My eyes were drawn to his face, watching the way his jaw ticked and his eyes remained fixed on the lift doors. If he was one of them, I could see why people called them gods. This man was undeniably attractive. He had an air of power surrounding him. Under the surface of it, danger simmered.

"I haven't seen you before," he said, his silver eyes flicking to me. "Are you new?"

"Oh no, I'm here for an interview."

He cocked an eyebrow.

"Ah yes, the PA position, no?"

I nodded, unsure of whether or not to introduce myself to him. His lip curled up at the side, his eyes glinting. It made him seem almost predatory.

When I got the offer of an interview, the HR lady, Deborah Manning, told me the CEO, one Mr Drake Ackley, would be conducting it himself. She said he liked to know who he was hiring since I'd be working for him personally. It didn't fill me with any sort of reassurance. I'd never been interviewed before. My parents had falsified my employment records to make me look like a good candidate. In reality, the only work I'd ever done was help my father run the estate. In some ways, it gave me a little experience. Plus, they'd sat me down with his own PA and she'd gone over the job numerous times with me. What

would be expected. How to conduct myself in a work environment. And other such things.

I could do this, but I'd have to have my wits about me to make sure I played it all the right way.

The lift doors slid open as we arrived on the twenty-eighth floor. The man took a step out before turning back to me.

"I can show you where to go if you'd like, Miss..."

"Carver. Scarlett Carver."

I stepped out after him. He smiled at me but didn't put his hand out.

"Well, this way then, Miss Carver."

He strode across the lobby, leaving me wondering why he'd not told me who he was. I quick-walked after him to keep up with his long strides. There was a lady at a desk near the corridor we were walking towards who glanced up when she heard us.

"Mr Beaufort," she said, putting her hand up.

He stopped at her desk and leant over it, giving her a wicked grin.

"Yes, Tonya?"

She looked at me when I came to a standstill before turning her gaze back to him.

"Mr Ellis wants to see you."

"Did he say what he wanted?"

She shook her head, glancing at me again. He seemed to notice because he waved a hand at me.

"I'm taking Miss Carver down to Drake's office, then I'll stop by and see Pres."

"Mr Ackley is expecting you," she said directly to me. "Good luck."

Tonya looked back down at her desk. The man she'd called Mr Beaufort shoved off it, walking away down the corridor. I caught up to him a minute later, realising I was meant to be following him.

He was one of the Four Horsemen. My parents had drilled their names into my brain repeatedly.

Prescott Ellis. West Greer. Francis Beaufort. Drake Ackley.

They were my ultimate goal. The men I needed to reel in. How I'd go about it was a huge mystery to me. I'd been told it had to be by whatever means

necessary. I guessed I'd have to wait and see how this all panned out.

Mr Beaufort stopped outside a door. It had a frosted glass and the name 'Drake Ackley, CEO' pasted on it in black lettering. He knocked once before opening it and striding in. I stayed where I was for a moment, taking a deep breath.

This was it. No going back now.

"Drake, your interviewee is here."

I stepped in behind Mr Beaufort and took in the room. The office was huge and modern looking. Black bookshelves lined one wall with three leather sofas and a coffee table set in front of it. The desk was by the window with a high-backed leather chair set behind it. The man who owned this office stood with his hands behind his back, staring out the window in a black suit matching his hair. The sight of him intimidated me, but I dug my nails into my palm, trying to stem my nerves.

He turned, taking me and Mr Beaufort in. He waved a hand at the two seats in front of his desk a moment later.

"Hello, you must be Miss Carver, please, come in and take a seat."

His voice was deep and rich. I straightened my spine before closing the distance and putting my hand out to him.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr Ackley," I said as he took it.

His palm was warm and it spread up my arm. The man was seriously tall. I almost had to crane my neck up to meet his eyes. They were indigo blue, an unusual colour. Something about them made my breath catch in my throat.

He dropped my hand and didn't smile at me but indicated his desk again. I walked around and took a seat, dropping my handbag on the floor. Mr Ackley looked over at the door.

"Did you want something else, Francis?"

I looked back in time to see a glance passing between the two of them, and a strange look appeared in Mr Beaufort's eyes. His body tensed again and his demeanour hardened.

"No. Good luck with your interview, Miss Carver."

He turned, glancing over his shoulder at me as he walked towards the door. Those silver eyes held something in them that confused me. A note of sadness and desperation. He disappeared, leaving me feeling unnerved.

I shook myself and turned back towards Mr Ackley, who'd taken a seat. He leant forward, placing his joined hands on his desk, and levelled his intense eyes on me. The intimidation I'd felt when I'd first seen him hit me at full force. I swallowed hard and tried not to appear as though he made me nervous, even though my palms were sweating.

Stay focused. You have to get this job. It's part of the plan. You need this to succeed.

There was nothing else for it. I straightened my spine and met his gaze head-on. It was time to show this man why he should hire me.

“So, Miss Carver... shall we begin?”

FOUR

DRAKE

God, she was beautiful. The moment I turned and saw her, my damn skin prickled. All I could think about was how stunning she was. The way she carried herself, her head held high and her hazel-green eyes assessing every inch of me. Her light brown hair fell on her shoulders in soft waves. The cream blouse hugged her figure and was tucked into wide-legged black trousers. Nude heels peeked out of them and she had a brown leather handbag completing her look.

It's been so long. Too fucking long.

I knew Francis felt it too. His eyes betrayed everything. Neither of us could afford to say a damn word. We had a plan and we had to stick to it. I had to get on with this interview and forget about everything else. I couldn't get side-tracked.

Scarlett folded her hands in her lap and gave me a nod. I was known for keeping a cool head about things but having her here twisted up my insides. My mouth felt dry. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

Get a grip.

"I thought I'd start with asking you what you know about Fortuity."

She shifted in her seat before meeting my eyes and smiling. And fuck, did her smile make my stomach flip. Not something I needed right now.

"You and your associates started the company six years ago when you were twenty, initially providing investments, which has since expanded into investment banking and foreign exchange. You provide your clients with top-quality service, including their own personal advisor and management of their investments. Fortuity has won many awards for its entrepreneurial success. Simply put, you're the best of the best."

Scarlett had done her research. Unsurprising really. We had risen fast and become a recognisable name. We were the top dogs of our industry.

“I see there’s no need for me to explain further about the company. I’ll move on to some questions then.”

“Of course.”

She smiled again. I bit the inside of my cheek and picked up my tablet resting on the desk, scrolling through her covering letter and CV.

“Tell me, Miss Carver, what made you apply for this position?”

My eyes flicked up to her, noting the hesitation in her expression indicating she didn’t know how to answer my question.

“I... wanted a new challenge.”

“You’ve worked for your family’s company for the past six years, unless I’m mistaken.”

She nodded and flexed her hands. A nervous habit.

“Yes, which is why I’d like to try something new. Spread my wings a little. Not to say I haven’t enjoyed my time there, but doesn’t everyone want some independence from their parents at some point? It feels like the right time.”

Her voice shook on her answer, but I pretended I hadn’t noticed, giving her a nod. Glancing down at my tablet, I made a show of writing a few notes.

“Tell me something about yourself that isn’t on your CV.”

When I looked up at her, her eyes had gone wide and she bit her lip. Another one of her unconscious tells, betraying her hesitation and need to think before she gave me a response. She raised her hand slightly and gripped the arm of the chair as if to steady herself.

I liked to put people off balance. It showed whether or not they would crack under pressure. How they’d perform. It wasn’t something I only did in a work environment either. Catching someone off guard told you a lot about them. Would they slip up and reveal something they shouldn’t or would they recover quickly? I liked to get deep inside a person’s psyche, learn how they ticked so I could use it to my advantage. You push the right buttons and they fall in line.

Prescott might be able to command a room with his presence, but people trusted me with their secrets. They saw me as a good listener and the person to go to for advice. Such a shame they didn’t see who really lurked underneath the surface when they told me their deepest, darkest desires. I dissected their whole

lives, learning what made them who they were so I could crush them until there was nothing left but ashes in the wind. It was such a rush when they discovered what I'd done. I loved watching the deep, visceral sense of betrayal displayed across their features. The death of everything they held dear. Snatched away in a moment. It was such a sweet victory.

“Does it have to be work-related?” she finally asked.

“It's up to you.”

“Okay. Well, I had to learn how to walk and talk all over again when I was younger. It was a long arduous process. I'd prefer not to go into the whys, but I like to think it shows I'm very committed when I put my mind to something. I want to be successful at what I do.”

I nodded again, writing down more notes. I wasn't going to pry into her life any further, but it showed definite strength of character. Anyone who worked for me had to have a certain work ethic. I wanted someone who would run all aspects of my life, business and personal. It wasn't what my current PA did, but with the changes to our business, I needed someone who could take a more hands-on approach.

“I imagine that was very difficult.”

She gave me a tight smile, her eyes betraying how uncomfortable she was revealing something so personal.

“Yes... life has a funny way of challenging us.”

Don't I know it! Sitting here in front of you is a challenge in of itself.

I didn't smile back. I rarely did. Showing emotion wasn't something I did. Not for a long time. It made it harder for anyone to get a read on me. It's how I liked it. I preferred not to let anyone in. It only led to disappointment when they realised I wasn't who they thought. Most people didn't like the ugliness inside me and the others. They wouldn't understand the whys or how we'd all descended to the lowest of lows to rise to power. And risen we had, like fucking phoenixes from the ashes. Except these phoenixes dripped with immorality, perversion and deviancy.

“You're aware this role can require you to be here at odd hours, liaising with my associates to keep diaries aligned as we all work very closely together, and we require you to sign an NDA.” I paused, assessing her reaction. Her eyes flickered momentarily. “Is any of that going to be a problem?”

“No, not at all. I’m very good at working with others and can adapt to my circumstances no matter what is thrown at me.”

No hesitation on her part. I liked that. So far I was impressed with what I’d heard.

“As you said, you want a new challenge.”

Scarlett nodded and let go of the chair arm, her shoulders relaxing.

I asked her a few more questions about her experience, which she dutifully answered. Some of it felt rehearsed, but I came to expect that sort of thing in interviews. People could be very predictable. They wanted to impress, especially when it came to working here. You could tell who wanted a role for bragging rights and who was invested in building a solid career. Weeding out the former happened to be something I was well versed in.

Scarlett wasn’t one of those types. She had her own reasons. Ones she clearly kept close to her chest. The woman wasn’t entirely easy to read.

“Do you have any questions for me, Miss Carver?” I asked when I’d wrapped up my own.

She bit her lip again. I tried to keep my attention on her eyes as opposed to the indents she made on the bottom one.

“You mentioned you work closely with your associates. Just how involved would my role be with them?”

Now there was something I had anticipated. No doubt she’d want to know if she’d be seeing the notorious Four Horsemen regularly. Didn’t everyone? Unlike the others, I could see why we’d been branded with the name. The four of us took no prisoners. No one in their right mind challenged our authority and power. We’d proven we weren’t to be messed with despite our enemies continuously circling. The four of us were ready for them whenever they chose to strike.

“It depends. Francis... Mr Beaufort doesn’t like anyone else interfering in his routines. He’d be the least of your worries. As for Mr Greer, West keeps to himself mostly. Mr Ellis is the one you’d be seeing the most other than myself. Prescott is the face of Fortuity so he’s very... involved.”

That was an understatement. Prescott liked to stick his nose in things that weren’t his business. The rest of us didn’t mind. We were used to it. Well, except for West. He outright hated the way Prescott behaved. Then again, West

pretty much hated everything and everyone. It didn't take much to set him off.

"That said, you'll mainly be working directly with me," I continued. "The others have Tonya to manage their schedules."

She nodded and looked thoughtful for a moment.

"And the late hours. Do you anticipate those to be every day or...?"

"No, not every day. I try not to work late, but sometimes these things happen."

I wasn't going to tell her about my tendency to work at all sorts of hours, since she didn't need to be here for that. Insomnia had plagued me for years, and it wasn't disappearing any time soon.

"Okay... I don't think I have any other questions."

I rose slowly from my chair. She watched me, her head tipping back to meet my eyes.

"I think that just about concludes everything then. I will walk you out."

I indicated the door with my hand, stepping out from behind the desk. She didn't move straight away, watching me with curious eyes, as if she hadn't worked me out yet.

Scarlett rose from her chair and leant down, picking up her handbag. My mouth went dry again, watching her body stretch and flex as she straightened. She gave me a tight smile and walked towards the door. I swallowed hard, steeling myself against the odd feelings erupting in my chest.

It's almost over. You can breathe again when she's gone.

I needed to speak to the others. This plan of ours needed to go off without a hitch. We were going to see this through one way or another. But first, I'd see Miss Scarlett Carver out.

I followed her to the door, watching the slight sway of her hips as she walked, completely unable to help myself.

It won't be long now. You'll get what you want soon enough. You all will.

I had to keep that in mind. As Prescott always said, everything we did was for a purpose. And our ultimate goal was to regain what we'd lost all those years ago. What we were fucking well owed. Nothing, and I mean nothing, would stand in our way ever again.

FIVE

WEST

I stepped out of my office with my head buried in my phone. These fucking figures weren't adding up. It meant I needed Francis. Nothing worse than having to ask for his damn help. I didn't like being at anyone else's mercy. Still, we couldn't afford to fuck up with this account, so needs must.

Voices floated up the corridor, making me glance up. I came to a complete standstill, feeling the wind knocked out of me in an instant. It's not as if I didn't know Drake was interviewing today. However, it didn't prepare me for the sight of *her*.

I had put little thought into how it would feel. My heart thundered in my ears, the sound echoing around my skull over and over. The violence of it settled over me. I revelled in it. Wild emotions got me going in a way nothing else did.

My arm dropped to my side, my fingers curling tighter around my phone. I couldn't help watching them. How Drake seemed relaxed, and yet the tension in his shoulders and eyes told me otherwise. The way she clutched her handbag, her fingers worrying at the leather strap like she was nervous and unsure of herself. And when they turned the corner into the lobby, I followed, tugged by an invisible cord wrapped around my wrist.

I peered around the wall in time to see them come to a standstill outside the lifts. Drake pressed the button before stepping back and staring down at her. My eyes drifted down to her pert behind, causing my thoughts to run rampant with things best left in the dark recesses of my mind. The others might have been able to fool themselves into believing shit like we were all just friends, but not me. No, I was fucking realistic. And there was no way in hell I could deny the twisted fucked up parts of us craved something more.

“So, Deborah will be in touch to let you know either way,” Drake said, sticking his hands in his pockets.

I almost scoffed. The outcome had been set in stone long before she even stepped into the building. I didn’t deal in the same nonsense as the rest of them did. While I never described myself as seeing the world in black and white, I was straight shooting when it came to saying it like it is. I didn’t mince words. Probably why most of our staff stayed well out of my way. I delegated a lot of day-to-day stuff to my junior, Andrew. Easier that way. Didn’t have the time or patience for idiots. He had tact. I took a sledgehammer to people if they pissed me off. Once it happened quite literally, but the less said about that incident, the better. Francis would only lament the blood splatters ruining his favourite shirt all over again. I mean, I’d bought him a new one and all that shit, but he still held it against me. The prick held me to account for every one of my supposed wrongdoings.

“Okay, great,” she replied, looking up at Drake so I could see her face in profile.

The way her neck stretched made my fingers twitch in anticipation of being wrapped around the slender column of flesh. Holding myself back from striding across the lobby and doing so took a supreme effort on my part. The others would have my fucking head if I ruined our plans.

It was lucky the lift arrived then, the doors sliding open. She gave Drake a smile and a nod before stepping into it.

“Goodbye, Miss Carver,” Drake said, without a single trace of emotion in his voice.

“Bye, Mr Ackley.”

She reached over and pressed a button to go down. Drake waited while the doors closed. I caught the flash of emotion across her face before they slid shut. The confusion there made me wonder what she’d been thinking about.

Drake turned around and walked over to Tonya’s desk, his hand still dug into his pockets.

“Tell Deb to draw up the paperwork and to let Miss Carver know she’s been successful.”

I couldn’t see Tonya’s expression, but her hand tightened around her mouse.

“Don’t you have more interviews today?”

Drake didn't even shrug. He merely stared at her.

"I do."

"Then why are you telling me this now? Surely you haven't decided yet."

Tonya had fucking balls. She would never talk to me like that, but then again, she was shit scared of me. Probably because I'd threatened her on more than one occasion, much to Drake and Francis' displeasure. I'd only been joking, but Francis spent most of his time with a stick up his arse so no wonder he wasn't amused. Drake had other reasons for wanting me to keep my behaviour in check. I didn't care for either of their concerns.

Drake's eyebrow rose, but he didn't outwardly show any emotion otherwise. That was Drake for you. Never giving away how he felt about anything.

"Are you questioning my decisions?"

"I just... no, Mr Ackley. I'll get it done, but I have to ask... do you still want to interview the other candidates?"

"Send them in when they arrive. After all, I have to do my due diligence."

He didn't let her respond, strolling away towards where I was standing.

"I didn't think skulking around corners spying on people was your thing, West."

Tonya's head whipped around, her eyes going wide as she spied me. Then she turned away abruptly, but not before I saw the flash of fear in them. Something I was used to when it came to anyone other than Francis, Drake, and Prescott. Most people gave me a wide berth unless they were unaware of my reputation.

Drake stopped next to me, his indigo eyes flashing with amusement.

"I'm not," I replied, glaring at him.

He knew exactly why I'd been lurking. As if I could help myself when it came to *her*.

"You out of your office for a reason?"

"Need to speak to Frankie."

"Mr Beaufort is with Mr Ellis," Tonya threw over her shoulder, clearly eavesdropping as usual.

Maybe I should put the bitch in her place again.

"Thank you, Tonya," Drake said, waving his hand at her before starting off towards Prescott's office. I trailed after him, shoving my phone in my pocket and leaving thoughts of tormenting Tonya behind me.

Drake didn't bother knocking, opening the door and striding in. Prescott and Francis' voices hit me the moment I reached the door myself.

"No, I gave you a budget and you need to stick to it," Francis said with frustration lacing his voice.

"And I just told you I need more," Prescott replied, crossing his arms over his chest as he leant on the edge of his desk.

Francis stood a few feet away with a thunderous expression gracing his features. It hardly surprised me they were arguing over finances again. Prescott couldn't budget to save his life, which is why Francis, despite being an uptight prick, was the Director of Finance. He could turn a few pennies into thousands. About the only attribute of his I admired without reservation.

"Pres, if Francis says no, it's a no," Drake interrupted, walking over to the windows and staring out over the city.

I shut the door and leant against it, watching both Prescott and Francis turn and stare at Drake's back.

"You pulling the CEO card on me?" Prescott retorted.

"Yes."

Prescott's mouth pressed into a thin line and his blue eyes flashed with irritation. Served him fucking right. He was always acting far too big for his boots. I wanted to question why we'd remained friends with the self-entitled prick, but even I couldn't deny we needed each other. We were stronger together. It'd been this way since we were kids. Even though I'd quite happily throw Prescott into a woodchipper for his narcissism and arrogance, I knew it wasn't an option. He was useful... sometimes.

"You going to tell us how it went then?" Francis asked, continuing to stare at Drake's back.

"Fine, she'll do just fine," Drake said.

"Is that it?"

Drake turned his head, a small smile playing on his lips.

"What do you want me to say, Francis? That seeing her was easy? It wasn't, and you know it."

Francis rubbed his face.

"No, you're right. It wasn't."

"Hold on, you got to see her?" Prescott asked, his eyes widening.

“So did I,” I said, my voice quiet as I stared at the three of them.

“What the fuck, guys? I thought we said we wouldn’t all crowd her.”

I smiled. Prescott was put out by being the only one not to have seen her. Served him fucking right.

“Hey, not my fault I was coming back from a meeting when she arrived,” Francis said, shrugging as if he hadn’t intentionally planned to intercept her. I knew his fucking game.

Both he and Prescott looked at me.

“Before you get your knickers in a twist, West didn’t talk to her. Staring at her from around a corner doesn’t count as anything other than being a creep,” Drake said, saving me from responding.

Francis snorted. Prescott shook his head.

“Fuck off,” I muttered. “I was not being a creep.”

“No, I’m sure you couldn’t help yourself.”

“Oh, as if you can fucking blame me. You do have eyes, right?”

He finally turned around and we could all see the smirk gracing his lips.

“I noticed... hard not to.”

“Then don’t give me shit.”

They always gave me a hard time. I suppose sometimes I deserved it when they had to clean up my messes because I had difficulty remaining calm. My temper was violent and unforgiving. It’s not as if I was unaware of my own faults. I merely embraced who I was, unlike the rest of them hiding behind walls and never showing their true colours.

“I should’ve stuck my head out the door to get a glance at her,” Prescott mused as he rubbed his chin.

“You’ll see her soon enough,” Francis said, rolling his eyes.

“That’s if she accepts the job.”

Drake strolled over to where I was standing, blocking the door. He glanced back at Prescott.

“She will.”

“And you know that for sure?”

I stepped away from the door as he reached for it.

“You doubting me, Pres?”

“As if.”

“Then trust me. She’ll accept and then we’ll see how far our little Scarlett is willing to go.”

He walked out without waiting for a response.

“And you lot complain about me being arrogant.”

“You are arrogant, Pres,” I said, grinning.

“No one fucking well asked your opinion, West.”

I stuck a finger up at him, which only made Prescott drop his hands from his chest and glare at me.

“At least he calls you by your fucking name,” Francis muttered.

Sour puss really needed to get over it. I think he only hated it because it reminded him of what *she* used to call him.

“Don’t get me started on your uptight bullshit, Frankie.”

“Oh boy, here we go,” Prescott said before Francis stepped towards me, his fist clenching at his side.

“You know what, next time you call me that, I’m going to stab you in the eye with a fucking letter opener.”

“I’d like to see you try,” I said, grinning at him. “Last time you attempted to hit me, you ended up needing stitches.”

Francis’ face went red and he clenched his jaw shut.

“Anyway, I actually need you to come look at some figures for me,” I continued. “Shit isn’t adding up with the Bykov account, and you know, I’d prefer not to tell the Russians we fucked up.”

Francis threw his hands up.

“Why didn’t you fucking well say so in the first place?”

“Seeing you get all pissy is more fun.”

He stalked towards me, glaring.

“One day I’m going to put your face through a glass wall.”

“Can I watch?” Prescott piped up as Francis disappeared out the door.

The last we saw of him was his hand appearing to flip us the finger. I glanced at Prescott who had a wide smile on his face.

“So... would you then?” he asked.

“Would I what?”

He waggled his eyebrows.

“Fuck off, Pres.”

“What? You were the one creeping on her.”

“You have a one-track mind.”

I started out of the door.

“Come on, West, you can be real with me... I know how you felt back then.”

I stiffened, stopping in my tracks.

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?”

“It means you were a lovesick puppy who wanted what he couldn’t have.”

I wanted to turn around and shove him into a wall, but I didn’t. Losing my temper with Prescott wouldn’t get me anywhere.

“You don’t know shit, Pres.”

“Hey, I’m not judging. It can’t be easy for you, so, you know, if you want to talk about it...”

“I don’t.”

Nothing would ever make me talk about that shit. None of them would get it. I wasn’t supposed to feel this way.

“Francis and Drake don’t know, do they?”

“There’s nothing to know.”

“West...”

“Just fucking drop it.”

I stalked away, irritated that Prescott even had an inkling of the way I’d always felt about her. It hadn’t changed. It permanently marked me in ways I wasn’t ready to talk about. Instead, I drowned myself in pussy, alcohol, drugs and violence to get by. My coping mechanisms were unhealthy as fuck, but I didn’t care. We all had our vices. Mine happened to be deviant and perverse. And I revelled in them. If it made me a sick fuck, then so be it. I wouldn’t change for anyone.

Prescott could go fuck himself. I wasn’t going to discuss shit with him. Digging up those old memories would not end well for anyone. I was sure none of them wanted to clean up the result of me going off the rails yet again.

I stalked back towards my office, where I knew Francis would be waiting for me, wondering how the fuck I was going to cope when she was here all the time. Guess I would have to wait and see. And I wasn’t looking forward to it. At all.

SIX

SCARLETT

Considering it was my first ever job and my first day, to say I was nervous would be an understatement. I'd been so sheltered from the world. Being out in it on my own wasn't always easy. Especially in the city with people everywhere and no room to breathe. It wasn't like Kent, with the fresh countryside air where I could walk on our estate and not see anyone for miles. The only person I knew here in London was Mason Jones. He was in my father's employ and had helped me through my recovery, becoming like an older brother figure. My father insisted I have someone to watch my back. Here we were, living in a three-bedroomed flat my parents owned in an expensive part of the city.

"You sure you're going to be okay today?" he asked, nursing a cup of coffee as he sat back on the sofa with his legs up on the low table.

"Why wouldn't I be?"

"Well, you're being thrown to the wolves, Scar."

I snorted, staring at myself in the mirror above the faux fireplace while I applied another coat of lip gloss. Mason always worried about me. He'd been there at my worst when I'd woken up after being in a coma for weeks and having to learn how to do things like walk and talk all over again.

"I'll be fine."

I was strong enough to do this. Besides, what exactly would they do on my first day? Nothing. They didn't even know why I was really here. There was nothing for me to be afraid of. I couldn't afford to have second thoughts or doubts.

"You know their reputation. Just because Stuart thinks you're ready to take them on, doesn't mean you are."

My father hadn't had a choice. When they announced they were expanding their business, he'd jumped on the opportunity to get me a job there, close to the men who ran it.

"Oh yeah, I'm so scared of the Four Horsemen." I rolled my eyes. "Jesus, Mase, they're not godlike immortals. They're four men. I can handle it."

I didn't want to tell Mason how intimidated I'd been by Drake Ackley when I'd had my interview with him two weeks ago. He never smiled nor showed any emotion. I couldn't get a read on him. He had one hell of an intense gaze. I was dreading having to work closely with him.

I had to get my shit together. This was my way in. I had to work out how to break through that icy exterior of his to make him trust me. And the rest of them. I wondered what Prescott Ellis and West Greer would be like. Francis Beaufort had seemed friendly, but I couldn't afford to let my guard down with any of them.

Even though I'd made a joke about it, they were called the Four Horsemen for a reason. They were ruthless. Something I could not afford to forget or be complacent about.

"Hmm, I'm sure," Mason replied.

I could see him giving me a look in the mirror. Chucking my lip gloss in my handbag, I straightened my skirt and spun around.

"Do I look okay?"

Mason's brown eyes roamed over me.

"You're a knockout, Scar."

"I'm meant to look like a professional, not a knockout."

He grinned.

"You look fine."

I glanced down at my tight black pencil skirt, sky-high black heels and black blouse with little white horses on it. It made me smile. I wondered if it would provoke a reaction when I met the men today. They had to be aware of what they were called. I hoped at least one of them noticed.

"Okay, I've got to get going or I'll be late and that won't make a good first impression."

"Good luck."

I gave him a smile, clutching my handbag as I made my way to the front door.

Having double-checked I had everything twice earlier, I was ready to face the music.

It didn't take me too long to get into Central London, arriving at Fortuity's building with ten minutes to spare. I was given an induction by the HR lady I'd spoken to, Deborah, for well over an hour. I had to sign my contract and a non-disclosure agreement, legally muzzling me from revealing any of their personal lives to the world. I could deal with that part. It was a case of being careful how I went about giving their information to my family. After all, they could ruin me if they found out why I was really here. It was a risk I had to take.

After that, Deborah took me up to the twenty-eighth floor and introduced me to Tonya properly. I got a weird vibe from the woman and wasn't sure what to make of her. I wondered how much she knew about her employers, but I didn't have a chance to follow that thread of thought. Deborah took me down the corridor and knocked on Drake Ackley's door. We walked in a moment later, Deborah going straight over to where Mr Ackley sat behind his desk with his head buried in some papers.

"Your new PA is here, Mr Ackley," she said, waving a hand at me as I stood by the door, feeling awkward and unsure of myself.

He looked up, his eyes landing on me as his jaw ticked.

"Thank you, Deb. Is everything in order?"

"Yes, we went through all the paperwork and general procedures. Miss Carver is all yours."

A shiver ran down my spine at Deborah's words and the way his eyes darkened slightly. He gave her a nod. She smiled before making her way back over to me.

"Don't worry," she whispered, patting my arm. "You're in good hands."

I questioned what that meant in my head as she walked out of the room, shutting the door behind her. Did I look as nervous as I felt? My palms were sweating. I kept rubbing my handbag strap to keep my fingers occupied.

"Miss Carver."

I jumped, turning my attention to the man I would be working for. He put a hand up and beckoned me over. My feet started towards him before I realised what I was doing. It's as though the moment he told me to do something without words, I had to obey. And the knowledge of it almost made me falter in

my steps.

You are not going to allow anyone to have power over you, Scarlett. You need to have the upper hand. You know this.

I stopped a foot away from his desk, giving him a smile. I wanted to start out on a positive note. And I needed to stop those ridiculous thoughts about wanting to obey him in their tracks. What did I really know about this man other than what I'd been told? Nothing. Staying on my guard was my only option.

“Good morning, Mr Ackley. I wanted to thank you for giving me this opportunity. I’m looking forward to working with you,” I blurted out in a rush.

He cocked his head, appraising me with those intense eyes. My knees threatened to buckle under the onslaught.

What is wrong with you?

“You’re welcome.”

His eyes fell on my blouse. I was graced with an upward curve of his lips as those indigo eyes glittered with amusement. Clearly, he had a sense of humour, even if he hid it behind a mask of indifference. I could work with that... somehow.

He rose from his chair and stepped out from behind his desk, sliding his hands in his pockets. It struck me again how much he towered over me and how intimidating it was.

“I wanted to start by getting Annika, my current PA, to show you the ropes. She’s leaving in two weeks so it’s important you spend time with her... unless you have questions for me now.”

I swallowed, watching him continue to appraise me.

Do not be intimidated by him. You can do this. This is what you’ve been working towards.

“No, that’s fine.”

“Well, shall we, Miss Carver?”

He put his hand out, indicating we should move. I turned and started towards the door, feeling him fall into step beside me.

“You can call me Scarlett. I’m not big on formalities.”

Plus, I wanted to break down the barriers between us and find a way inside his head. Glancing up at his profile, I could see I’d surprised him. And I almost looked away when he turned his head to meet my eyes.

“In that case, you can call me, Drake... Scarlett.”

My name on his lips made my skin tingle, and the memory of a voice rang in my ears.

“Don’t cry, Scarlett. I know it hurts. Let me kiss it better.”

I almost froze on the spot, trying to work out where it came from and what it was. There was nothing else attached to it. No images. Just a child’s voice. It unnerved me.

“Are you okay?”

I jumped, realising we had stopped by the door to his office and I’d been staring at it intently.

“Yes, yes, sorry... I must’ve zoned out.”

Drake’s expression didn’t change, but he nodded and opened the door. A man stood outside it with his hand raised, which he dropped and his mouth quickly curved up into a smile.

“Well, hello there.”

Everything about him was striking. His hair was dark blonde, his eyes blue and he had a set of perfectly straight teeth. High cheekbones and a beautiful mouth made him look as though he’d been carved from marble. His grey suit moulded to his body as if it was a second skin and he even wore a waistcoat underneath it. Clearly, someone liked to make an impression. And judging by the way my heart hammered in my chest at his presence, he’d succeeded.

“What are you doing, Pres?” Drake asked.

“Coming to talk to you, but I see you’re occupied.” He waved at me. “Is this your new PA?”

“Yes.”

The man stuck his hand out to me.

“It’s nice to meet you. I’m Prescott.”

I took his hand, noting how soft his skin was as I shook it. The set of his jaw gave me a weird sense of familiarity. Like I’d seen it before, but I couldn’t put my finger on where or how. And after hearing that voice in my head, I wasn’t sure I wanted to.

“Scarlett.”

“Pretty name for a beautiful woman.”

I found my face growing warm from his compliment. His blue eyes twinkled and he winked at me.

So this is Prescott Ellis. He's quite something.

"Prescott," Drake said in a tone that displayed his disapproval. "That's not appropriate."

Prescott dropped my hand and waved Drake off with a grin.

"I'm sure Scarlett doesn't mind."

I caught Drake rolling his eyes. I held back a smile.

"I don't mind. Thank you for saying so."

I didn't want to alienate any of them, considering I needed them all to trust me. Besides, being complimented felt good. I'd had very little male attention in my life so far. Mason didn't count since he was my father's employee.

Prescott looked between Drake and me as if he was expecting one of us to say something else. Then he stepped back and waved a hand.

"Well, I won't keep you."

"Wait in my office, I'll be back in five minutes," Drake replied, stepping out and starting along the hallway.

Prescott's eyes were on me. My skin prickled from his gaze. I had to step closer to him to leave Drake's office. And it did nothing to help the odd feelings his presence elicited from me.

"Do you like horses, Scarlett?"

His voice was low and had this seductive note to it, which made my heart pound harder, the sound ringing in my ears.

"Yes."

His blue eyes flickered with something I couldn't put my finger on.

"Then I think you'll do just fine here."

He's noticed my blouse. It's the only reason he brought horses up.

"I hope so."

I gave him a smile before hurrying away after Drake, unsure of what to make of Prescott Ellis. Was he flirting with me? Is that why I felt so flustered and why my face was on fire? And why the hell would he when I was an employee?

I didn't have answers to any of those questions and could only hope he was like that with everyone. I had a funny feeling Prescott could prove to be a thorn in my side if I wasn't careful.

Am I going to have problems with all of them? Why does it even surprise me?

This task was never going to be easy. Not when I had to get close to four men with as deadly a reputation as the Four Horsemen had. Perhaps Mason had been right to be so worried about me. Perhaps I should be more worried about myself than I was. And perhaps... I'd bitten off far more than I could chew.

SEVEN

PRESCOTT

Scarlett scurried down the hallway after Drake, leaving me to rub my thumb across my bottom lip. They weren't lying when they said she was beautiful. Scarlett had grown into her figure a little too well. Her hazel-green eyes still held the spark in them I'd grown so fond of all those years ago. The one which told me she was up for getting into mischief. I knew better than to be lulled into a false sense of security around her, no matter how familiar she felt to me.

I'd wanted to talk to her more. To see if she still had her sharp wit. I wanted to fucking well see if she remembered anything. A single damn thing. And yet I knew deep down she didn't. Not seeing the recognition in her eyes cut me in a way I hadn't been expecting. It was one thing to know someone wouldn't remember you, and another to experience it. And fuck if it hadn't got to me. The urge to slam my fist through the wall drove through me, but I took a breath instead.

Stay calm. Stay focused. Stick to the plan.

I watched her and Drake enter the office, which would be hers when Annika left in two weeks. He glanced back at me with a warning stare. As if telling me to back the fuck off. Like I ever listened when any of them attempted to warn me to keep my distance. If I wanted something, I'd have it.

However, I wasn't as bad as West. He had the worst impulse control out of the four of us. Last night he'd come home high as a fucking kite. Fuck knows what he was on, but the three of us had wrestled him into bed to sleep it off. I had a feeling he'd got fucked up because Scarlett was starting today. Tonight would probably be worse. A whole lot worse.

Sighing, I walked into Drake's office. I hadn't only wanted to see Scarlett. I

also needed him to get Francis to stop being such a tight arse over funding. It's not as if we couldn't afford it. Right now, we needed to expand to cover up all the other shit we were doing. It meant spending a little more than we had planned. And landing some more prestigious clients too. I had my eye on the owners of the Syndicate now we'd secured the Bykov account. It was running smoothly, no thanks to West almost screwing shit up.

I stood by the window and stared out over the city. Drake was right about this being my playground. I loved to see the world going about its day-to-day business, blissfully unaware of the dangers which lurked above them. Namely me and my three best friends. Yes, we ran our business above the law most of the time, but the other shit we had a hand in? Not so much.

My thoughts drifted back to *her*. The way she'd smelt like caramel with a hint of cinnamon. She'd always loved the smell of cinnamon. It didn't come as a surprise she wore a spiced scent as opposed to something more floral. It suited her. Hell, everything she'd been wearing suited her, accentuating her waist and drawing my eyes to all of her curves.

Fuck, I want to hold her close, look into those hazel-green eyes and remind her who I am to her. Who we all are to her.

I couldn't. It wasn't part of the plan. And I would not be the one to derail it. The loose cannon in our merry band was West, not me. I had to keep my shit under control. I could do it. If only she didn't smell so good. If she didn't look so damn good. If only I didn't feel a fucking stirring in my damn chest and lower. I wasn't going to let a woman trip me up into losing control. I didn't allow anyone that sort of power over me. They bowed at my fucking feet, not the other way around.

Except you'd worship her if you had half the chance. It just wouldn't be the type of worshipping you did in church. It would be sinful. Deviant. Immoral.

"What the fuck was that?" came Drake's voice as he walked in.

"Whatever do you mean?"

I turned, finding him glaring at me.

"I told you I'd take her around to introduce her to everyone this afternoon."

"I couldn't wait."

They'd all seen her already. It was my fucking turn.

"Oh, and could you also not keep your fucking eyeballs in their sockets too?"

I smiled. No, I definitely couldn't. It'd been long enough. Too many years we'd had to be patient and bide our goddamn time.

She's ours. She fucking well belongs here with us.

I didn't need to remind him. He knew it as well as I did.

"What exactly are you so pissed off about? Perhaps it's because you've noticed she's a woman now and you don't like the fact the rest of us have. Is that it?"

Drake glared, shoving his hands in his pockets and paced away.

"No."

"Don't start lying to me now, Drake. You might be able to fool the whole world with your indifference, but not me. Never me."

"Fuck off, Pres."

I rolled my eyes. Drake hated talking about his feelings to anyone. He didn't like admitting to having any weaknesses, but we all knew about his inability to sleep. We all knew what haunted him. I wasn't going to let him bullshit me.

"You're as bad as West."

He stopped, glancing at me with a frown.

"Don't compare me to him."

I shrugged, knowing I hit a nerve. West could be a sick, sadistic piece of shit, only he didn't hide it behind a mask of civility like Drake. West put it all out there. Drake didn't like to show the world his true colours, but we'd seen them. Me, Francis and West. We'd seen each other at our worst. None of us were immune to our darkest urges. In fact, we didn't give a shit who got caught in the crossfire when it came to indulging ourselves in them. Anyone who threatened to talk about one of us didn't stay breathing for very long. We had our reputation for a reason. And we were fucking untouchable because of it.

"No? You not going to ask why I'm doing it?"

He let out a huff.

"Fine, I'll bite. Why?"

I flicked my hand out.

"He won't admit to his little crush, nor how fucked up he is now she's back. Or did you forget he used to follow her around like a puppy dog?"

Drake lifted his hand and rubbed his chin, grazing along the scruff he had there.

“Jesus, that’s why he was high last night. Fuck, we need to get him under control or we’ll end up with a bloodbath on our hands... again.”

I shuddered. While I wasn’t squeamish, the shit West had done to our enemies could turn even the strongest of stomachs.

“You suggesting we cut him off? If so, count me out. I am not dealing with him when he’s sober. He’s bad enough drunk and fucked off his head on pills.”

Drake looked thoughtful for a long moment.

“It would take all three of us, but no... I’m not suggesting that at all.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“You going to enlighten me then?”

His lips curved upwards. A rare sight for Drake to smile about something.

“I think we should give West what he wants, what all of us want, don’t you?”

It took me a second to realise what he was getting at. And I was pretty sure Drake had lost the plot.

“You’re not serious.”

“Why not, Pres? You afraid of the repercussions?”

“It’s not what we planned.”

His smile grew wider.

“Plans change. You can’t deny it’s tempting, is it not?”

“Try telling that to Francis. I reckon he’d have something to say about it.”

Francis would hit the fucking roof. The repressed shit needed to live a little. He was as fucked up as the rest of us, only he denied it completely, preferring to be the ‘nice one’. Francis wasn’t nice. He wasn’t kind and thoughtful. In fact, I’d go as far as to say he had tendencies that were as fucked up as me and Drake. None of us could compare ourselves to West. He was in a league of his own.

“Let me handle him.”

“I don’t think West is going to agree either... the last time I brought it up, he almost bit my head off.”

“Then we’ll have to persuade him.”

I shook my head.

“What happened to being good boys for Little Nyx?”

He showed me his teeth before he bit his lip.

“We’ve never been good boys, Pres. It’s time Little Nyx found that out, don’t you think?”

I couldn't help smiling back.

"You really are sick in the head." I gave him a nod. "Count me in."

EIGHT

WEST

When Drake texted me earlier to tell me we were having a household meeting, I almost threw my phone across the room. Coming down from the drug-induced haze I'd been in last night had been shit. I'd not ventured down to the office for that very reason. Andrew could handle everything. The risk of running into *her* made me feel... violent. I wouldn't subject anyone to my shit right now. Especially not her.

Prescott wandered into my bedroom without knocking, finding me in bed with an unlit joint between my fingertips. I'd been contemplating whether or not to smoke it before going down.

"Time to get up."

"Fuck off."

I twirled a lighter around in my other hand. Prescott advanced on me, snagging the joint from my fingers before I had a chance to stop him and walking back out. He was taking his own life into his hands with me, but he knew that. And he knew I wouldn't really hurt him. Not in the way I did other people.

Fucking bastard!

I hauled myself up, tugged on my dressing gown, not bothering with a t-shirt and slid my lighter and phone into the pockets. Padding out along the corridor, I descended the stairs into the open plan living space. Prescott stood by the window with my joint dangling from his fingertips. Francis looked ready to kill someone. Drake lounged on one sofa with a beer in his hand.

"Nice of you to join us," he said.

"This fuck stole my joint." I pointed at Prescott.

“You can have it back when we’re done.”

Not wanting to punch my friend’s lights out, I stalked into the kitchen and grabbed a beer from the fridge, popping the cap with a bottle opener. I leant against the kitchen island near Francis, who glared at me.

“What crawled up your arse today, Frankie?”

Instead of replying, he leant over and flicked my ear. I shoved him in the arm. The prick thought he could take me. Too bad he always lost. I liked to push his buttons and watch him get riled up. Francis needed to loosen the fuck up and let go.

“Would you two behave like adults for once in your fucking lives?” Drake interjected.

Francis walked away from me, but not before throwing another dirty look my way, and took a seat on the sofa opposite Drake. I downed half my beer and waved a hand at him.

“Go on then, your majesty, what is this about?”

Drake stuck a finger up, making me smile.

“We need to talk about Little Nyx,” Prescott said.

My blood froze in my veins.

That fucking nickname.

I hated it. I hated it so fucking much. Echoes of the past flooded my senses.

Moonlight. The forest. Her twirling under the canopy. Her smile as she looked at me. The feel of her skin against mine as she let me hold her.

My hand tightened around my beer bottle. I needed to keep that shit at bay.

“I told you never to say that in my presence. Do you ever fucking listen?”

“Get over yourself, West. You’re acting like none of us knows what it felt like when she was fucking ripped out of our lives. We were all there.”

If Prescott didn’t have my last joint in his possession, I would’ve launched myself at him. I didn’t have the patience or energy to get in touch with any of my dealers. If these three had left me in peace to chill out for a while, then I wouldn’t be so fucking riled up right now.

I downed the rest of my beer, needing something to take the edge off. Anything. But nothing ever fixed me. I was too fucked up in the head. Un-fucking-hinged.

Fuck, I really want to beat someone bloody right now.

“Whatever, Pres,” I muttered, moving towards the fridge to grab another beer.

“We’re going to give you what you want, West,” Drake said, making me freeze in the process of opening the fridge door.

“And what exactly do you think it is that I want? If the answer isn’t my joint, then you’re barking up the wrong tree.”

I grabbed three beers and set them on the counter before popping the caps. Picking them up, I walked into the living room and handed one to Francis and the other to Prescott. He didn’t give me my joint back, but he did nod at me. Francis had barely acknowledged me. I expected nothing less. He was already in a shitty mood for some reason.

“You want her.”

I walked away from Prescott and sat on the dining table, earning a glare from Francis as I swigged from my beer.

“How do you figure that?”

“We’re not stupid, that’s how,” Prescott said.

“No one asked you.”

Drake snapped his fingers, bringing our attention back to him.

“Enough.”

“Get to the fucking point then.”

I was done with this conversation already.

“She walked into our kingdom, a little sacrificial lamb sent to slaughter... I’m saying we treat her that way.”

“Have you been in West’s drug stash again?” Francis interjected, his expression turning outright murderous.

“No.”

“Then what the fuck, Drake? That’s not what we agreed.”

Drake’s lip curled up at the side.

“She doesn’t remember us, Francis. She doesn’t remember a fucking thing.”

“What kind of excuse is that? She’s been here a day. Did you expect all her memories to come flooding back the moment she saw us? Jesus, she has amnesia, it’s not like it’s her fault she can’t remember who we are.”

Francis had a point. I hated it, but he had a point. She didn’t have a choice.

She didn't ask to forget who we were. She didn't ask for any of this. Especially not what we planned to do to her. How we intended to use her. Except now it sounded like Drake wanted us to use her for more. Use her in ways none of us should, but all of us wanted to, deep down. Especially me. I wanted her like nothing else. Not to be my balm like she had been all those years ago. No, I wanted to indulge in everything I'd never allowed myself before.

"We all wanted her back. She's here, but she's not really with us... yet. So excuse me for wanting to make sure she doesn't leave again."

"What? By messing with her head further? You really have no fucking morals."

"Like you can say anything. You don't fool anyone here, Francis. Did you forget who you're talking to?"

Francis stood up and paced away as he knocked back some of his beer.

"No. I haven't, but she's one of us, Drake." He let out a long sigh. "At least, she used to be."

"We can't do anything to her until Annika leaves," Prescott said, waving my joint around, which only pissed me off further. He needed to be careful with that shit. I'd rolled it just right.

"No, but we can worm our way inside her head," Drake replied. "See how she responds... how far she will go. I was all for what we planned until I saw her again."

At least we could all agree on that fact. She'd grown up. Words could not describe how alluring she'd become. Not that she hadn't been before, only now she was a woman. All woman and it made her fucking dangerous, but we could handle it. The four of us never backed down from a challenge.

"And now you want more," Francis said, his voice quiet.

"You don't?"

His back stiffened and he drank deep from his beer.

"I do."

"Well, are we agreed then?" Prescott asked.

I downed my beer, placed it on the table before hopping off it. I approached Prescott and put my hand out, waiting for him to give me what I came down here for.

"You didn't answer the question."

“Give me the fucking joint.”

He dropped it in my hand, his eyebrow shooting up. I turned away and walked towards the stairs, digging my lighter out of my pocket.

“West,” Drake said.

“You already know my answer.”

If we were going all out, then I was in. I was all the way fucking in, because I never said no. They knew that. It was Francis they had to convince.

“I need to hear it from your mouth.”

I walked up the stairs, flipping my lighter on and off. As I reached the top, I leant over the glass barrier, staring down at the three of them. Flicking my lighter back on, I lit my joint and took a long drag. I blew it out a moment later, feeling the hit and knowing I’d sleep well tonight.

“Is he in?” I pointed at Francis with my joint.

“If we’re in, he’s in.”

Francis glared at Drake but didn’t dispute what he’d said.

“I won’t go near her until the two weeks are up... until Annika is gone, then all bets are off, understood?”

Drake and Prescott smiled, but Francis looked like he wanted to throw himself at them.

“You planning to let her get settled in, lull her into a false sense of security?”

I stuck my lighter back in my pocket before tapping my nose.

“Exactly.”

“You are all fucked in the head,” Francis said before stalking away towards our home gym, his hand tugging at his tie.

“As if you aren’t one of us,” I called to his retreating back. “Stop being so fucking self-righteous.”

He didn’t acknowledge what I’d said. Clearly, he’d had enough of us today. Whatever shit was going through his head right now, Drake could fucking well deal with it. I was not in the mood. Then again, I was never in the mood when it came to his moral compass. Not that he had one, but he liked to pretend he did. Francis battled with demons, not unlike my own, but he never let them out. I said live and let fucking live. We were who we were. We should fucking own that shit. All of us.

Gods amongst men.

It's what they called us. Why the fuck shouldn't we behave that way?

"Is there anything else?" I asked Drake and Prescott.

"No," Drake replied, waving his beer at me.

I took another drag from my joint and walked away towards my bedroom. Knowing I wouldn't have to keep myself in check around her for long calmed me as well as the cannabis making its way through my system. I didn't know what had got into Drake and Prescott today, but something had changed. I didn't care either. We were all going to hell one day, so why not fuck shit up a little more in the meantime?

You have no idea what you've walked into, Scarlett. No idea at all.

NINE

FRANCIS

I didn't like what was happening with the rest of them. They all seemed so content to let their darker sides out without a second thought for how it would affect everything between us. It was something I'd always battled with. I wouldn't deny it felt fucking good when I allowed myself the freedom to be who I was inside. To do exactly as I pleased without morality or a conscience weighing me down.

Why couldn't I let it go like West had always done?

Why did I have to fight with myself over the things I craved?

Time for thinking about that shit was over. No matter how much I disapproved of what they wanted to do with her, I wouldn't let them down. Prescott, West, Drake and I were in this together. We always had been. At one point, she was a part of the equation. And now? Fuck knew what she was to us. It'd been ten years. Ten fucking years of waiting for the opportune moment. And now it was here.

I had to deal with it. Do what I was supposed to. And be who I was.

They call you a fucking horseman, act like it.

I clenched my fists as I walked into the kitchen, knowing I had to sort my shit out and get with the fucking program. My feet came to a standstill the moment I saw a woman standing by the counter tapping her purple nails on it while the coffee machine whirled.

Her light brown hair was pulled up in a tight ballerina bun on top of her head, with little wisps framing her face. When my eyes drifted lower and fell on her behind, perfectly encased in her tight black pencil skirt, I swallowed hard as my mouth watered. She had black heels on with little purple bows on the back of

them. Her legs were bare and made me wonder what she was wearing underneath her skirt.

I'd tried not to look at her like that. As someone desirable. As someone I'd want to tie down with chains, listening to them rattle while she screamed and fought against their hold. As someone I'd torture with pleasure and pain because I fucking well could. As someone who was ours to do what we wanted with.

She was that. She belonged with us... no... she belonged *to* us.

Fuck. This. Shit.

"Good morning, Miss Carver," I said, my voice calm and collected, not remotely betraying my inner thoughts about all the depraved things I would subject her to. What we would all subject her to because it was who we were.

Scarlett turned her head and smiled at me.

"Good morning."

My conscience fled. I didn't give a shit where it went, either. Her smile made me want to let my inner deviant play with fire. Play with her. Just like we'd agreed to. To push her until she snapped. Then we'd really learn what went on inside that head of hers. Force those secrets between all of us out in the open. One day, but not yet... not until we were ready.

I stepped closer until I was almost brushing against her. Her head tipped up, her hazel-green eyes widening slightly.

"Drake is rather picky about how he takes his coffee."

"He is? Annika didn't tell me."

My lips curved up. Annika wouldn't have. She was used to Drake's ways. Plus, he wasn't too strict with her. Scarlett would learn that while Drake had infinite patience, he also liked to get his own way at all times. He didn't concede. And now he'd decided to mess with her, I was sure he'd use every little mistake to his advantage.

"Well, perhaps I should teach you exactly how he likes it."

Before she could say anything else, I stepped behind her and reached up to the cupboard, pressing myself against her back as I tugged out a mug. She sucked in a breath. It didn't stop me from leaning over her and setting it down as I laid my other hand against the counter.

"This is his."

Scarlett looked down at my arms, where I'd effectively caged her in before her

eyes fell on the mug. Prescott thought it would be funny to get us all mugs related to what he called our namesakes. Drake's mug was black with a white horse running and below it, the text read: *You cannot outrun Death.*

"And if you don't want him to give you one of his disapproving stares, you need to select this option." I pointed at the buttons on the machine. "No milk. His coffee is like the man himself... dark with a bitter aftertaste."

She turned her head to me, her lips parting and her tongue darting out for the briefest of moments.

"Is that so?" she murmured.

"Oh yes. You better not keep him waiting, Miss Carver, he's not known for being lenient if you're tardy with his coffee first thing."

"And what about you, Mr Beaufort? Are you as picky as him?"

It was almost like an invitation to press closer, but I didn't. I stayed where I was, inches away from her body. No, I wanted to tease her, taunt her, make her come to me. And then I'd take everything I wanted, needed, pleased.

"Perhaps, perhaps not... you'll just have to find that out for yourself."

I pulled back and stepped away, noting the way she exhaled sharply. I smiled to myself, rubbing my thumb over my bottom lip. The Scarlett I'd once known never backed down from a challenge. I wondered how much of that girl remained all these years later. After she'd lost everything.

"You too chicken?" I teased, as Scarlett stared up at the dilapidated building in front of us. Her head turned towards me, and she glared.

"Hell no, you're the one who doesn't want to go inside with the rest of them."

I shrugged and walked up to the open front door where Drake, West and Prescott had disappeared into a couple of minutes ago.

"No, I was being nice and staying outside with you, but if you're going to be a scaredy-cat, then maybe I should leave you to it."

Scarlett barged past me and walked into the building, turning her head back as her eyes glinted with mischief.

"Now who's the scaredy-cat, Frankie?"

"Well, thank you for the lesson," Scarlett said, as she pulled the mug from the coffee machine and replaced it with Drake's. "I appreciate it."

I shrugged and grabbed my own mug from the cupboard. The white one with

two black horses rearing in opposite directions and the words *It's Feast or Famine* underneath it. Even though I didn't find Prescott's mugs amusing, it didn't stop me from using mine.

"You're welcome."

She fiddled with the coffee machine before she turned around and leant back against the counter. Her blouse was dark purple and clung to her breasts, which you could see the tops of because she hadn't buttoned it up the whole way. Perhaps a little inappropriate for a work environment, but I didn't give a shit. I wasn't going to tell her not to wear something less... provocative. Hell, I could quite happily stare at her tits all day, but then it'd make me want things I couldn't yet have. And fill my head with dark thoughts of what we were going to do to her.

"Should I make tea or coffee for everyone whilst I'm here?"

"Well, if you want to get your head bitten off by venturing into West's office without an invitation, then by all means."

She raised an eyebrow.

"An invitation?"

"Yes. He doesn't like anyone invading his space unless it's strictly necessary, but if you really want to know, he takes his coffee spiked with whisky."

Scarlett's eyes widened, and she tapped her hand against her thigh.

"I don't know whether or not to take that seriously."

I knew for a fact West kept the bottom drawer of his desk stocked with alcohol. He likely spiked his own damn coffee. A sober West was a bitch to deal with. I never told him off for drinking at work as long as he kept his drug use outside of hours. That's if he was even at work today. He'd not reappeared from his room after he went to smoke a joint last night and I'd stormed off to work out my frustrations on the running machine in our home gym.

"I never joke about West."

"Maybe I won't disturb him."

I grinned.

"Probably wise not to."

The coffee machine stopped whirling. Scarlett turned, picking up Drake's mug. She eyed me for another moment before making her way towards the door. My eyes fell on her swaying hips. My hand tightened around my mug as

the urge to stop her from leaving overtook my self-control.

“I’m sure Prescott won’t mind you making him tea... it’s milk and two sugars for future reference.”

She paused in the doorway.

“And you?”

“You’ll work it out... eventually.”

Scarlett turned her head and bit her lip. Soon, I’d have that lip between my own teeth, biting down so hard, I’d draw blood. The thought made my body thrum with anticipation of listening to her cry of pain.

“Well, I’ll just have to surprise you then.”

She walked away, leaving me alone with the distinct impression she knew I was flirting with her. I shook my head and turned to the coffee machine, pressing down on the button for a cappuccino.

I couldn’t help looking forward to the thrill chasing her down and making her ours completely would bring.

TEN

SCARLETT

I wasn't sure what to think of what occurred in the kitchen. Annika had only told me Drake expected them at certain times of the day, not his exact coffee preference. I should have asked her before making it. And I hoped Francis Beaufort wasn't messing with me over this because I didn't like getting things wrong. Fucking up on my second day wouldn't be a good look.

My thoughts ran wild, as I walked down the hallway, from the obvious way he'd been outright flirting with me. Just as Prescott had been yesterday, although, as he was the face of Fortuity, I expected as much from him. Francis had been friendly with me the first time I'd met him at my interview. His behaviour today was unexpected, to say the least. I didn't know what to make of him. The way his grey eyes glinted gave me goosebumps.

Shaking myself, I found Drake's door open. I walked straight in without knocking. He didn't raise his head from his computer as I approached his desk. I set his coffee down on the coaster, not knowing whether to say anything or not. He seemed intent on what he was doing. A little furrow appeared between his dark brows, and his fingers moved across the keyboard with speed. He had large hands with long fingers. I could imagine them curled around my arms, holding me down on his desk.

Where did that come from?

"Thank you," he murmured, startling me. My hand shook around the mug. I released it and looked at him. Drake's eyes were on me, those indigo irises flickering with an emotion I couldn't put my finger on.

"You're welcome."

He reached out, taking the mug and bringing it to his lips while his eyes

remained fixed on me. I couldn't help feeling hot and overexposed, as if he was stripping me bare with his gaze. As if he could see everything I kept hidden beneath the surface. I clenched my hands in my skirt to stop myself from trembling.

Jesus, I need to get a grip.

Something about Drake set me on edge. I couldn't put my finger on why. Being around him lit my body up in ways I hadn't experienced before. It shouldn't come as a surprise, given I'd never spent much time around the opposite sex if you discounted Mason. And honestly, I found Drake incredibly attractive, as I did with Francis and Prescott. It made me wonder what West looked like. I'd yet to meet him.

I shouldn't find any of them attractive. I was here to bring them down. To ruin them completely for the things they'd done. Perhaps I could use it to my advantage. What better way to wrap them around my little finger than to make them want me? The problem with that plan was I didn't know how to go about it. Making men want me wasn't exactly something I had any experience in.

Maybe you should ask Mason, though I doubt he'd be very impressed with you taking this course of action.

His misgivings couldn't stand in the way of me getting things done. Maybe I wouldn't tell him. Maybe I should attempt this on my own. How hard could it be? Francis and Prescott seemed inclined to flirt with me. I should flirt back... if I could work out how.

Drake sipped his coffee before placing it back on the coaster. His lip curled up, but not with disgust, more amusement.

"Is... is it okay?" I asked, unable to stand the silence between us any longer.

"You look like I'm about to throw the mug across the room and demand you make me a new one."

"Mr Beaufort said you're picky about your coffee."

I don't know why I told him. Guess he had that way about him. The kind which told me if I lied to him, I wouldn't like the consequences. Perhaps I should provoke him. I didn't think I could take the same approach to Drake as the others. He didn't seem inclined to be anything other than professional. It made me wonder what he was like under the mask he wore. Whether or not he was as dark and wild as his eyes and reputation suggested.

“Did he, now?” He flexed his hand on the desk. “What else did he tell you?”
I shrugged.

“You wouldn’t like it if I didn’t stick to your schedule.”

“No, I wouldn’t.” Drake’s eyes roamed across me, lingering on where I’d left more cleavage on show than I should have. “In fact, it would displease me greatly. I suggest you heed his warning.”

I released my skirt from my fists and smoothed it down.

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

He put his hand up and beckoned me closer.

“Should I not be getting back to Annika?” I asked, hesitant to get any closer to this man. I had no idea what was running through his mind.

He merely gave me a look that screamed ‘do not test me’. My feet carried me forward, walking around his desk and coming to a standstill next to his chair. Drake turned towards me, his hand shooting out and curling around my wrist. He dragged me closer to him until our faces were level with each other. Heat spread up my arm from the feel of his skin on mine. I had no idea what he was doing, but I couldn’t move or look away.

“Tell me, Scarlett, do you think this is appropriate?” he murmured.

“What is?”

He let go of my wrist, only to reach up and touch his fingers to my blouse. My legs almost buckled. Did he mean my blouse being undone?

God, why is he touching me?

It was at odds with the closed-off man he’d been so far.

“This.”

He fiddled with the buttons of my blouse, covering my breasts up before he released me and turned back to his desk. I stared down at where his fingers had been, unable to comprehend what just happened.

“Do you think I’ll ever find a boyfriend?”

“Why wouldn’t you?”

“No one seems to find me attractive.”

“You’re pretty, Scar. Anyone would be lucky to have you.”

The voices rang in my ears, my own and another. I had no idea of the context or where it’d come from. They almost didn’t feel real because I had no visual

indicator attached to them. Not being able to remember anything about the first sixteen years of my life, except for small flashes, frustrated me.

“Sorry,” I whispered.

“You should get back to Annika now,” was all he said in response, not even bothering to throw a look my way.

I straightened and backed away, swallowing hard. Not wanting to earn another reprimand, even though this hadn’t really been one, I walked out of the room, worrying at the fabric of my blouse with my fingers.

My interactions with the Horsemen had been strange so far. I didn’t know what to make of them. And I certainly didn’t understand why I kept getting weird flashes of voices from the past in my head. Nothing about this made sense.

“Hello, Scarlett.”

I jumped, almost stumbling on my heels, as I reached out and caught the wall to steady myself. Looking around, I found one of them leaning up against the doorframe of his office, staring at me with a smile.

“Oh... hello, um, Prescott.”

“My apologies if I startled you.”

I let go of the wall and straightened my spine, forcing a smile on my face.

“I’m... fine.”

He raised an eyebrow, indicating he knew it was a lie. I’d already been rattled by both Francis and Drake today. My mind was all over the place. I wanted to get back to work, then perhaps I could calm myself the hell down.

“You sure about that... sweetness?”

A horrible wave of familiarity rushed down my spine at that word.

Amused blue eyes. The smell of freshly cut grass. The sun beating down on my skin.

“You expect me to believe you’re innocent? You forget how long we’ve known each other, sweetness?”

He called me sweetness and light.

A sharp pain radiated out from my temple, making me reach up and rub it. The memory faded as soon as it came on, leaving me thoroughly unsettled and unnerved.

“You want to sit down for a bit?”

I blinked before my gaze settled on Prescott again. He indicated his office with his hand, inviting me into his domain. I nodded without thinking. One foot moved before the other. I found myself following as he backed away into his office, wondering all the while why now, of all times, did flashes of my past seem to be seeping back into my consciousness. And whether or not it meant my memories would finally return to me in full.

ELEVEN

PRESCOTT

Scarlett seemed rather out of sorts when I'd said hello to her. It made me want to find out what was going on in her head. It's why I'd invited her in despite knowing we both should be working. I shouldn't treat Scarlett like I'd known her most of my life, even though I had. She didn't know who we were and it bothered me. However, I couldn't allow her to see how uneasy she made me feel.

She followed me over to my seating area by the windows. I sat down, setting my ankle on one knee. I leant back and appraised her. Scarlett sank down into one of the armchairs and rubbed her temple again.

"Headache?" I asked.

I had a feeling I should not have called her sweetness. It came out without me thinking. We had this stupid joke between the two of us. Scarlett was sweetness and light and all things nice because she was lovely to people, even those she hated. Behind closed doors, Scarlett could be as savage as they came. A side of her only we got to see. It's what made her one of us. She revelled in the darkness, even if she never saw how fucked up the four of us were. Scarlett kept us from sinking into hell and without her, we'd only got worse.

Is she the same now? Does she still put on an act for the world? Fuck, I want to ask her everything.

"A little," she replied. "Just came on."

"Do you need some water or painkillers?"

She shook her head.

"Something stronger?"

Her eyes raised to mine, widening slightly.

“It’s barely nine-thirty.”

I shrugged, resting my arm on the back of the sofa.

“Always five o’clock somewhere.”

Scarlett’s lips curved up.

“You got booze stashed away in your desk then?”

I ran my tongue over my bottom lip, noting the way her eyes tracked its progress.

“Maybe I do... want to check?”

I waggled my eyebrows, which only made her snort.

“You giving me permission to rifle through your drawers?”

“Depends on what type of drawers we’re talking about.”

It took her a second to get my innuendo. Then her face flushed and her hands curled into her skirt. She let out a nervous laugh as if she wasn’t sure whether to take me seriously or not. I never joked about sexual matters. Hell, I wouldn’t object to her sliding her hand under my clothes. In all honesty, I wanted her to. Lying about it seemed futile. The image of her hitching up her skirt and straddling me assaulted my senses. Her running her fingers down my chest, flicking open the buttons on my shirt and scraping her nails down my skin. I fought to keep my face clear of my wayward thoughts.

“You’re funny,” she mumbled before looking away.

Was I making her uncomfortable? If I was, I didn’t care. In fact, I welcomed it. We’d agreed to fuck with her as much as we could. Scarlett might have been one of us long ago, but it wasn’t the case now. It was so far from the case, it was fucking laughable... except it made me feel shit instead.

When she’d been torn out of our lives, it had left a gaping hole in our little group of five. One we’d never attempted to fill because no one could replace her. No one knew us in the way she did. And now she couldn’t remember a single thing about it. We were all strangers and it fucked with my head. More than I’d admitted to the others. I wanted her to look at me with a spark of recognition. I needed to see the way her hazel-green eyes twinkled whenever they fell on me.

“What do you say, Pres? Should we break into West’s dad’s drinks cabinet and get wasted?”

Scarlett’s eyes were bright with mischief, making me grin.

“You already know what I’m going to say.”

It didn’t matter that we were only fourteen. Nothing mattered when it came to Scarlett, me and the guys having fun and doing whatever the fuck we wanted.

“My dad is going to kill me,” West muttered. “Let me get something to jimmy the lock.”

“I’ll help,” Scarlett said, giving me a wink before she and West disappeared into the kitchen.

This whole fucking situation frustrated the hell out of me, but I couldn’t afford to let it impede our plans. We’d waited long enough to return her to our sides. Two weeks was nothing compared to ten years of biding our time.

“You feeling any better?” I asked, wondering what she was thinking so hard about.

She had small frown lines between her brows.

“A little, I guess. I don’t know what came over me.”

She had just left Drake’s office. I could only imagine what he’d said or done. He might like to hide his dark urges under his mask of indifference, but Drake was as fucked up as they came. There was no doubt in my mind when he got his hands on Scarlett, she’d be in for a surprise. Then again, I was slightly more concerned about her being around West. His penchant for violence scared a lot of people. Mixed with the obvious repression of his feelings for Scarlett, it could be a deadly combination.

Fuck it. Scarlett had been as tough as fucking nails when we were kids. Even if she couldn’t remember a single damn thing, I was sure that girl still lurked somewhere inside her. She could fucking take it.

“I should really get back to work,” she said, standing up abruptly.

For a moment, I stared at her while she fidgeted under my gaze, her eyes darting away all over again. Then I rose to my feet, noting the way she watched me under her lashes. Closing the distance between us, I looked down at her. Her lip trembled as if nerves had spiked in her system, and my proximity made her wary.

I noticed a figure in the doorway behind her, which made my lip curl up. West stood there, his eyes intent on Scarlett. So many emotions burned in those amber depths. Lust, hatred, violence, pain, desire, need. I’d noticed the way he’d looked at her our whole lives. As if she was the sun and he was basking in her fucking glory. Well, now West could bask in her all over again, but this time, the

rest of us would too.

I was about to open my mouth to introduce him when he shook his head. West didn't want her to know he was standing there. I decided to fuck with him. Perhaps then he'd have the balls to introduce himself to her.

I reached up, my fingers finding the small strands of hair framing her face and curling it around them. Scarlett sucked in a breath. West gripped the doorframe, irritation and rage painting his features.

Good. Let it the fuck out, West, just like you always do. Fuck knows we can't deal with you when you're bottling shit up.

Scarlett stared up with me, her eyes wide and her expression one of confusion mixed with caution.

"I do hope you didn't take my joke seriously, Scarlett."

"About the drawers?"

"Mmmhmm."

"I didn't."

I leant closer, turning my face so I skimmed past hers. Her breathing stuttered as my lips brushed over the top of her ear. I watched West's fingers around the doorframe go white.

"I wouldn't want you to think I was being inappropriate."

What I was doing now was probably entirely inappropriate, considering she was our employee. I didn't give two flying fucks. Scarlett was ours. We needed to take her and make her realise it... over and over again.

"I-I-I wasn't thinking anything of the sort," she stammered.

"Good," I murmured, my fingers tightening around her hair. "We take cases of sexual harassment very seriously here. If I say anything you feel crosses a line, please don't hesitate to tell me."

Her breath fluttered across my neck, making me aware of how affected by me she was. Fuck, I could barely control myself now I was inches from her body. She wore this spiced scent, which I couldn't help but want to inhale from her neck. I clenched my free hand so I wouldn't act on the urge.

"I will."

"Good girl."

She let out this little sound which was a mix between a moan and a squeak, but it was so quiet, I had to strain to hear it. And it made my dick fucking hard.

I wanted to know what she was wearing under her skirt. To run my fingers up her inner thigh and brush them across her underwear. To see if she was soaked for me.

I hadn't looked at Scarlett this way when we were younger. It never occurred to me I could. She was one of the boys. The moment I'd seen her again as Scarlett, the fully grown woman, all I wanted to do was pin her down and infect her mind with dirty, deviant desires so she'd be as corrupted as the rest of us. I wanted to drag her down into the dark and keep her there forever.

She's ours. She belongs to us. She always has.

Only now, we all wanted her to belong to us in a very different way.

Biting my lip as I stared at West, who looked like he wanted to outright murder me, I stepped back. I gave him a smile, which I don't think helped matters.

Scarlett blinked, her eyes still fixed on me with her fists curled around her skirt as if she was trying not to act on the potent lust permeating the air.

"I'll see you later then, shall I... sweetness?"

"Ah, yes. Thank... thank you for letting me sit for a few minutes."

I licked my lip as my hand dropped from her hair.

"You're welcome."

When I looked over at the door again, West had disappeared. No doubt to go deal with his anger. I pitied the poor fool who got caught in the crossfire. Maybe it would be Tonya. The bitch needed taking down a peg or two. I wished we didn't have to keep her around. She was always trying to stick her nose into business she shouldn't. I was pretty sure the fact she was shit scared of West was the only reason she ever stayed in line.

I watched Scarlett leave the room, her hips swaying with each step. It didn't help my current predicament. Adjusting myself, I walked over to my desk and sat down. It's not as if I could take her the way I wanted yet. Patience wasn't exactly my strong point. I'd have to do something about this later.

Soon, I'd be able to indulge in the desires running rampant through my head when it came to Scarlett. Soon, all of us would have her right where we wanted her. And it kept me from doing anything stupid.

TWELVE

WEST

Fucking Prescott. The prick decided to taunt me, using his proximity with her to his advantage. Of course he fucking well did. He knew how I felt about her. How I'd always felt about Scarlett. And I hated everything about it.

It wasn't just me. Prescott liked to push everyone's buttons because he could. This shit didn't surprise me in the slightest. Didn't stop it from winding me the fuck up. I wanted to smash his face in, but I refrained. No, I walked away. I couldn't afford to show that side of myself. Especially not when she was right there.

Scarlett.

The epitome of beauty and fucking pureness. She had a brutal side too. A darkness we'd brought out in her when we'd been younger. Seeing her neck exposed as her hair was up made me want to wrap my hands around it. To show her she was at my fucking mercy.

And this is why you're staying away from her until Annika leaves. Until we're all free to do what the fuck we want.

We couldn't afford to let Drake's current PA see who we were. She was innocent in this shit. I didn't have a fucking conscience, but Drake didn't want to subject her to it. And I respected Drake's wishes... most of the time. I didn't give a fuck what Tonya thought about us, though. She was fucking expendable, in my opinion, though Drake wouldn't agree with me on that point. I made sure she knew my feelings about her. While she feared me, she'd quite happily spread her fucking legs for Prescott. I'd caught her staring at him with bedroom eyes on more than one occasion. He had women falling at his feet wherever he went. The fucker could drown in pussy if he wanted.

I stalked away from Prescott's office, forgetting entirely I'd been going down to see Francis to discuss the Bykov account. Seeing Scarlett had me losing my self-control. I'd just reached my office door, throwing it open when I felt another presence in the hallway. I couldn't help glancing left and spied her walking towards me.

My skin prickled. My mouth went dry. All of my senses homed in on *her*.

The moment she looked up and our eyes met, it was as if all the air had been stolen from my lungs. And for a second, there was recognition in those hazel-green depths. Recognition of who I was to her and who she was to me. The moment it left her expression, my body tensed. I needed to be away from her. If I didn't, I'd be a fucking animal, pin her to the wall and do something I shouldn't. Do something that would scare the shit out of her.

She had no fucking clue who I was. Not really. It was a damn fluke.

Scarlett didn't remember any of us. She didn't know what we'd all been to each other. She didn't know a thing.

She took another step towards me, curiosity blazing all over her face. That fucking beautiful face I'd branded into my retinas all those years ago. The dimple in her left cheek when she smiled. The dusting of freckles across her nose she'd always hated, but I found so damn alluring.

Fuck. I want you. I fucking want you. I can't stand it.

I couldn't move as she approached me. She seemed cautious in her steps as if she knew danger surrounded me, warning her away. And yet, it didn't stop her standing before me, tipping her head up and meeting my eyes.

"You're Mr Greer... right?"

Her voice surrounded me. The sweet melodious tone made my blood pump harder around my body. My chest tightened to the point of pain. And I didn't say a damn word. Just stared at her. The girl I could never forget. The girl who fucked me up way worse than anything else in this godforsaken shitshow of a life we all lived.

"I'm Scarlett."

Oh, I know who you are, but you don't know me. Not really. You don't remember. And I don't know if I even want you to.

"I wanted to introduce myself since I'm new... and well..." she trailed off, fidgeting under my gaze.

I wasn't supposed to have this fucking confrontation. I thought I could avoid her. Yet... here she was. Right fucking there. Staring up at me with those damning eyes of hers, that sinful body so close to mine. My instinct was to take her. To take her and fucking break her into tiny pieces. Make those fucking pieces mine. All *mine*.

If anyone saw what happened next, I'm pretty sure they would've told me to go back upstairs and chill the fuck down.

No one was around to censor me.

My hand snapped up and enclosed around her neck, pulling her closer. Scarlett's eyes went wide and her mouth parted.

"Hello, Scarlett."

"Wha—"

"I'd say it's a pleasure to meet you, but it would be a lie."

"I—"

"If the rest of them didn't give you a warning about me, then it's too fucking bad." I stroked a thumb down her skin, revelling in the softness of it. "You've introduced yourself, now run back to your office... if you don't, you won't like the consequences."

I released her, my hand dropping to my side. Scarlett remained where she was, her mouth still parted with shock written all over her features. I leant closer until we were at eye level.

"Run... whilst you still can."

I should not have come to work today. I knew I wasn't in a fit state to be around people, let alone her. The way she was staring at me had me wondering whether she was scared, confused, or intrigued.

"You... you... you..."

"I, what?"

She swallowed, her hand going to her neck as I straightened again. Perhaps she felt the phantom of my fingers around it, squeezing her precious airway. It made me want to do it again.

"You can't just manhandle me."

"Can't I?"

"That's not appropriate."

I couldn't fight the grin spreading across my face.

“I’m not really one for being appropriate. Rules are so restrictive, don’t you think?”

Scarlett blinked as if she wasn’t expecting my answer at all. Her hand dropped to her side.

“Is this something you do to everyone you’ve only just met?”

I leant against my door frame, shrugging as I did it.

“Sometimes.”

We haven’t only just met, Scarlett. We’ve known each other our whole lives. You used to know all my secrets and I knew yours. We were as close as two people could be. And then you were gone... you left me behind. It’s not your fault, but I can’t help resenting you for it.

She swallowed yet again, her eyes searching my face as if she was trying to work out what the hell my deal was. Pity for her, she wouldn’t see a damn thing. Not least because now she’d forgotten me, she wouldn’t be able to read me like an open book any longer.

“Well, don’t do it again.”

I almost laughed. She didn’t look angry, more curious.

“Why? You going to run off and tell HR? You should see all the people who’ve run from me in tears. I don’t do nice and polite. I never have.”

Scarlett cocked her head to the side, narrowing her eyes a little.

“I’m beginning to understand why you all have a reputation.”

The stupid fucking shit we’d been branded with. Of course she’d be aware. I rolled my eyes, thinking of how much Prescott loved to play up to it. Sat on my desk right now was the idiotic mug he’d bought. A deep red colour with a lone rider on top of a white horse and the words *There is no peace in War* underneath it. Even though I thought it rather apt since I was never at fucking peace, I wouldn’t tell Prescott. The prick would only gloat about it.

“And yet you don’t seem to want to heed my warning.”

“You don’t scare me.”

My eyebrow rose.

“I think you’ll take those words back one day... but for now, I’ll leave you with a piece of advice. If you want to survive here, stay away from me.”

I shoved off the doorframe and walked into my office, throwing the door shut behind me. It’s not her who should stay away from me, but the other way around. I had to stay away from her. The urges driving through me right then

had me walking over to my desk, picking up my mug and downing the whisky I'd poured in there earlier.

Who gave a shit if it wasn't even ten in the morning. After our encounter, I didn't know if I could trust myself not to storm back out there, drag her in my office, force her down on her knees, fist her hair in my hand and shove my cock down her throat. I'd do it to scare some sense into her, but I wouldn't care how much she gagged. Nor if she pressed against me, begging me to stop. I wouldn't even care if she screamed. She'd take every fucking inch. She was made to be ours. She was fucking born to be with us. Scarlett would be subjected to everything we wanted to give her. That's how it should be. How it would've been before if things had been different. If everything hadn't gone to hell and left us without her for ten fucking years.

"Fuck," I muttered, running my hand through my hair. "Fuck."

I stared at my desk, but all I could see were images of her naked and tied down on it. How I'd bury myself so deep inside her, she'd scream and cry about how much it hurt. But I'd make it feel fucking good too. She'd be in ecstasy by the time I was done with her. But I'd never really be done with her.

I had to stop these thoughts. They'd fucking well consume me if I didn't. Picking up my phone, I sent a text to my dealer because I was fucking done. This day had already set me on edge. If I let this shit go on for too long, no one would like the outcome. Blood, violence and everything in between. And I wasn't sure the guys would want to pick up the pieces yet again.

THIRTEEN

SCARLETT

The moment I got in the front door, I could smell the comforting warmth of pasta sauce and garlic bread wafting from the kitchen through into the hallway. After the day I'd had, I needed a home-cooked meal and to put my feet up. After kicking off my heels and hanging up my coat, I trudged into the kitchen, finding Mason in front of the stove.

"You are my hero," I announced, falling into a chair at the table.

Mason turned, his lips quirking up at the sides.

"Bad day?"

"You could say that."

I had no idea what to make of my encounters with the Four Horsemen. They were all so different yet had this undercurrent of darkness and menace surrounding them. As if they were hiding their true nature behind a mask of civility.

Well, I could say that about three of them. My hand shook, remembering the way West Greer had wrapped his around my neck as if he had any right to do so. Like it was something normal to do to a person you'd only just met. Except there was something familiar about him. I couldn't put my finger on it.

Perhaps it was the colour of his eyes. They were an unusual amber that had darkened and heated when I'd been in his presence. As if the man didn't attempt to hide who he was, nor the thoughts he was clearly having about me. I wasn't sure I wanted to know what exactly had been running through his mind.

I should have been far angrier than I was about him handling me in the way he had done. It had only made me curious. Made me want to ask him why he would do that. Why had he looked at me as if he'd seen a ghost? I'd barely spent

five minutes in the company of this man. Yet... I couldn't help wanting to know everything.

Probably sounded absolutely crazy. It felt crazy. It's as if a part of me knew him. And yet which part I had no idea because this was the first time in my life I'd ever laid eyes on West Greer.

"What happened?"

I shook myself, turning my attention back to Mason, who was watching me with concern.

"Nothing really. I mean, other than I've finally met them all and they're... I think I know why they have the reputation they do."

"Scar..."

I looked at my hands, knowing if I told Mason about what happened today, he wouldn't be happy. Nor with my plan on making them all want me. It's why I'd not done anything when West manhandled me. I didn't think antagonising him or making him think I wouldn't welcome his advances would fit with my agenda.

"They're just intense, Mase. That's all."

I almost scoffed at myself. Intense would be an understatement. They had this magnetism about them, drawing people into their net so they could take advantage of them. I wasn't fooled in the slightest. Walking into the lion's den unarmed would be stupid. I knew what I needed to do. Seeing the way they'd made some effort to be close to me today made me aware they all saw me as their prey.

Such a pity they wouldn't see what I intended. How I'd ingratiate myself into their lives and tear the rug out from underneath them. Take them down so they'd burn with me. Then I'd be free. At least, it's what I'd been promised. The only reason I'd agreed to any of this. To exact my parent's revenge on them.

For now, if they thought I was amenable, meek and could take advantage of me, all the better. You didn't show your enemies the truth behind your intentions. You didn't show them the real you.

"It's not as if you weren't aware of what you'd be walking into."

I shrugged, tapping my fingers on the table.

"I know. It's more I'm still working out how to make them trust me."

West's warning was still fresh in my mind.

“If you want to survive here, stay away from me.”

I couldn't listen to it, even if everything about him screamed I would not like the consequences of provoking the man.

Looking over at Mason, I found he'd turned back to the stove and was busy dishing up dinner for us. My phone buzzed in my handbag, which I'd plonked on the table when I'd sat down. I tugged it towards me and pulled it out.

Drake: Annika can't stay late tomorrow. I need you to.

I swallowed. Annika had made sure to get my number, as according to her, Drake needed to be able to contact me at all times. She'd given me his, so I'd know it was him.

Scarlett: I can do that.

Drake: Good.

No please or thank you. I wasn't sure what else I expected. I didn't want to think too hard about the fact he'd reprimanded me for having too many buttons undone on my blouse. And how I'd felt like shit for displeasing him. I shouldn't, but I couldn't help it. Something about him set me on edge. It was as if my body instinctively wanted to do everything he said.

That's a little fucked up, isn't it?

Mason brought the plates over to the table. I put my handbag in a free chair, setting my phone down with it. He sat down and dug in. I picked up my fork, staring down at the food without really seeing it.

“How do you know if a man likes you?”

Mason almost choked on his mouthful, his brown eyes bugging out as he turned to me. A second later, he swallowed.

“What?”

“Well, do you guys make it obvious? Do all men flirt with women they like or do they flirt with anyone in a skirt?”

He blinked and set his fork on his plate. Mason was the only guy I could ask these sorts of questions. He might be uncomfortable answering, but I needed to know.

“It depends on the man. Some do flirt with anyone and some don't. Why are you asking me this?”

I pushed my food around my plate.

“Isn’t it obvious?”

He frowned.

“Is this about... them? Have they been inappropriate with you?”

I almost blurted out that all four of them had got way too up and personal with me today in different ways. It wasn’t as if I expected it. It was only my second day and in a lot of ways, I didn’t know what the hell to make of them doing it.

“No, not inappropriate.”

“Scarlett.”

He used his stern tone he liked to bring out when I’d stepped out of line. I hated it because it made me feel small. The people in my life had a habit of making me feel like I was nothing.

“I’m asking the question since I don’t know how to interpret the opposite sex in the way normal people do. Excuse me for not understanding social cues.”

Mason had the decency to look contrite, lifting his hand to rub the back of his neck.

“Sorry... I forget Stuart refused to let anyone come around you.”

I snorted.

“Only you and the staff were allowed within ten feet of me.”

He reached over and stroked his fingers across my hand as if attempting to soothe me.

“I know it’s been hard for you. I just don’t like the thought of you getting involved with or close to those... men.”

“I don’t know that I have any other choice in the matter here.”

I turned my palm up and he slid his against it. Mason had always made me feel safe to tell him whatever was on my mind, even if he didn’t always like what I came out with.

“You’ll know if someone likes you, Scar. They’ll make it obvious by the way they act around you. Learning to read the cues can take time. And if you need help, then I’m here, okay?”

I nodded. It didn’t make me eager to reveal my plans to make the Horsemen want me. And if I was going to do that, I might as well prepare myself for the very real possibility I’d have to give up my virginity. It’s not as if I had any desire to remain innocent of a man’s touch, nor had any romantic notions about it

being with someone I loved.

“I know... thank you. Don't know what I'd do without you.”

Mason smiled at me, but it didn't meet his eyes. He pulled his hand away and went back to his food. I knew he didn't like what my parents wanted me to do any more than I did. Yes, I had agreed to it, but liking any of it was a very different matter.

The cost of my freedom was a high price to pay. I'd give anything for it. The cage I'd been trapped in wasn't one of my own making. Enduring it for the past ten years had given me the determination to do whatever was necessary to secure my future. Then I could walk away from this madness and never look back... if this madness didn't consume me first.

After today, I'd been left with the impression it might actually be a very real possibility. And I wasn't sure how I'd cope if all my hope was ripped away from me.

FOURTEEN

FRANCIS

I could hear the screaming before I even stepped off the lift. The scene that met me was like a kick in the fucking teeth. Drake and Prescott were sat on the sofa with beer bottles in their hands. In the middle of the living room, a plastic sheet was laid out, which already had blood splatters on it.

For fuck's sake, not what I wanted to come home to.

A man was sitting in a chair in the middle of the plastic sheeting. West was behind him, holding what looked like a hammer in his right hand.

“It’s the screamers who like the pain the most,” I heard Prescott saying to Drake, who gave him a grim smile.

“What the fuck is going on?” I demanded, throwing my hands out to gesture at West and the man with blood running down his arm.

Drake and Prescott’s heads turned to me, but West kept staring down at the man in front of him with violence in his eyes. Nothing could pull him out of it when he was in a trance-like state. The rush of adrenaline shooting through his system was too strong.

“West is fucked up on some shit,” Prescott said with a shrug. He took a swig of his beer, looking completely at ease despite the fact our friend was torturing someone in front of him.

This shouldn't surprise me. I never know what the fuck I'm going to encounter with this lot. I swear they get more fucked up as the days go by.

I was under no illusions about my friends. We weren’t good men. We never claimed to be behind closed doors. The world knew us as ruthless. They’d branded us the Four Horsemen after all. What they didn’t realise was we had lost all our morality and qualms over the years. Mine resurfaced on occasion

when the others sunk to new lows. It was my fight to deal with. No doubt I was a depraved, fucked up bastard who liked to dish out pain with the rest of them, but I didn't like to admit it to anyone but these four.

“On what shit?”

“Don't know, we found him like this.”

I rubbed my face, not knowing what the fuck to say or do about this situation.

“Did something happen with him today?”

It could be the only explanation as to why he'd gone off the rails like this yet again.

Drake looked nonplussed by the whole thing, then again I didn't expect anything else from him when it came to West's violent side. Prescott eyed West for a moment with a knowing look.

“I may have been partially responsible.” He shrugged as if it was no big deal.

I wondered at my three friends sometimes. Then again, I couldn't exactly call myself any better than them. We'd already established long ago I wasn't.

“Let me guess, it has something to do with our new employee, huh?”

Prescott gave me a wide grin, which only made me want to throw him off the roof of our building. He had no shame and took pleasure in winding up West to watch him explode. I, on the other hand, got pissed off with West's erratic behaviour. He needed to be kept on a short leash.

“Bingo.”

I rolled my eyes, skirting around West and his latest victim, and walked into the kitchen.

“You know, I'm surprised no one has investigated us over all the seemingly random killings which happen in this city,” I muttered as I opened the fridge and took out a beer.

I used the opener on the fridge to flip the cap and chucked it away before taking a seat next to Prescott and Drake.

Honestly, I dread to think about the death count between us. We hadn't cared about who got in our way back when we were at our worst. I wasn't going to start caring now. No point. We were who we were. None of us apologised for it.

“We're careful. Besides, I doubt West is going to kill him.” He waved at a document sitting on the coffee table in front of us. “The guy signed an NDA,

he wants this shit.”

I frowned.

“What?”

“West’s dealer knows this guy who facilitates this kind of thing. Can’t remember his name, but he’s a big player. The kind who gives people a chance to indulge in their most fucked up fantasies and desires.”

I leant forward and picked up the NDA, scanning my eyes over it.

“You’re seriously telling me people actually sign up to get their fucking bones broken for shits and giggles?”

Prescott shrugged again. Drake was staring at the blood on the guy’s arm, his eyes full of repressed desire. The man had some fucked up fascination with death and blood. He said he liked to watch it run down a person’s skin, staining it red while the life drained from their eyes. I didn’t understand it myself, but each to their own.

“Apparently so. You can ask West about it when he comes down.”

Our fucked up friend had set the man’s hand on a small table next to them. The sound of the hammer whooshing through the air followed by bones cracking filled the air. The man howled, tears streaming down his face.

“More,” he cried. “More!”

Prescott cocked his head to the side.

“See, told you he wants it.”

I didn’t know how to respond. It’s not like this was giving West some sort of sexual high since he wasn’t into guys. He merely liked violence and causing pain. It’s the guy he was hurting I didn’t understand. Who wanted all the bones in their hand broken?

“So what? He gets off on this shit?” I asked a moment later.

“Yeah, haven’t you noticed?”

Prescott indicated the guy’s crotch with his hand. I didn’t particularly want to look, but I did.

Well, what do you know? The sick fuck likes this a little too much.

“Huh? Well, suppose this is a safer way for West to indulge in his sport, unlike his usual ventures.”

I wasn’t sure I wanted to know what type of conversation West had with his dealer to prompt him to mention this shit. West knew some pretty shady people

with the circles he ran in. People like us, except they didn't hide who they were from the world.

"Plus, this guy has a hardon for blood." Prescott pointed his thumb towards Drake. "Kills two birds with one stone."

Drake gave Prescott a dark look.

"Fuck off," he muttered. "I do not."

Prescott snorted.

"Yeah, okay, Drake, you keep telling yourself that. Not like Francis and I can't see the look in your eyes."

I didn't look at Drake. I'd seen enough from the guy in the chair this evening. Instead, I watched West continue to break the bones in the guy's hand. It looked like a mangled mess already. Seeing those broken bones made my lip twitch. I didn't have a thing about that. It was the harsh pants of pain a woman made when her arms were tied too tightly behind her back. When the pressure got too much. When her bones almost popped out of their joints. I swallowed, trying to dissipate the images assaulting my mind. Images of her.

West dropped the hammer on the table, looked up at the ceiling, and sucked in a breath.

"Fuck," he growled. "I need some pussy."

"Well, we all know whose pussy you want," Prescott said.

West dropped his head and stared at Prescott with this manic look in his eyes. He pointed his blood-spattered hand at our friend.

"Do you want me to break your fucking hand too, Pres? I will next time you pull that bullshit in front of me with Scarlett."

Drake and I both looked at Prescott.

"What did you do?" Drake asked.

"Taunted him a little is all," Prescott replied with another shrug as if West's threat meant nothing.

To be fair, West had threatened to hurt all of us on many occasions. We'd been known to throw a few punches at each other from time to time when things got too heavy.

"And for your information, I'm not on a single damn thing. This is a favour for Gary. The NDA is to keep us safe, not him." West waved at the man whose hand he'd destroyed. "He needed to be shown what happens when he steps out

of line.”

“So, he’s not getting off on it?” Prescott asked with a raised eyebrow.

West looked down at the man and smirked.

“Never said he wasn’t. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got to deliver this fucker to his owner.”

I didn’t know what West meant by ‘his owner’, but I didn’t have time to ask. He hauled the man up out of the chair and took him over to the lift and stepped in, hitting a button. The last thing I saw before the doors closed was the glint of satisfaction in West’s amber eyes, like messing this guy up had soothed something deep within his soul.

No doubt, West is a sick, twisted deviant who will debase just about anyone to keep on an even keel, but it’s not like I’m any better.

“Wait, did West say excuse me?” I asked, staring at the other two.

West never said his pleases and thank yous... like ever.

“He did,” Drake said with a frown. “What did you do to him, Pres?”

“Me?” Prescott pointed at himself.

“Yes, you. Why is he being polite to us?”

“I did nothing other than talk to Scarlett. Maybe I got a little too close.”

He shrugged as if it didn’t make a difference either way. Drake looked at me, his eyebrow quirking upwards.

“Something else must have happened.”

When it came to West, all bets were off.

“Do you think he spoke to her?” I asked.

Drake nodded slowly. West had been pretty insistent he wasn’t going near Scarlett until the two weeks were up. What had prompted him to go back on his word?

I guess we were going to have to wait until he returned to get the answer out of him. I sure as shit hoped he hadn’t done anything fucking stupid. If he ruined this for us, I wasn’t going to hold back. He would get a taste of my fist, repeatedly.

FIFTEEN

PRESCOTT

I'd known setting off West was never a good idea. It hadn't stopped me. The guy needed to let it the fuck out. Besides, I'd quite like to watch what happened when he did get his hands on Scarlett. The way he'd use and fucking abuse her in the best way possible.

Stop thinking about it or you'll pop a fucking boner like Drake has, the sick fuck.

Maybe I enjoyed being the voyeur from time to time. I also liked to hunt, chase, and catch my prey. And I liked it when they screamed for mercy. It was the best and sweetest fucking sound in the world. How I fucking adored it. Every part of it. I needed it. Craved it. Fucking wanted it like nothing else.

She'll scream. She'll scream so fucking loud for the entire world to hear. But she'll love it too. Love it just like I will.

"Close your fucking mouth, Pres, you look like you're about to drool all over the carpet," Francis' voice rang in my ear. "Dread to think what's running through your mind."

I shrugged and sipped my beer.

"Oh, just imagining the way she'll scream, cry and beg for mercy that will never come."

"Gutter minds, the lot of you."

I slapped his shoulder.

"Don't act all high and mighty, Francis. You're one sick fuck yourself. You almost broke Chelsea's arm the last time she was here."

Francis glared at me while Drake snorted.

"She slapped you so hard, she left a handprint. Shame she had to go overdose on whatever shit West gave her to help with the pain. She was quite something,"

he mused a moment later, his indigo eyes glittering with amusement.

“You two can fuck off with your useless reminders,” Francis barked, before getting up and pacing away. “She’s still breathing, unlike some of the others.”

Drake and I exchanged a look. Chelsea was the only one Francis cared about out of all the girls we hired to please us. The girl was twisted as they came. She didn’t care about us sharing her, but she and Francis had been close. She told us all to take a hike after the last time when she almost died. We let her go. She had signed an NDA. She knew we would come for her if she divulged any of our secrets. We did unspeakable things to those who crossed us. And we all liked it when we punished our enemies together as a group.

“Have you even stuck your dick in a woman since then? Is that why you’ve been such a grumpy bastard?” I asked, knowing Francis would probably deck me for the question but not caring in the slightest.

When we didn’t let our inner beasts come out to play, we all got a little antsy and irritable. Well, except for West. He never held back. He was a fucked up psycho, but he kept his shit together the best he could with all the self-medicating he did.

“Not that it’s any of your fucking business, but yes, I have. I’m not fucking Mr Celibate like this guy.” Francis waved a hand at Drake. “If anyone needs to get laid, it’s Drake.”

“I’ve had women,” Drake muttered, giving Francis a disparaging look.

I nudged his shoulder.

“Oh yeah? When?”

“The night before Scarlett had her interview.”

I hadn’t expected him to give an answer. Drake kept quiet about his lady friends. We’d all shared Chelsea and other women. Drake couldn’t hide his twisted kinks from us.

“So, let me guess, when you saw her again it was like no other woman would do?”

Drake didn’t respond immediately. His eyes darkened, and his fingers tightened around his beer bottle. A sure sign my question had irritated him. He’d never been the type to get emotional or let much rattle him. But she had. She’d fucking well rattled us all.

“As if you, West and even Francis didn’t have the same reaction.”

“Difference is I’m not hiding it. I want her to be our little lamb. One we’ll sacrifice and use every way possible. I want her to understand our pain.”

We all fell silent then. Loss does funny things to people. It brought the four of us closer together. As if we hadn’t been close enough before. It twisted our already fucked up minds. Lured us into the darkness. We knew what type of men we’d become. And we weren’t sorry for it. Not even Francis, with all his morality. Some fucking morality. He’d hurt, maimed, tortured, and killed alongside us. He liked it. We all did.

The lift doors sliding open broke the silent but tense atmosphere. West strolled out without a fucking care in the world, looking mighty pleased with himself.

“What’s with the miserable as fuck faces in here?” he commented as he walked over to the plastic sheeting and started tidying up the mess.

Francis stopped pacing and glared at West.

“You care to explain what the fuck this was all about?” He waved at the shit West was cleaning up. “You don’t usually do favours for Gary.”

He was West’s drug dealer. He knew a lot of people and was quite the fountain of knowledge. Probably why West kept him around. You didn’t kill the useful fucks even if they were cunts.

“Oh well, it was for one of Zayn Villetti’s clients, but Gary fobbed it off on me for obvious reasons.”

“Zayn Villetti?”

“That’s the guy,” I said, waving a hand. “The big player who deals in fantasies and desire, right?”

Francis raised his eyebrow.

“You’re telling me one of the sons of the Italian mafia is some kingpin pimp?”

West snorted.

“Yeah, Frankie, if you want to put it that way, but it’s more than being a pimp. He’s made his fortune catering to the rich and depraved. The ones who want something more than your regular BDSM shit. Trust me, no one else delivers what he does.”

Francis glared. His knuckles were going white with the way he clenched the beer bottle in his hand.

“Speaking from experience, are we?”

“Nope. I wouldn’t fucking touch that guy and his business with a bargepole. Like I said, a favour to Gary, nothing more. I ain’t dealing with the fucking mafia if I can help it. Not when there’s a turf war going on now Russo is out of the picture.”

None of us were unhappy about that cunt being taken out. We didn’t get involved in the petty squabbles of the criminal underworld or the crime families of London, but we knew the big players. It was safer that way. No one wanted to get inadvertently involved in a shit situation with them.

“Did you speak to her today?” Drake asked, cutting through the discussion about Villetti.

West paused as he was folding up the plastic sheeting. His expression turned sour, meaning yes, he had spoken to her.

“What’s it to you?” he grunted.

“Did you fuck with her, West?” Drake’s voice was cold.

It took a minute for West to respond while he finished dealing with the plastic sheeting. He stuffed it in a bag and placed it underneath the sink in the kitchen. It would be something he’d dispose of later to destroy the evidence. When he straightened, he washed his hands in the sink. Then he leant against the counter and smiled at Drake in this maniacal way he’d perfected over the years.

“Perhaps I did, but don’t worry, I doubt she’s going to run. She didn’t want to heed my warning. I reckon we’d have to do a lot more to scare her away. A whole lot fucking more.”

“You think she’s just as fucked in the head as we all are?” I asked, already knowing the answer.

“We’ll have to find out now, won’t we?” West pulled out a baggy from his pocket and waved it at us. “You all look like you could do with a hit. Take the fucking edge off for a while, you know, before we all do something we shouldn’t.” He extracted four joints from the baggy and set them on the kitchen island, along with his lighter. “It’s Gary’s best shit. What do you say?”

Francis was the first to walk over and pick one up. He shoved it in his mouth and lit up, taking a long drag. He let out a sigh with the smoke. Drake and I rose at the same time, wandering over to the kitchen island and setting our bottles

down. One by one, me, Drake, and West lit up, the sweet smell of weed permeating the air.

“I have an idea about how to celebrate when our two weeks are up,” Francis said, leaning his elbows on the counter and playing with his beer bottle label.

“Oh yeah, you finally going to drop your bullshit morality act then?” I asked.

Francis didn’t even spare me a look.

“I think we should show her exactly what all of us are made of... at the same time.”

West threw back his head and laughed. Drake smirked, and I licked my lip.

“Oh yeah, you want to tag-team her, Frankie?” West asked through his laughter.

He shrugged, ripping the label from the bottle. For once, he wasn’t giving West shit about calling him, Frankie. Sometimes those two were civil, sometimes not. Tonight it appeared to be the former.

Thank fuck.

“It’s what we want, isn’t it? No fucking point denying it.”

There was never any point denying what we wanted. We’d never let anything stop us before. Nothing would stop us now.

“I’m in,” I said. “I’m always fucking in.”

“You already know I’ll be there,” West said once he’d settled down and taken another drag.

We all looked at Drake. It was all of us or nothing. That was the deal. It’s how we fucking worked. We all had to be in when we made a decision.

“As if I was ever going to say no,” he murmured before swigging from his beer. “But that being said, I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

The three of us stared at Drake.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

Drake putting the brakes on our plans was something we had to talk about.

“I’m not saying never, just not yet. We need more time to observe her. It’s been a couple of days. We need to make sure she doesn’t run back to where she came from.”

“You going soft on us?” West asked, but his eyes betrayed his own concern about what Drake had said.

“Fuck no. I’m merely saying we need more time, then we take her and... tag-

team her as Francis suggested.”

“Fine,” I said, feeling the drugs hit my system. “More time it is. Maybe we can see if she’ll be... willing or not.”

“Doubt any woman would be willing if they knew what this fuck really wanted to do to her,” Francis muttered, indicating West with his head.

West reached out and clipped Francis around the ear. I spoke too soon. Francis and West weren’t being civil at all.

“You cannot fucking talk,” West grunted.

“Would you two chill the fuck out for one night?” Drake said, giving them both a dark look.

West took another drag of his joint.

“Fine, why don’t you call Rina G? We could all use a distraction if we’re not going to get what we want because you want to pump the fucking brakes.”

Drake pulled out his phone.

“You sure?”

West gave him a sharp nod. I had not anticipated this, but I wasn’t complaining. We could all use an outlet right now.

“Okay, is everyone wanting a turn?”

“Why the fuck not,” Francis said. “In for a penny, in for a fucking pound.”

Then he stalked off with his joint hanging from his lips to the sofa, throwing himself down on it.

“You know I’m never going to say no,” I said with a shrug.

“Way to sound fucking excited,” West said.

“Fuck off. I said yes, didn’t I?”

Drake rolled his eyes and put his phone to his ear. No doubt Rina Gregory would be pleased with the handsome sum we’d provide, so who gave a shit? It might keep us from doing something stupid as fuck. Then again, it was us. Nothing kept us in check except the need to keep up appearances. And maybe now more than ever, we needed to remember that.

SIXTEEN

DRAKE

SEVEN YEARS AGO

His scream echoed around the room, ringing in my ears like a fucking siren.

“Please, please, no more.”

Standing with my hands behind my back, I eyed Den with no small amount of disgust. The man was bound to the table he lay on. Blood dripped down the sides of it. He wouldn't survive this ordeal, but I didn't exactly care about the waste of life in front of me. He didn't matter in the grand scheme of things. No one did except the four of us and what we were searching for.

West stood beside him, his amber eyes full of violence. Something he revelled in. In some ways, all of us did. He trailed the knife he held up Den's chest. The one he'd used to bleed the man. West liked to get his hands dirty. Shit like this got him going. None of us gave him a hard time for it. We were all sick in our own ways.

“It's really very simple,” I murmured, my voice soft and unassuming. “Tell us where she is.”

We'd searched high and fucking low for almost three years. The four of us were done waiting. It had gone on long enough. She was out there somewhere and we were going to get her back no matter what it took.

Francis leant against the wall, a joint dangling from his fingers, watching the scene without a trace of emotion on his face. He'd found this fuck after months of chasing down dead ends. Getting this lead meant everything to us. It was the only thing we had left to cling onto. We needed this. It was our fucking chance

to make things right.

Only Den didn't want to talk. No, he wanted to be a fucking martyr for whoever had a hold of our missing piece.

"I can't tell you."

Den needed to get with the program. We would be keeping him alive until he told us the truth. If he wanted us to end it, he needed to give us what we came for.

Prescott stepped forward, twirling around a hammer in his hand. His blue eyes betrayed his ire. He was about as done with this shit as I was.

"No? Have we not given you enough incentive?" he taunted.

Before Den could say another word, Prescott brought the hammer down on his fingers in one fell swoop. The noise of bones shattering made me smile. A scream followed seconds later. And he soon dissolved into sobbing.

"Please."

"Begging doesn't work on us, or have you not got that into your thick skull yet?"

We weren't always like this. The loss of something precious twisted us into men who were unrecognisable from the boys we'd been. Ones with no morals or decency left inside. She'd been our humanity. And with her gone, we had no reason left not to give into our baser needs. Our sick, fucked up desires. We did as we pleased. We cared little about the consequences. All we cared about was getting back our Little Nyx.

Francis stepped forward when Den kept his mouth firmly closed, except for his whimpering. He tilted his head to the side, observing the bloodied man on the table without a hint of remorse for what we'd done to the guy. Well, mostly for what West had done, considering he was the reason for the deep cuts across Den's chest.

"We'll put you out of your misery if you tell us the truth," Francis said, his voice hard.

"Just do it now, end it," Den cried out. "I'm done."

A slow smile spread across Francis' features. His silver eyes glinted with something akin to excitement.

"Oh, Denny, we want to. Trust me, we'll take great pleasure in ending your sad, pathetic life."

West set the knife down next to Den's torso before picking up a different one. A butcher's knife. He showed it to Den, whose eyes widened.

"Fingers or toes? I wonder which will hurt more... though I suppose it doesn't matter since you're going to lose them all one way or another if you don't talk."

Den's only response was to cry. He must think we were complete psychopathic monsters. Pity he didn't understand. He didn't know how many times we'd gone through this same process only to reach a dead end. We'd do this a thousand times over if it meant we got Little Nyx back.

A man who has lost it all is deadly.

Four men who have lost everything is a recipe for carnage and complete annihilation.

"What's it to be, Den? A quick death or a long, slow, drawn out one?" I asked, wanting this to be over and fucking done with.

Silence descended over the five of us for a long minute. I could feel West growing impatient but he would have to wait.

"I'll tell you," Den whispered. "I'll tell you everything... but you're not going to like it."

The four of us stiffened at his words. We knew she was alive. She had to be. We wouldn't entertain any other option.

"And why is that?"

Den closed his eyes as if what he'd say next would change everything for us, and he didn't want to see the result.

"She doesn't remember anything from the first sixteen years of her life."

Confirmation she was alive filled me with a sense of relief. But Den's other words? Those filled me with fucking dread.

"What do you mean?"

"The accident... it left her with amnesia."

The four of us looked at each other. We couldn't afford to deal with that revelation right then. We needed to know the rest. All of it. Who had her. Why they had her. And what the fuck we were going to do next.

"Who took her?"

Den opened his eyes, staring at us with abject misery on his face. And when he uttered the words none of us wanted to hear, West brought the butcher's

knife down. It dug into the wood, leaving a huge indent. He stalked away the next moment. His fist hit the wall, and a harsh, guttural moan of agony fell from his lips.

Den continued talking, but I was only half listening. My attention was on West and the way his body trembled with anger as he flattened his palms on the wall and bowed his head. There was no mistaking a man in immeasurable pain.

“Is that everything?” Francis asked.

I turned my attention back to the bloody mess in front of me.

“Yes,” Den replied.

Knowing West wasn’t in a fit state to do a thing, I rounded the table, picking up the knife left there on my way. My hand wrapped around Den’s face, tipping it backwards to expose his neck. He stared at me as if resigned to what would happen next.

“Death comes for all of us,” I murmured as I sliced across his neck, digging the knife in deep enough to make it quick.

Blood spilt from the wound. I let go of his face, placing the knife down on the table. Den gurgled. I watched the life draining from his eyes, feeling nothing at all. He mattered not to me and the others.

“What do we do now?” Prescott asked.

I raised my head and met his eyes. They were full of conflicting emotions. In all honesty, I had no idea how to feel about the information Den had provided us with.

“We can’t go after them head-on. You know that as well as I do.”

Francis dug something out of his pocket and walked over to West. He placed a hand on his shoulder, making West tense.

“I have something to take the edge off.”

West let go of the wall, his arms dropping as he turned to Francis, who put his hand out. Sitting in it was a single pill. West grabbed it and stuffed it in his mouth, swallowing it dry. Sometimes those two could be at each other’s throats, but they always had each other’s backs. We all did.

“We do what we always do,” I said, turning back to Prescott. “We find a way.”

He nodded as the other two joined us with grim expressions on their faces. We had to clean up this mess. Then we needed to evaluate what our next steps

were.

One thing was for sure... we would have to play the long game if we had a chance in fucking hell of getting our girl back.

I swear, Little Nyx, I fucking swear we'll come for you. And we'll remind you exactly who you are if it's the last fucking thing we do on this godforsaken piece of shit we call Earth.

SEVENTEEN

SCARLETT

The rest of the week and the one after passed without incident, leaving me wondering if I'd imagined them taking a liking to me. Sure, Prescott continued to chat to me, but there was none of the flirtatious tone he'd used before. I hadn't seen hide nor hair of Francis and West. And Drake had been cordial but quiet with me.

Mason had asked a million and one questions about them. I had little to relay to him. He was only getting on my case as my father likely was getting on his. I hadn't spoken to my parents since I'd left their estate. In many ways, I had no interest in doing so. They had kept me chained to a life I didn't want any part of. Where I had no freedom. Now I could roam where I wanted, talking with them would only land me with the uncomfortable reminder of what they expected from me. How they'd dragged me into their revenge plot.

Shaking myself, I gripped the mug I was holding tighter. My palms had become a little sweaty and I didn't want it to slip. I took a breath and knocked on the door frame as the door to his office was wide open. Prescott looked up, those blue eyes narrowing for a moment. His expression cleared when he saw it was me.

"Scarlett."

I'd thought long and hard about who I should go after first, especially now Annika had left. It was my first day without her. I could finally enact my plan to make them want me.

Prescott was the most amenable to me in so much he wasn't closed off like the others. I could use it to my advantage. Knowing I would have to be careful kept me from doing anything drastic, but I could talk to him at the very least.

I walked in, approached his desk, and set the mug down on a coaster. I'd just taken Drake his morning coffee. He hadn't asked me for anything else. I figured the best way to have an excuse to stop and chat with Prescott was to make him a hot drink.

Prescott's eyes flicked down to the mug.

"Is this for me?"

"Yeah... I thought maybe... I mean, I made one for Drake and..."

He picked it up and took a sip, watching me over the rim. There was a hint of amusement in those blue depths. Why was I acting so weird? I needed to have more conviction. Maybe I should be the awkward girl who he had to rescue. Maybe it would make him let his guard down.

"Thank you, I appreciate it," he told me as he placed the mug back down. "I see someone has told you how I like my tea."

"Mr Beaufort did."

He gave me a nod. I fidgeted. My brain had taken a hike and all my thoughts were scrambled.

Ask him something, stupid!

"Did you have a good weekend?"

I licked my lip. Prescott's eyes followed its path, darkening at the sight of it.

"I did," he replied, his voice gruffer than before, while his eyes remained fixed on my lip. "How about you?"

"Oh well, it was okay. Didn't do much. Still getting used to all the noise here, it's much quieter in the country."

He leant back in his chair.

"Mmm, I imagine so. Where did you live before?"

"Kent."

Those blue eyes of his roamed down my body, perusing every inch.

"You don't seem like you'd be at home amongst trees, fields and farm animals."

I stared down at myself. My black skirt was form-fitting, my red blouse had no sleeves and my heels were probably too tall to be work appropriate.

"No? Can't imagine me in wellies and tweed?"

He snorted.

"Is that what you used to wear?"

I shrugged and ran my fingers along the glass top of his desk.

“Maybe... if I showed you a photo, you wouldn't recognise me.”

“Are you offering?”

I licked my lip again. His fingers tapped on the glass as if impatient for my answer. Pulling out my phone from a pocket in my skirt, I circled his desk and stopped next to his chair. He turned to look up at me while I found an appropriate photo. My hand landed on the back of his chair as I leant down. My other contained my phone. I showed him the photo, allowing him to see me when I'd been a little younger.

For a moment, his eyes were on my face, now inches away from his. I recognised the emotion displayed across his features. Curiosity at why I was being so friendly.

“This is Chocolate.”

Prescott looked at my phone. I stood with a dark brown horse, dressed in jodhpurs and riding boots. While I could ride, I never competed or anything. I wasn't allowed. Going horse riding was the only time I was ever allowed to roam freely on the estate.

“You have a horse.”

“Had.”

“Is Chocolate no longer with us?”

I sighed, drawing my phone back to me, but I didn't straighten.

“No. He passed away a year ago.”

“I'm sorry.”

He looked at me with a sort of sympathy in his eyes, but somehow, I didn't think it was genuine. It's as if he knew he had to show it, but he didn't feel it. It should unnerve me. Everything about him should but, instead, I wanted to know more.

“It's okay... so, was I right? Do you recognise me?”

I was a couple of years older than the photo.

“I can tell it's you, but you're different now. You look innocent and free in that.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“Oh, am I not innocent and free now?”

He reached out, curling a lock of my hair around his finger.

“No, I don’t think you are.” Those long fingers tightened in my hair, pulling me closer. “Tell me I’m wrong.”

“Depends on what you mean by innocent.”

I had no idea where this conversation was going or what he was doing. A part of me was drawn to him, and not because I had to get close to him for my parents.

It wasn’t the first time he’d touched my hair. On my second day here, he got awfully close to me. And I liked it more than I should.

“Innocent can mean many things, but I think we’re referring to something of a... sexual nature, am I wrong?”

The seductive note of his voice made me tremble. My fingers curled tighter around my phone.

“Then I hate to break it to you,” I murmured. “But you are wrong.”

For a long moment, Prescott didn’t react. Then a slow smile spread across his face.

“They tell me it’s the innocent ones you have to look out for. They offer themselves up like little sacrificial lambs before the slaughter.”

I shivered at his words, dripping with innuendo. While I might have no experience, I had read a lot... a heck of a lot. It had been my form of escapism. One my parents hadn’t tried to curb. Then again, I’m not sure they realised what I was reading and how I’d become fascinated with the dark and morbid.

“Is that what you’re interested in? Lambs to hunt?”

I’m not sure if he was surprised by my direct question or not. His expression hadn’t changed.

“Perhaps.”

For the first time in my life, another person’s mere presence had the space between my thighs tingling. Not to mention the sensuous notes of his voice slowly melting me into a puddle of desire.

His fingers slid deeper into my hair, dusting across my scalp. My mouth went dry, my eyes falling on his lips.

Where is your head at? You can’t let him seduce you like this. He’d be in control and you’d be at his mercy.

Maybe I wanted to be at his mercy. Perhaps I was desperate for it. The darkest parts of me were unlocking as if the key had finally been shoved into the

lock. As if the freedom from my oppressive life on my parent's estate had allowed me to spread my wings.

"Are you a lamb, sweetness?" he whispered.

I had to remember while I needed to get them on my side, I had to stop myself from falling under their spell. Right now, I was too busy thinking about being taken and ravaged by the man in front of me. I shouldn't want that. It had nothing to do with revenge. It was a selfish desire I only just realised I had.

"Maybe."

The wicked smile he gave me had my blood pounding.

"Mmm, you are quite something, aren't you."

I didn't know what he meant by that, but I didn't ask, merely waited for his next move.

A low growling sound from behind us had me pulling away, forcing his fingers to drag through my hair. Prescott kept his eyes on me for a long moment before he dropped his hand and turned his gaze to the newcomer.

"Yes?" he asked, a smirk forming on his lips.

I turned around and found West standing in the doorway. Those amber eyes looked downright deadly. His expression made me swallow. The fury emanating from him had my heart firing on all cylinders. I could hear its drum beating in my ears. He could have stalked into the room, shoved me up against Prescott's desk, told me to spread my legs and I wouldn't have objected. In fact, I would have done it willingly.

What the... you barely know this man! And he put his hand on your damn throat the first time you met without saying a word.

Maybe my conversation with Prescott had stripped me of my inhibitions. I couldn't censor my thoughts. They were running amok and there was nothing I could do about it.

West didn't say a word. I couldn't look away nor think of anything suitable to say myself.

"Did you want something, West?" Prescott asked.

West's jaw ticked, then he raised his finger and pointed at me.

"You, come here."

Whatever possessed me to obey, I had no idea. It was only when I was standing a foot away from him, my phone still clutched in my palm, I realised

I'd walked across the room on command.

His gaze roamed over the length of me.

"Don't indulge Pres, he uses any excuse to flirt with women," he said in a hushed voice full of irritation.

"He wasn't flirting with me." My voice came out squeaky and if I'm honest, a little indignant. Prescott and I had been more than flirting. "It's my fault, I started a conversation with him."

I looked down at the floor. Why on earth was I defending myself to him? Drake was my boss, not West. My chin was forced up by his hand gripping my jaw.

"Go back to work, Miss Carver, or I may have to tell Drake... though you'd likely prefer his version of discipline to mine."

I swallowed. My skin burnt under his touch and the way he stared at me with intense hatred. Was it hatred though? Or was it something else? Something much darker and more... nefarious.

"Yes, Mr Greer."

He let out a harsh breath. Then he dropped his hand, gripped my arm and shoved me out of the door. The next thing I knew, it slammed shut behind me, making me flinch.

I had no idea what had just happened. My body shook. The man had literally no qualms about manhandling me.

There was no point standing here trying to work out what was going through West's head or even Prescott after my conversation with him. On shaky legs, I made my way back to the office and sunk down into the chair at my desk. I bent my head back and stared at the ceiling taking several deep breaths.

I'd discovered two things. Firstly, Prescott was definitely my easiest target, but I couldn't let my guard down with him. And secondly, West was clearly unhinged and had a problem with me. What it was I had no idea, but I would have to tread carefully with him or something might happen to me. Something I might not like. The thought of it made me shiver and Prescott's words about me being a little sacrificial lamb came back. Perhaps if I played at being their little lamb, they wouldn't see the wolf hiding behind it. I could do that. Be an innocent girl who didn't know any better.

Lowering my head, I smiled. They had no idea who they'd let into their

company. And I would keep it that way until I was ready to strike at the hearts of the Four Horsemen.

EIGHTEEN

PRESCOTT

The fire in West's eyes when he turned after kicking Scarlett out of my office and slamming the door shut had me biting my lip. It wasn't my intention to provoke him at all. In fact, I'd been so intent on Scarlett, I hadn't noticed him until he'd growled.

"Before you go off on one, I didn't start anything with her." I waved my hand at him. "She came in here and spoke to me."

West stalked towards the windows, tension radiating off him in waves. He folded his hands behind his back in a rather Drake-like manner and stared out at the city skyline.

"Two weeks are up." His voice had lost the note of irritation he'd used when he'd spoken to Scarlett.

"And?"

Annika's last day had been on Friday. Now we had nothing left holding us back other than Drake wanting to wait before we did anything to Scarlett. Well, anything too drastic. We were meant to be messing with her head.

"And... did you see how sweetly she obeyed?"

It had surprised me how willingly she'd gone over to West as if she didn't fear what he might do to her. As far as I knew, they hadn't seen each other since her second day here. West had been calmer for the past couple of weeks. And what I meant by calmer was, he'd been doing a fuck load of weed while keeping to himself. I swear it made Francis suspicious as fuck. He kept watching West like he was waiting for the guy to explode on us.

"She did."

He turned his head towards me, a deadly glint in his eyes.

“Pity her fake little submissive act doesn’t fool me. That woman is fucking with us.”

I rubbed my chin.

“I did wonder why she was being so forward with me.”

He scoffed.

“Did you forget why she’s here?”

In the moment, I had. Scarlett had successfully distracted me with her words and her closeness. The way she’d pretty much insinuated she would be interested in being a sacrificial lamb had me thinking of all the deviant things I wanted to do to her.

“No.”

West narrowed his eyes.

“I don’t believe you.”

“Like you can talk. You growled at her. What are you, a fucking animal?”

He flashed his teeth at me.

“We’re all animals, Pres. Beasts who crave violence and kinky fuckery. You’ve spent too much time in those suits acting like a pretentious prick to appease the masses. I think all that praise they shower on you has gone to your head. Maybe you need to screw it the fuck back on before she winds you around her finger.”

I leant back in my chair and folded my arms over my chest. While he might have had a point about what just happened, I wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of knowing how right he was. The psychotic fucker wouldn’t make any bones about gloating if I told him he was correct about Scarlett.

“At least I’m not out here smoking weed all day and breaking guy’s hands with a hammer after one encounter with her.”

West’s amber eyes darkened with annoyance.

“Fuck you.”

“I’d rather be fucking her than myself, would be far more enjoyable.”

I swear to god he was going to launch himself over the desk and strangle me.

“You not got enough pussy to be getting in right now? I’m sure Tonya would gladly take you up on the offer.”

I made a face. I was well aware of her intentions towards me but she was one woman I wouldn’t touch. You would have to give me a pretty good incentive. The woman reeked of desperation and was a little snake. The only reason we

kept her around was because she knew too much. Drake couldn't get rid of her because of who she was. I would do it in a fucking heartbeat, but I didn't want to cause Drake trouble with his family.

"Fuck off, West. I would rather break my own hand than touch her."

"A little extreme."

"Oh no, should I get you to break it for me?"

"I'd do it in a heartbeat, you just need to ask."

I stuck a finger up at him.

"No thanks, rather not end up permanently mutilated. We both know you have no fucking restraint."

West's maniacal smile made me grimace.

"I had some with her, didn't I?" He waved at the door.

"Only because you have a soft spot for her."

His smile faded.

"I do not have a fucking soft spot for anyone. You just wait until we take her, I'll show you how little restraint I have with that woman."

"That woman? You can't even say her name, can you? Ha, you are so predictable. Trying to deny how you really feel about her when we all know the truth."

I knew I shouldn't have provoked him. There was a part of me that loved to watch West explode because it amused the shit out of me, but it was also hazardous.

He was across the room in a flash and hauled me up off my chair by my tie. The rage in his eyes betrayed how much Scarlett's mere presence had affected him. He slammed me up against the wall behind my desk and glared.

"You are playing with fucking fire, Pres. I swear to god you want me to punch your damn lights out."

"I see I touched a nerve."

His fist wrapped around my tie, pulling it tight against my neck. West would beat the shit out of me, of that, I had no doubt. It wasn't the first time any of us had come to blows with him. He'd even decked Drake once. I secretly thought Drake had deserved it after he'd gone behind West's back and got him banned from his favourite underground fighting ring. Even Francis hadn't wanted to interfere with West's outlet. He craved violence and it gave him a good excuse

to beat the shit out of people. It was only when he'd almost killed a guy Drake had put a stop to it. We didn't need to bring down that kind of heat on us.

"Jesus, Pres, what did you do to provoke him this time?"

Both West and I turned our heads finding Francis standing in the doorway. Neither of us had heard the door open.

"Me? I'm innocent."

Francis scoffed and rolled his eyes.

"Innocent is not a word I would *ever* use to describe you. In fact, it shouldn't even be in your vocabulary given how un-innocent you are."

West stepped back, letting go of me. I huffed and smoothed down my clothes.

"What do you want, Frankie?" West grunted, pacing away with his hands dug in his pockets.

"Nothing that concerns you."

West cocked a brow.

"No? Well, I'll leave you two little bitch boys to it then."

He stalked out of the room, deliberately barging past Francis, who stared at his retreating back. Then he turned and came into the room.

"You really did a number on him."

I shrugged and took a seat behind my desk again.

"Oh, that? Reckon it had more to do with Scarlett being in here than me... though I will admit I didn't help matters."

Francis gave me a look.

"What was she doing in your office?"

"Bringing me a cup of tea."

I snagged said mug and brought it to my lips. She'd used the right one. It was dark green with a white horse which looked as if it was decaying and the words *The weak yield to Pestilence* were below it. I'd bought us these mugs as a joke. Even West used his despite his misgivings about the name we'd been branded with.

"Is that all?"

I smiled.

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"No wonder you pissed West off, you're in one of *those* moods."

He made air quotes with his fingers. I popped the mug back down and leant

my chin on my fist, fluttering my eyelashes at him.

“And what kind of mood is that, Francis?”

He pressed his mouth into a thin line. Maybe I was in a mood. Knowing I shouldn't have allowed Scarlett to get under my skin had me deflecting. None of them needed to know about the way she'd affected me today. They'd only give me shit over it. I had to do better. Didn't matter how much I wanted her. How desperate I was for her to remember me. I couldn't let my guard down.

“You want to cause mischief and I'm not having it. You can fucking rein it in because we need to talk business, unless you forgot we're supposed to be working right now.”

I refrained from rolling my eyes and put my hand out, waving at the chairs in front of my desk. Francis probably wanted to talk to me about money and it was always fucking boring. He should just fund what I asked him to without arguing with me over it. I'd never steered us wrong.

I put Scarlett to the back of my mind. What I'd discovered about her today could wait. Business came first, I supposed, and the knowledge she'd not been with a man before wasn't going to give me pause over what we planned to do with her. But... I would have to inform the rest of them sooner rather than later. No point keeping secrets over it. No point at all.

NINETEEN

SCARLETT

“Have you had enough yet, little lamb?” came the sinister and disjointed voice from behind me.

My legs urged me on faster, dashing through a never-ending dark tunnel. I don’t know how long I’d been going, only that everything burnt.

Keep running.

My chest heaved with the exertion. I pressed on, my arms flailing at my sides as my feet pounded the dirt floor.

“I’m going to catch you, little lamb. And when I do, you’ll feel it for days.”

I couldn’t let him catch me. My choked cry came out hoarse and gravelly. The voice chuckled as its brokenness echoed around the tunnel.

“Are you crying, little lamb? Will you beg? You’re running now, but we know you want it. You want the pain.”

“No,” I moaned, urging myself on.

I was exhausted. My body ached everywhere. It hurt in the worst way but I had to keep going. If I didn’t, they’d destroy me.

“You think you don’t want it now, but you will, little lamb. You’ll remember.”

Remember what?

“You’re ours, Scarlett. Ours.”

I shot up in bed, sweat pouring from my body as my heart pounded in my ears. That wasn’t the only sound. My mouth erupted in these tiny whimpers. I’d learnt a long time ago not to scream when I had a nightmare. I didn’t want anyone getting angry with me for waking up the household, especially since they happened all the time. Like my subconscious trying to force my past memories lost to me back into my head but failing to join the dots together properly. They

were all jumbled up and made no sense.

This wasn't like those nightmares. It felt different. And I was terrified for a reason that had me staring down my hands trembling as I brought them up towards my face.

Why am I having this reaction?

Yes, I was a sweaty mess, my breathing erratic and my pulse skittering, but all that paled in comparison to the way my nipples had hardened. My hand dived under the covers to confirm my theory. I let out a choked gasp when my fingers were met with my wetness. The crazy, fucked up nightmare I thought I'd been in turned out to be a wet dream.

I flung the covers from my body, stumbling out of bed on shaking legs as I fought to regain some semblance of control. Making my way into the bathroom, I flipped on the shower and peeled off my damp pyjamas. They'd need washing. I had at least seven or eight pairs for that reason. Mason had stopped saying anything about it. He knew it wasn't something anyone could fix. I was broken. At least, I felt that way considering I had sixteen years missing from my memory and no way of knowing if what anyone had told me about what happened was true or not. I had taken it on faith, but there were times I questioned the things my parents had told me. Only ever in my head, because questioning them out loud led nowhere good.

Who knew what time it was. I hadn't checked, but I needed to wash away the clamminess from my skin. I stepped into the shower, tipping my head up to the spray. The hot water hammered down, soothing me a fraction.

I braced my hands against the dark grey tiled wall and bowed my head, closing my eyes. My hair stuck to my skin, but I paid it no mind. The only thought I had was being scared had excited me on some level.

Was I always like this? An adrenaline junkie? Needing fear to feel alive.

It didn't feel alien to me. Like my body and mind finally remembered a concrete aspect of my past before the accident. Before I was left in a coma with no memories of what happened to me.

Don't fight it, Scarlett. You'll never remember if you fight it. Let yourself feel the fear. Let yourself go.

A hand left the wall and snaked down my body. I let out a whimper when my fingers met my clit.

The voice kept calling me a little lamb. He said they'd make it hurt.

My fingers circled the small bundle of nerves on instinct. The memory of the dream flooded me. The way I'd been scared out of my mind only fuelled my need.

I could hear footsteps behind me this time. I let the fantasy take me under, not caring I knew in my mind who those footsteps belonged to. Who I wanted them to belong to. And how I shouldn't want that at all.

"I think you like being scared, Scar," he said, his voice echoing around the pitch-black room.

"What gives you that idea?" I asked.

His hands snaked around my waist, holding me against a solid body. I let out a breath. I'd known he was there, but in the dark, I'd lost a vital sense.

"You run headlong into danger instead of away from it."

I laughed. They made me brave. I was safe if I had them. They'd never let me fall or flounder.

I moaned as the memory and the voices dissipated. My fingers worked faster. I was right. I liked the fear. The excitement. The need to feel alive. It was the opposite of the girl I knew now. The one who'd spent the past ten years locked away from the world. Who didn't know who she was at all because she couldn't remember a thing.

If I embrace the past, will that change who I am now? Do I even want to be this woman?

I had no answers to either of those questions.

I was so close to the edge, wanting to free fall into the abyss.

"Little lamb," I whimpered. "Little lamb, run."

The explosive sensations washed over me. My knees threatened to buckle but my hand on the shower wall kept me upright. I let out a cry of relief. Letting it all out felt good. As if I was embracing who I was inside.

I stood for a long moment, trying to catch my breath. Then I straightened, dropping my hand from the wall and picking up my shower gel. My next step was to wash thoroughly since I had work today.

I had been at Fortuity for just over two weeks now. And after yesterday's encounter with Prescott, I shouldn't be surprised by my dream. We'd talked about lambs and hunting. No fucking wonder I'd dreamt of it. Of him chasing

me. Of them all chasing me.

Shaking myself, I stepped out of the shower and dried myself off before going into my bedroom to get dressed. When I was done drying my hair and putting makeup on, I walked out into the kitchen, finding Mason sat at the table.

“Why are you up so early?” I asked as I flipped the kettle on.

I’d checked the time when I was getting dressed. It was only six.

“The shower woke me up. I’d ask you the same question, but I already know the answer.”

“They’re never going to end.”

I got two mugs out of the cupboard and chucked tea bags in them.

“Don’t say that. They might.”

“We both know they’ll only end if I get my memories back. I’m not going to fool myself into thinking otherwise.”

As I glanced back at him, I noticed his contrite expression.

“Do you want them back?”

“Are you really asking me that?”

I want them restored more than anything.

It wasn’t Mason’s fault I was tired and snappy. I shouldn’t take it out on him, but he knew the answer to that question already.

“It’s been ten years. The doctors said it’s unlikely they’ll return.”

“They’ve said a lot of things. Some of them turned out to be bullshit.”

They thought I might not walk or talk again. I’d proved them wrong. I’d proved everyone wrong since none of them knew my inner thoughts and feelings. The ones I’d kept hidden for good reason. I could never afford to forget who Mason reported to. I wasn’t about to tell him my past had started bleeding through into my consciousness. No one could know about the tiny snippets I’d had since returning to London. The city I knew I’d grown up in even if it was alien to me now. It felt familiar at the same time. I belonged here more than I ever did on my parents’ estate in Kent.

“Scar, I didn’t mean...”

“Didn’t mean what? I want to remember. I need to. I’m missing a vital part of myself. You can’t possibly understand what that’s like. No one can.”

The kettle boiled. I picked it up and poured water into the two mugs.

No one got it. They just expected me to go on with life since it was like

starting with a clean slate. It didn't work like that for me. I didn't feel whole.

"I know. I'm sorry."

'Sorry' wasn't good enough any longer, but I didn't say that to him. I'd had too many people apologising to me over the years. Especially my parents. Pity their apologies were hollow and meaningless.

"I'm sorry we can't let you leave the estate, it's too dangerous."

"I'm sorry I have to ask you to do this."

"I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry."

I slammed my hand down on the counter.

"I'm tired. Adjusting to working every day is taking a toll on me."

It wasn't a lie but it wasn't the whole truth either.

"It's okay, I get it."

But he didn't. No one did. I carried this burden alone. All alone.

I don't want to be alone anymore. I want to know who I am. Maybe then I can find my way home.

My home sure as shit wasn't with my parents. All I had to do was this one complicated task then I could be done with all this fucked up revenge business. I didn't believe it ever really gave anyone closure, but I would do it, anyway.

That was the price of freedom.

TWENTY

WEST

I wandered into Drake's office after being summoned there by the man himself. He stood by the window, staring out at the city like it would give him the answers he sought. Prescott was lounging on a sofa, and Francis had propped himself up on Drake's desk.

"I see you finally decided to grace us with your presence," he muttered.

I shot Francis a glare. If he wanted to give me shit today, so be it. I wasn't in the mood for him. Not after yesterday and Prescott's fucked up need to press my buttons. The guy was a damn fool.

"His lordship requested my presence, so here the fuck I am. Want to make any more sarcastic comments, or are you done?" I ground out.

"Your mood hasn't improved since yesterday. Wonderful. Do I need to loosen my tie?" Prescott said with an eye roll.

I would have strangled the little shit yesterday until he passed out if Francis hadn't walked in.

"Why? So you can tie your own fucking noose for me?"

"Did the three of you wake up and choose violence this morning?" Drake asked, turning around and looking between us. "If so, why didn't I get the memo?"

"I choose violence every day."

That earned me a hard stare from Drake. I shrugged and leant against the wall by the door. He knew all too well violence and I went hand in hand.

"Is this a business meeting or personal? I've got shit to do," Francis huffed.

Something had crawled up his arse this morning. He looked about ready to start throwing fucking knives or some shit. Or maybe he'd be the one tying

nooses. Francis was dead handy with knots. Had everything to do with his obsession with tying up women. It went beyond Shibari or Japanese bondage. I swear he knew more knots than the average sailor and then some. I personally preferred holding a woman down with my bare hands, but each to their own.

“Personal,” Drake replied, eyeing Francis with curiosity as if he was also wondering why our friend was in a mood.

“Can’t it wait until this evening?”

“No.” Drake turned his attention to Prescott. “You said you had something important to talk about. Spill before this one gets too antsy.” He stuck a thumb out, directing it towards Francis.

Oh, but the glare he earned in return. I couldn’t help smiling. Even Drake wasn’t above winding Francis up, and the two of them had been friends since birth. Their mothers got pregnant at the same time. Best friends who lived next door to each other. And their sons became close too.

“Oh well, I didn’t expect you to call us all together over it,” Prescott mused with a suspiciously smug grin on his face.

“I will choose violence like West if you don’t get to the point,” Francis all but barked.

Prescott looked contrite as if sensing Francis was at the end of his patience.

“Okay, okay, Jesus. Chill the fuck out.” He waved a hand at Francis. “Scarlett told me something rather interesting yesterday.”

I watched both Drake’s and Francis’ eyes narrow.

“Told you what, exactly?” Drake asked.

“She’s not had sex before. Well, she insinuated it, anyway.”

“Are you serious?”

Prescott shrugged.

“Why wouldn’t I be? What do I have to gain by lying about that, huh? Nothing.”

I stared hard at Prescott. For a moment, I wondered how the fuck she could outright lie to him that way. Then I remembered she was lying to all of us about her real reasons for being here. Followed by the other realisation that she wouldn’t know the truth. She’d lost the part of her memory containing the four of us. And thus, lost her knowledge of the night we’d spent together when we were sixteen, not long before her accident.

Not only had I kissed Scarlett multiple times when we'd been teenagers, but I'd had sex with her too. The memory of it was far too painful for me to even think about. It only tormented me with what I'd lost. And what I'd waited ten years to find again.

"Fuck. That complicates matters."

Prescott frowned.

"Why?"

"What do you mean, why?" Francis interjected. "Isn't it fucking obvious?"

Prescott frowned.

"No. What does it matter?"

Francis straightened and glared harder at Prescott.

"Are you really going to sit there and tell me you're okay with introducing her to sex the way we all like it when she has zero experience?"

Prescott sat up and gave Francis an incredulous look.

"Oh, what, you want it to be all romantic and loving for her, do you?"

"I didn't say that."

"Then what the fuck is your problem?"

Drake took a step forward and held his hand up.

"Hey, no need to start giving each other shit. Both of your opinions are valid. We need to think about how to play this."

"You agree with him, don't you?" Prescott fired back, waving at Francis.

I watched them battle it out for a long minute. Drake was clearly trying to referee, but it wasn't working.

Scarlett thought she was a virgin, huh? Well, we'd fucking see about that shit. These three could argue all they wanted. I had no patience for it. What I did have was the desire to fuck some sense into that girl. She was mine. While she'd forgotten who I was and what we'd done, it didn't negate that fact.

I'm going to show you why you should not have told Prescott about it.

I was silent as I pushed off the wall and backed out of Drake's office. If anyone was going to have her first again, it would be me and only me. Taking care of our little problem would be a bonus. She wouldn't think she was a virgin, and the rest of them would have nothing to argue about. Wasn't like I could tell her we'd already fucked once ten years ago. We were keeping her in the dark about who we were for good reason. And I wasn't prepared to tell the boys

about what had happened between Scarlett and me, either.

I stalked down the hallway to her office, but she wasn't in there. I found her in the kitchen a few minutes later, setting out mugs on the counter. Before she had a chance to turn around and say hello, I gripped her by the arm and tugged her out of there. She let out a squeak of surprise but was likely too shocked to push me off. By the time we'd reached my office and I'd shoved her inside, locking the door behind us, she'd regained her senses.

"What are you doing?"

"I suggest you shut the fuck up and do as I say."

Her eyes bugged out. I stalked towards her, causing her to back away until she hit my desk. A scared little rabbit afraid of the man coming after her. Good. She should be fucking well afraid.

"But what are you doing?"

I got right up in her face, my body inches from hers, and wrapped my hand around her jaw, forcing her face up towards mine.

"Whatever I want. I did tell you I don't like to stick to the rules, didn't I?"

She swallowed.

"Yes, but—"

"No buts, Scarlett. I don't want to hear the words *but* or *no* from you."

I didn't think her eyes could get any wider. They were like saucers. Her pupils dilated to their fullest extent. Whether it was fear or arousal coursing through her veins, we would just have to wait and see.

"I don't understand."

My hand tightened around her jaw, my fingers making indents into her skin. She winced.

"No, you don't, and you probably never will, but I don't really give a shit. In fact, I'd go so far as to say I don't care about anything you have to say right now."

Her breath whooshed out of her chest. I smiled, leaning closer until my nose hit her cheek. I ran it up the length of her skin, making her shudder. It was time to initiate her into our little club. No doubt the only thing she knew about us was our reputation. I intended to live up to it... and then some.

"You want to know what I'm doing, do you?" I murmured, nipping at her ear.

“Yes,” she whispered, her body tensing and her breathing shallow.

“A little birdie told me you’re inexperienced. Consider what happens next a lesson.”

“What? I... he... he told you that?”

I nuzzled her hair, breathing her in.

“You should be careful about what you say to men like us, Scarlett. Did you never wonder how we came to be in the position we are? Power comes with ruthlessness.”

For a moment she said nothing as if she was processing my words. Her body shifted against the desk, but I didn’t think she was trying to escape me. She’d know better than that. At least she should.

“Are... are you... what are you going to do to me?”

If she needed to hear the words out of my mouth, then fuck it. It’s not like it would make a difference to me.

“Oh, Scarlett, I’m going to fuck you. And make no mistake, begging me to stop won’t work. I gave you a warning when you introduced yourself to me. Now you’re going to learn why you should have heeded it.”

TWENTY ONE

SCARLETT

My body shook with his words, like a trembling leaf blowing in gale-force winds. It was violent and unforgiving. I couldn't even form a sentence in my head, let alone open my mouth. When he'd warned me about himself, I'd wondered how serious he was. And now I realised this man was actually a full-on predator.

Here I was, pinned to his desk by his bulk and his hand wrapped around my jaw. I hadn't even made an attempt to push him off me or struggle in his grasp. I'd been too shocked by the entire thing to get my head on straight. Now, it was impossible to think at all.

He just told you he's going to fuck you.

A man I'd talked to twice. Who the hell did he think he was? It's not as if I hadn't thought about sex with the Horsemen. It had crossed my mind I might have to sleep with them to get close to them. It happening so soon, and with West, who intrigued and terrified me at the same time? I had no fucking words to describe my feelings. All I knew was I had no control over this situation.

"I'll take your silence as compliance."

I wanted to scream. My mouth opened, but no sound came out. He stepped closer, right up into my personal space. I choked on my own breath. For the first time in my life, a hard solid body pressed against mine and I didn't exactly hate it.

"I'm not going to hurt you," he murmured, turning my head to the side and trailing his lips down my neck. "At least, not this time."

I gripped the edge of his desk to stop my knees from buckling.

"I don't believe you," I whispered, finding my voice.

His low chuckle had my heart pumping harder in my chest.

“Good, you shouldn’t. Now, be a good girl and spread your legs.”

I didn’t want to obey him. He couldn’t possibly think he could drag me into his office and expect me to pull my skirt up for him, could he? My brain didn’t want to believe what was happening.

“No.”

It’d been my intention to do whatever it took to get close to these men, but the reality was far different from thinking about it in your head. This wasn’t on my terms. Not at all. It was on his. Maybe I should have known better than to think it would be easy. West was right. Their reputation preceded them. Mason had warned me. My parents had warned me. None of that prepared me. I was so out of my depth.

“No? Oh, Scarlett, that was the wrong thing to say.”

He moved away so fast, I barely had time to blink. West spun me around and had me face down on his desk, his hand around the back of my neck, pinning me in place.

“I don’t think you realise who you’re talking to, so let’s get a couple of things straight before you piss me off. And trust me, making me angry is the last thing you want to do. I will hurt you and I’ll fucking enjoy it.”

I shuddered, his harsh words piercing at my very being. West wasn’t playing around. I wouldn’t be leaving this room with my innocence intact.

“We don’t use the word no in this room. If I tell you to do something, you’ll do it. And you want to know why?”

I nodded. He leant over me, his body heat warming me from the inside out.

“You’re mine.”

I opened my mouth to object but was unable to utter a word. I had nothing. Only the stark realisation I’d bitten off way more than I could chew by coming here. By returning to the city and finding these men. I knew for a fact I’d grown up in London. My parents hadn’t hidden that from me, but after my accident, they’d taken me to the countryside to recover. Really, it was to keep me locked up in a comfortable prison. An excuse to keep me from the wider world. I had questioned in my head why they’d done it, but no answers were forthcoming.

Now I was in a situation I didn’t know how to navigate. They hadn’t given me the skills to deal with the opposite sex. The only person who had taught me anything was Mason, and even he’d been reluctant. I had a feeling he didn’t

want me getting too intimately involved with the Horsemen. I'd resigned myself to the knowledge there would be no other way around it. I just hadn't expected it to play out like this.

"Now, you're going to stay right here. If you move..."

He would hurt me.

"I get it," I whispered.

"Good."

He released me. I stayed on the desk, planting my palms flat on the solid surface. Unlike the Prescott and Drake's glass-topped desks, West's was a dark solid wood. In fact, from what I'd seen, his whole office was full of dark colours. I turned my head, resting my cheek on the cool wood, and stared out of the window, not that I could see much from this angle.

I flinched when I felt his hands on my skirt, hitching it up my legs. Rather than rip it off me, he was taking care not to tear the fabric. When his fingertips met my bare skin, I bit the inside of my cheek to prevent myself from making any noise, but it didn't stop me from shifting my feet. I heard his warning growl. It only made me tremble with its deep, resonating sound.

My skirt soon sat on my waist. His fingers stroked over my underwear before he peeled it down, leaving me entirely exposed to him. I stepped out of it with no fuss. West laid it on the desk right next to my face so it was all I could see.

"Well, look at you being such a good girl." The taunting note to his voice had my pulse racing.

His hands landed on my behind, which made me jolt, and he spread my cheeks. I could feel my face flaming, and not just because he was staring at me. As much as I wanted to hate this, my body responded to him. Especially when his hot breath dusted over my backside. Then he bit down on my skin, making me cry out from the sharp points of pain.

"As much as I want to tease the living shit out of you until you're begging for it," he told me, his voice gruff. "We don't have time for niceties." His thumb brushed along my slit. "Besides, I think I've discovered what turns you on."

I wanted to ask him what the fuck he meant by that, but his thumb dipped between my lips with ease, the slickness of my arousal guiding him in.

"You're scared... terrified... and yet, you want this."

My teeth dug harder into my cheek, almost drawing blood. After this

morning's wet dream, I was pretty sure fear played a factor in getting me wet. In my body preparing itself to get railed. I had a feeling West was going to show me no mercy, despite knowing I'd never been with a man before.

He released me, chuckling as he did it. I heard the distinctive sound of a belt buckle clinking, followed by a zip. His hand landed on me again, gripping my hip in an iron hold. Then I felt it... hot skin against my most intimate parts. His cock slid between my lips, making me choke out a gasp. I should fear the fact he was doing this without protection, but the surgeries I'd undergone after my accident had left scarring, rendering me infertile. Something I didn't want to think too hard on when the man behind me was about to stick his cock inside me.

I tried to relax when he pressed against my entrance. Tried to imagine what it would feel like, but nothing prepared me for the stretch and the sensation of him slowly but surely filling my pussy with his cock. A cross between a cry and a moan erupted from my lips. My hand curled into a fist, my nails digging into my palm.

"Not too loud now, Scarlett," he hissed. "Wouldn't want anyone getting the wrong idea if they walk by and hear us."

His other hand landed on my behind, gripping the cheek to gain more leverage. I had no idea what the hell to do or say, only it didn't feel as I thought it would. I didn't expect to want him to go faster. To give me it all.

"Please," I whimpered.

He leant over me but didn't increase his pace.

"Are you trying to beg?"

"Please."

His low growl made me press back against him, trying to show him what I wanted. As if getting the message, he shunted forward, impaling me completely. I bit my lip, trying not to moan or be too loud.

"Is this what you wanted, huh? You want to be fucked, Scarlett? You want to be filled with cock and railed until you're crying?"

I choked, not wanting to answer him. He pulled back and made me whimper when he slammed back inside me, all the gentleness he'd exhibited before disappearing completely. His hand left my behind and curled around the back of my neck, holding me down while he gave it to me. My hips dug into the desk

with each thrust, but I didn't care. All I could feel was his body colliding with mine. The sensation of his cock buried deep inside my pussy. It ached but in the best way.

"I knew this pretty pussy was going to feel good, you're so fucking wet," he told me, his breath dusting over my cheek. "Do you hate this? Do you want me to stop?"

I cried out with the force of his thrusts, my hands scrabbling against the desk.

"I don't think you do. You want me to fuck you harder."

And he did. The brutality he used my body with was unlike anything I'd ever experienced before. Sure, I'd read about rough sex and violent men before, but actually being taken by one was on a whole new level of fucked up.

"West," I choked out. "Please."

I didn't know if I was asking him to keep going or to stop. My nerve endings were firing in all directions. I no longer knew what was up or down.

"Now you want to use my name, do you? Say it, Scarlett, tell me to fuck you. Go on, beg for what you want."

He pressed his cheek against mine, the bulk of him covering my body, while he continued to use me for his pleasure.

"Beg. Me."

"Please... please fuck me, West," I whispered, unable to say it any louder.

He didn't respond, but his hand slid from my hip, curling underneath me and touching the spot where we joined. His fingers moved higher, finding my clit. I bucked against him, moaning far too loudly. Nothing else but his fingers on my clit and his cock pounding into my pussy registered with me. I let myself be drowned by the man on top of me. And when I came, the wild bliss rushing up my spine, eyes rolling back in my head and my body violently shaking, I cried. A tear ran down my cheek unheeded.

Catharsis. The state of purging your emotions, letting go of everything, and giving in.

"Good girl," he murmured in my ear.

He pressed his lips to my cheek and then licked the tear from my face. I shuddered, not hating it at all. He kissed my cheek once more before pulling away. Both his hands wrapped around my hips and he really fucking went to town on me. I didn't know what had hit me, only it felt good. I squirmed on the

desk, never wanting the sensations to end.

West abruptly pulled out of me, grabbed hold of my hair, and tugged me up before pressing me down on my knees. I looked up at him. His amber eyes were dark, his expression wild and unhinged.

“Open.”

I did it on instinct, my mouth falling open with his command. And I didn't look when he shoved his cock in it. My eyes were on his face, watching him, needing to see what would happen when he emptied himself inside me. I had to open my mouth wider to accommodate him. He thrust a few times before I felt his cock throb and spurt with hot, salty liquid. But his expression held me captive. The tightness of his jaw and the satisfaction and heat radiating from him. I choked on his cum, trying to swallow, but finding it impossible with his dick still jammed in my mouth. It's not like he'd shoved it down my throat or anything, but he wasn't exactly small.

When he pulled away, his cock popping out of my mouth with an audible sound, I was able to swallow. He let go of my hair and moved away. I only got a second to glimpse what he'd fucked me with before he tucked it back in his trousers and zipped himself up.

“Sort yourself out and go back to work.”

I stared at him, unable to comprehend what the hell had happened. His voice came off cold and unfeeling.

“What?”

“You heard me.”

“Is that it?”

He glanced at me, his eyes losing their wildness.

“Is what it, Scarlett?”

On shaky legs, I rose to my feet, shoving my skirt down.

“You have your way with me, then dismiss me?”

The smirk that appeared on his face pissed me off.

“Yeah, that's it. And for the record, I did not have my way with you. I fucked you. You should count yourself lucky I went easy. The shit I really like would make you scream and not in a good way.”

My fists clenched at my sides.

Calm down, don't let him get to you.

How could I not? The man had given me my first sexual experience, and it was way more than I could've ever imagined. And now he'd made me feel like I'd been... used. I should have known better than to expect anything else, given the way he'd manhandled me the first time we'd met.

"Easy on me? You call that easy on me? It hurts... down there."

The way his eyes lit up with my words had me wondering what was going through his head.

"Good. Now your pussy knows who she belongs to, and when she's ready for more, you merely have to ask. Maybe I'll oblige her, but only if the woman she's attached to is good for me."

A suitable response completely eluded me. Instead, I picked up my knickers from his desk, made sure my skirt was covering my intimate parts and stormed over to his door. I tried the handle but found it locked. A small squeal of frustration left my lips.

"Turn the lock in the handle."

I didn't turn around nor thank him. My fingers fumbled with the lock, then I ripped open the door and walked out. My feet carried me to the bathroom where I shut myself in a cubicle, kicked the lid of the toilet closed and sat on it. My eyes fixed on the grey door in front of me.

I'd allowed a man I barely knew to have sex with me. Even though my mind told me it was necessary, it still made me feel as though my world was coming apart at the seams. When I'd agreed to my parent's stupid revenge plot, I hadn't realised I would have to go to these lengths. And the worst part about it all? I hated how much I'd enjoyed it. The way he spoke to me. The way his body felt against mine. The harsh sound of his breath. All of it had turned me on.

Of all the ways I thought I would experience sex for the first time, that had definitely not been it. And now I was left wondering if I had made any progress at all with West by letting him fuck me. Because the real thoughts about how much I wanted him to do it again, regardless of the fact it was meant to be a part of making him trust me, were ones I didn't want to entertain or acknowledge. They would lead down a dark path. One I had a feeling I'd end up walking down, anyway.

TWENTY TWO

DRAKE

These two had been at it over Scarlett for far too long. When it became clear neither Prescott nor Francis wanted to back down, I'd turned away and left them to it. Sometimes it wasn't worth intervening unless they started beating on each other, which wasn't exactly uncommon amongst the four of us. It wouldn't do to have them fighting during work hours.

"Your self-righteous bullshit is exhausting, you know that, right?" Prescott said, his voice full of irritation. "You're no better than the rest of us. Save your fucking morality for the masses out there."

"I never said no. I said we had to take it into consideration," Francis retorted. "You all seem so willing to forget she was our friend, our best fucking friend. She meant something to us. Do you even care now?"

I flinched. I hadn't forgotten who she was to us. How she'd been so fucking integral to our lives. We'd searched for her when she disappeared, tearing apart half of London to find out where she'd gone. Then we'd discovered the truth. It was the most depressing day of all our lives. Well, except for the day Scarlett got into her accident. That was worse. Much fucking worse. I would count that as the worst day of all our lives.

"You think this has anything to do with not caring? Fuck you. I care. She was the best part of us, but that was ten years ago. Things are different now. You're the one who wants to forget everything and bury your head in the damn sand."

"I do not! I remember all too fucking well how we've risked everything to get her back. Everything, Pres. We let a fucking mole into our lives who has the potential to destroy us because she can't fucking remember who we are."

I turned in time to see Prescott flinch. Francis had a point. We had lured her

here. We were letting her into our lives when we knew the danger she posed. It wasn't something any of us could afford to forget. The five of us growing up together didn't change our current circumstances. But, at the same time, she was the key component missing from our lives. The final piece to our puzzle. She represented a sense of nostalgia for us. A time when our lives hadn't been violent and unforgiving.

I was about to open my mouth when my eyes were drawn to West strolling back into the room. I hadn't realised he'd left. The smirk on his face made me suspicious. Where had he disappeared off to, and what had he done?

"Are you still arguing?" he asked, leaning up against the wall by the door, his hands dug in his pockets.

Both Francis and Prescott turned their heads and glared at West. He looked outright amused by their stares.

"Where have you been?" I asked, wondering whether I wanted to know or if West had done something fucked up. Knowing him, he likely had.

"Taking care of our little problem."

A cold bead of sweat ran down the back of my neck.

"What problem?"

I swear to god if he says what I think he's going to...

"Our Scarlett problem Pres brought to our attention."

"Jesus Christ, West."

I threw my hands up and paced away.

"You did fucking what?" Francis asked.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Prescott throw back his head and bark with laughter.

"Did fucking whom would be the correct term and yes, there was fucking involved."

I turned to find Francis gripping some papers on my desk as if he was holding back from decking West.

"You fucked Scarlett?"

West shrugged. Prescott was still chuckling, but I ignored him. No doubt he was amused because he kept winding West the fuck up over Scarlett. And now West had taken matters into his own hands.

"You didn't want to take her and tag-team her unless she had some

experience. I handled it. Plus, I discovered she's a kinky little thing under that façade she puts up, but it doesn't entirely surprise me. She's always had a reckless streak."

"I don't even know what to say to that." Francis turned to me, waving his hand at West. "What the fuck do we even do with that? Do I even want to know what you did to her?"

I raised my hand to my mouth and swiped my thumb over it, holding back a smile. Should I be pissed at West? Perhaps. Then again, we wanted to mess with her, didn't we? That was the deal. And what better way to mess with Scarlett's head than to set West on her.

"You worried she didn't like it? I assure you, she did... but I'll leave exactly what I did to her up to your imagination."

Francis blinked but kept his attention on me. I had a feeling West hadn't gone overboard with her quite yet. He had, after all, been the most devoted to Scarlett. And Prescott pointed out to me the fact that West had deeper feelings for her. There was no doubt in my mind, West was in love with the girl and had been since we were kids. Out of the four of us, he took her loss the worst. The biggest reason he was so unhinged could be tied back to what happened that night.

"I'm sure she did," Prescott said, giving West a wink.

"And I'm fucking sure you'd loved to have been a fly on the wall," West replied with a raised eyebrow.

No fucking surprises there. The four of us had no qualms about fucking women with each other, but Prescott had a thing about watching. Voyeurism was only one of his kinks. Chasing was another. I couldn't deny our tastes ran on the more extreme side of sex.

I didn't know why West was acting so casually about giving it to Scarlett. Underneath his calm exterior, I had a feeling there was a dangerous edge to his mood. We'd have to monitor him this evening lest he did something reckless.

"Well, it proves she's willing to do whatever it takes to get close to us," I mused. "Maybe it's time we escalate things."

"In what way?" Francis asked, narrowing his eyes at me. "You were the one who wanted to pump the brakes."

He'd clearly resigned himself to the whole West deal. Not like we could

change it, only use it to our advantage.

“Let’s use the rest of this week to push her buttons, and then Friday night, we take her. We’ll have to be careful, wouldn’t want her little lap dog getting suspicious now, would we?”

Prescott smirked.

“We need someone to run inference with him.”

I nodded slowly. West’s contacts came in handy for that. He was our in with the criminal underworld. He thrived in that environment. Up here in our ivory tower, he was stifled by the suits and pretence of civility.

“I’ll handle it,” West said without hesitation.

“Good. Now, kindly fuck off back to work. I’m going to seek out our prey.”

“And do what?” Francis asked.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?”

My friend raised his brow but didn’t question me further. The three of them left the room, Prescott throwing a ‘She’s not going to like what you’re planning,’ over his shoulder at me. I smiled, rubbing my lip again.

I gave it a few minutes before I walked out of my office and along to Scarlett’s. She was sitting at her desk, but her eyes weren’t on her computer, they were on the windows. I looked at my watch.

“Are you making a habit of being tardy with my mid-morning coffee?”

She almost jumped ten feet out of her chair.

“Oh, Jesus, you scared me.” She put a hand to her chest, then her expression became contrite. “No, no, I’m sorry, I... I... I got distracted.” She stood up, smoothing down her skirt. “I’m really sorry, I’ll do it now.”

I remained in the doorway as she walked over to it. Before she could leave the room, I reached out, planting my hand on the other side of the frame, effectively barring her path. Scarlett looked up at me with wide eyes.

“Did I or did I not tell you I value timekeeping?”

“You did.”

Her voice was hushed and brimming with nervousness.

“It’s your third week here, Scarlett, are you getting complacent already?”

“N-n-no. I swear I was in the middle of doing it and then...”

“And then what?”

I kept my voice cold and emotionless. She was losing her composure, her

hands worrying at the fabric of her skirt. I knew exactly what or should I say who had distracted her.

“Mr Greer wanted something.”

“Did he now?”

She nodded, her eyes wide and full of fear.

“Yes.”

“And what, pray tell, did he want?”

Scarlett swallowed, but I could tell she couldn't tear her eyes from mine no matter how much my line of questioning was making her uncomfortable. Watching her squirm gave me a sick sense of satisfaction.

“He... wanted...”

“Yes?”

“To... he wanted to... show me something.”

If I was in any doubt of West's assertion about fucking her, I wasn't now. It was so damn clear she didn't want to tell me what they'd done.

“Something.” *Was that something his dick by any chance, Scarlett?*

“Yes.”

I leant closer, crowding her personal space.

“Was this something work-related?”

“No,” she whispered.

I wanted to smile so fucking badly, but I didn't. The fact she was trying so hard not to lie to me was amusing. Clearly, she realised messing with me would be a mistake. I wouldn't hesitate to punish the fuck out of her if she did.

“I'd remind you, you're here to work, but I think you know that already, don't you?”

“Yes, Drake.”

The way my name sounded on her lips in that deferent tone had me gripping the doorframe harder. I was cool, calm and collected at all times. Scarlett was disarming. Not only because I'd grown up with her, but the way she didn't hesitate to do as I told her was far too damn intoxicating. Like a drug flooding my system and dragging me under. It's why I left the harder shit to West. I didn't like feeling out of control. Weed soothed me, but anything else, well, it was like a fucking riot in my head. Especially E. Fuck, the last time I'd done E... the less said about that, the better.

Maybe I should ask West to get a supply. Now I was thinking about it, I wondered what would happen to Scarlett if she took it.

Would she beg for it? For us? Would her body crave all the depraved things we wanted to do to her?

I schooled myself before my thoughts got out of hand. There would be plenty of time for me to think about that when she wasn't in front of me.

"I need you to stay late on Friday night. I have an important speech to prepare for next week and that's the only time I can compose it."

"Of course, I'll stay late. That's absolutely fine."

I gave her a sharp nod.

"Go make me a coffee and don't let this happen again."

"I won't, I promise."

I didn't move away immediately, captivated by her fearful expression. Loving the fact I'd put it there. I wasn't jealous of West fucking her, but the thought of being able to had me reining myself right the fuck in. Her tears would be so damn sweet.

I let go of the doorframe and shifted back, allowing her to walk out. My eyes fixed on her back as she scurried down the hall towards the kitchen. I let myself smile then. The girl had no idea what we had in store for her. West's little revelation that she was kinky had my mind running riot. There were so many things we could introduce her to. So. Fucking. Many.

I was going to enjoy watching her squirm, pant and beg. Friday couldn't come soon enough.

TWENTY THREE

SCARLETT

The moment I got into the flat, I let out a long sigh of relief. I was safe here. Today had been fucked up in so many ways, I could no longer count them. I hung up my coat and dumped my bag down on the side table, wanting everything and everyone to disappear for a few hours.

“Mase?” I called out as I kicked off my heels.

There was no answer. I trudged down the hallway to the kitchen and found it empty, as was the living room when I checked it. Who knew where he’d got to. He was usually here when I got in, and wanted to know all about my day, whether I’d got any information they could use and what the Horsemen were up to.

Deciding it was for the best he wasn’t here as I didn’t feel like dealing with the inquisition, I went into the bathroom and started running myself a bubble bath. I snagged a bottle of white wine from the fridge along with a glass before undressing in my bedroom and pulling on a robe. I padded out back to the bathroom, shut the door and poured myself a glass of wine. Then I put my hair up in a bun. The robe fell to the floor the next minute. Sinking into the hot water with my glass, I let out a deep groan of pleasure. After the shit I’d dealt with today, I needed this.

I sipped at my wine and stared up at the ceiling. My mind ran riot with thoughts of both West and Drake. The former for obvious reasons. He’d taken me into his office, bent me over his desk and fucked me. It didn’t matter to him we’d only shared a few words between us. The man claimed I was his. And I had no idea why I hadn’t disputed it. Well, the situation had got out of control so fast, I didn’t have time to tell him he was crazy. I also didn’t have much of a

choice but to give in to what he wanted.

Be honest... you wanted it too.

I shivered. I wasn't meant to find them attractive. Wanting any of them went against everything. I was here to destroy them, not catch feelings. Not that being fucked by West had caused such a thing. You could have sex with someone without liking them or wanting more out of the relationship.

The thing was, I didn't hate it. The sex. I'd never experienced such intense pleasure before. Never craved the feel of a man against me. I hadn't been allowed to be around them. Now I had four of them I had to get close to. And I had to admit to myself I wanted to be close to West again. Intimately.

Say it. You want him to use you again.

I set the glass on the counter next to the bath and rubbed my face. My wayward thoughts were not leading me anywhere good.

It hadn't only been West. Drake had caused me heart palpitations today. I'd been so flustered after my experience with West, I'd hardly had a chance to gather myself together. When Drake had stared me down and was questioning me, I'd almost wilted. The intensity of him made my knees go weak. He had such an intimidating presence. And the way he'd demanded I answer him without words... I had no idea what to do with myself. It was almost as if he was trying to get me to admit to the sex with West.

Did he know? Had West told him and the others?

I sank lower in the water, my cheeks flaming at the thought of them discussing it. It led me back to the dream I'd had. And how I had to admit to myself it hadn't only been Prescott chasing me in it. It had been all of them.

Before I could stop myself, I ran my fingers over my breasts, moaning when I flicked my nipples. The very idea of being chased by them turned me on. Especially in light of what happened today. My mind fired off, erotic images filling my senses and making me ache for a repeat. Of West pinning me down and taking me. This time he was brutal, making it hurt while Drake whispered in my ear all the ways he was going to punish me for being a bad girl.

My fingers slid lower across my stomach until they met my clit. I stroked myself, remembering the way I'd been filled earlier. The horrifying but beautiful experience of being taken by a man who should, by all accounts, terrify me.

"West," I moaned.

His unhinged nature called to me as if on some level we were kindred spirits. I didn't know how. It made no sense, but I felt it anyway.

Fuck me, West, please.

I was too far gone to care that I should not be getting myself off to thoughts of my employers doing deviant things to my body. These were the men I'd been sent to destroy. But did it mean I couldn't enjoy myself with them before I had to turn them over to my family?

Why did everything about this leave me conflicted? And the guilt flooding my system over craving more experiences with them did nothing to temper my desire. If anything, the guilt fuelled it.

"Bad girl," I whispered. "Such a bad girl."

I closed my eyes, letting the fantasy of them carry me under. To drown me in their sea of fucked up depravity.

"Scar, are you in... oh, oh shit."

My eyes snapped open. For a moment I froze in place, then I abruptly pulled my hand from my pussy and turned my head. Mason stood in the doorway, his brown eyes wide like a deer in headlights. I hadn't heard him open it. He dragged his eyes from me and coughed, rubbing the back of his neck as he turned away. My body was covered by the bubbles. I'd kept my modesty, but it didn't make this any less awkward. He'd caught me masturbating. He had no idea what I was thinking about but it didn't stop my face from burning.

"Haven't you heard of knocking?" I asked, dipping even lower into the water.

"I didn't think, shit, Scar, I'm sorry."

I let out a huff and crossed my arms over my breasts under the water.

"Did you want something?"

"I... uh... no. I mean, did you want dinner?"

Having the man who was like an older brother to you walk in while you're getting yourself off to your employers in the bath was not the way I wanted to spend this evening.

"Yes... now, can you please leave?"

When he didn't move, I frowned. Didn't he realise how embarrassing this was for me?

"Your father called. He wants to know why you've not responded to their messages."

I sighed. Both my parents had texted me in the past few days. I hadn't wanted to deal with them, not when I had nothing to report. Not like I was about to tell them I'd decided to get close to the Horsemen by essentially seducing them. Though, right now, it felt like it was the other way around. They were after me. Well... West was. And he was the type of man who took exactly what he wanted without a care in the world.

"I don't have anything to tell them."

"They want to know how you're doing."

"You didn't tell them already?"

"From you, Scar, they want to hear from you."

"Fine. I'll call them after I'm done in here. Now, can you leave?"

My voice was laced with irritation. I didn't care to mask it. I wanted to be left in peace. Not like I would be able to continue what I'd been doing before, but he needed to get out.

"Okay, okay, sorry again."

He walked out, shutting the door behind him. I glared at it. I resented the fact they didn't trust me enough. They had to send a babysitter. While Mason was here for my protection, he was also my keeper. There wasn't much I could do without his knowledge, except for when I was at Fortuity. They couldn't infiltrate the building or its security. I was their only way in. And it meant they had to rely on me to do my part. Something I knew they weren't happy about. It was my only way to freedom, or I'd never get away from their oppressive regime. I had to do what they'd asked of me.

I didn't linger in the bath, making sure to wash thoroughly. I'd spent the rest of the day smelling of West after our encounter. No way I wanted Mason to get suspicious. No one could find out about me having sex with one of them.

Letting out a sigh when I got out and dressed, leaving my hair wet, I knew I couldn't put this off any longer. I sat on the end of my bed and dialled my father's number.

"Scarlett," came his disapproving voice the moment he answered.

"Hello."

"You haven't been answering my messages."

"I'm sorry."

I didn't come up with an excuse. Wouldn't be any point. He'd merely get on

my case about it. It was better not to antagonise Stuart Carver, or his wife, Phoebe. They weren't my birth parents. I'd been adopted. They hadn't given me details about my birth family. The one time I'd asked, I'd received the worst imaginable response of them. I'd never tried to ask again. Dad got mad and Mum cried. All it did was leave me with a boat load of guilt. As if they couldn't possibly understand why I'd want to know when they were my 'real' family.

"Mason said you're struggling."

I gritted my teeth. Trust him to have told them that. While Mason and I were close, I was always reminded where his loyalties lay.

"I'm not. It's going to take time to get them to trust me, is all."

"Yes, yes, of course, that isn't what I was talking about."

"Then what?"

I tried to keep the bite out of my voice.

"The nightmares, Scarlett."

I flinched.

"They're not that bad."

It was a lie. Over the weekend I woke up screaming two nights in a row. Mason had rushed in and wrapped me up in his arms, telling me it was okay. I hadn't cried, but my body shook for several minutes until I calmed down. And I couldn't remember what I'd been so scared about.

"I think you should come home this weekend. Let Karl look you over."

As if I wanted to go back home to my prison, neither did I want to see Doctor Leonard either. He gave me the creeps and was too friendly with my father.

"I'm fine, Dad, I promise. There's nothing to worry about. I can handle it."

"If you're sure..."

The fake concern in his voice made me roll my eyes. I'd always had a feeling he only said these things as a way of making me think he cared. The truth was... he'd shown me enough times he didn't.

"I am."

Besides, I'd agreed to stay late on Friday at work. I didn't want to have to travel down to Kent the next day.

"Fine. I have to go. Don't ignore our messages again. Is that understood?"

"Yes."

“Good.”

He hung up without saying goodbye. I dumped my phone on my bed and lay back, digging my hands into my eyes. Talking to him always made me wary. You never knew what type of mood he'd be in. I was glad he'd not given me a lecture. After the day I'd had, there was no way in hell I wanted to sit and listen to that.

Now I had to go make small talk with Mason knowing he'd doxed me into my father. To say I was irritated was an understatement, but such was my fucked up life. And little did I know, it was about to get so much worse.

TWENTY FOUR

FRANCIS

Dealing with West yesterday evening was an absolute fucking nightmare. He'd left work early after he'd gone ahead and fucked Scarlett. Then he'd arrived home high as a kite on something he'd clearly taken while he was out. He proceeded to tell us all about how wet Scarlett had been for him. Prescott had been in his element. The sick fuck wanted all the details, but West had been strangely cagey about the rest. He, Prescott and Drake had started making a plan for Friday. And that had got out of hand. I'd left them to it, not wanting to deal with their shit even though it'd been me who suggested tag-teaming Scarlett in the first place.

My conflicted feelings regarding Scarlett were getting in my way. Every time I looked at her, I was reminded of the girl she'd been. The one who had been reckless and free. Who'd walked into the fire alongside us. The girl had kept us grounded. We'd been lost without her. They didn't want to see it, but I did. I fucking well saw the carnage we'd left in our wake. While I didn't feel remorse over the shit we'd done in the past, I understood actions came with consequences.

Luring Scarlett here when we were aware of the reasons why her family wanted her to come after us was the biggest risk we'd ever taken. And while having her back was worth every fucking minute, the fact she had no idea who we were was clearly taking a toll on the four of us. Especially when we couldn't say a damn thing about it. Couldn't remind her who we'd all been to each other. Five best friends who'd spent their formative years together. We didn't function right without our fifth. I knew that. They knew that. But she didn't. She had no fucking clue. And it killed me.

I sighed, running my hand through my hair as I wandered out of my office. I had a meeting to get to. It was a miracle we'd managed to set this up but securing the Bykov account had opened doors for us. I had to give it to Prescott. He knew how to lure clients to us like moths to a flame. We had to tread carefully with this lot. There had been a lot of gossip circulating about them after the now infamous massacre at Instinct Investments.

When I reached Prescott's office, our guests were already seated. A man with dark hair and dark eyes. Next to him sat a petite woman with long blonde hair and crystal blue eyes. To say they made a striking couple would be an understatement. However, rumour had it the five owners of the Syndicate were in a polyamorous relationship with each other.

Prescott stood up and waved me over.

"This is Mr Beaufort, our finance manager. Francis, this is Mr Knox and Miss Bykov."

I approached the sofas and shook both their hands.

"It's nice to meet you, but please call me Ash," the woman said. "I'm still getting used to the change in my last name."

I gave her a smile, while the man, one Mr Quinn Knox, gave her a sharp look. She merely rolled her eyes when he looked away as if she dealt with his seemingly severe demeanour all the time. I was used to men like him. Didn't worry me too much.

"Of course. Did Prescott offer you refreshments?"

"Yes," Prescott said. "Scarlett's making them right now."

I almost faltered midway into sitting down in one of the vacant armchairs. He'd not asked Tonya who usually took care of that stuff for us. I gave him a curious look as I made myself comfortable. Prescott merely shrugged in response. I suspected Drake had told him to use whatever was in our arsenal to bring them onboard as clients.

I turned to our guests, giving them a smile.

"So, do you have any questions before we begin with our proposal?"

I always liked to check in with potential clients to make sure I caught any concerns they had so we could deal with them immediately. Thankfully, neither of them had any. Prescott and I dived straight in, showing them what we wanted to do with their current portfolio if they were to join us. We only presented to

high profile clients ourselves. We had a whole team who managed clients and acquisitions for us. When you wanted someone's business with a reputation like the owners of the Syndicate, it was always better to give them the personal touch.

The moment Scarlett walked in, my skin prickled with awareness. Prescott glanced at me, a smirk appearing on his face as if he'd had the exact same reaction. The anticipation of what we'd do to Scarlett on Friday was high.

She carried a tray over to the coffee table and set it down. Then she handed out the drinks she'd made, including one for me. I eyed it, biting my lip as I tried not to smile. It reminded me of our conversation in the kitchen when she started a couple of weeks ago. How I refused to tell her how I took my coffee.

She picked up the tray after responding to our guests thanking her, but she didn't leave immediately. Scarlett stopped next to me, rested her hand on the arm of the chair and leant closer. Our guests were occupied by Prescott, so I wasn't too worried about them.

"Did I get it right?" she murmured.

I leant forward and picked up my mug. After taking a sip, I ran my tongue along my bottom lip. Oh, she definitely had.

"Perhaps," I responded in an equally hushed voice.

"I think I did."

"Did Pres tell you?"

She shook her head and gave me a sly smile.

"Dare I ask how you worked it out?"

"I'm good at my job, Mr Beaufort, that's all."

She straightened, intending to leave but I caught her by the wrist. Her eyes fell on my hand, her skin flushing at the direct contact.

"Call me Francis, Scarlett."

I wasn't about to mention I wouldn't mind if she called me Frankie. No one else but Scarlett had ever had the privilege. West, the psychotic fucker, called me Frankie to wind me up. In a lot of ways, I didn't blame him for wanting to punish me, but I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of knowing I understood his reasoning.

Scarlett stared at me for a moment. Then a sly smile crossed her features.

"You sure about that? Don't want to request that I call you sir, or

something?”

I almost choked, immediately dropping my hand from her wrist. The twinkle in her eye had me at a complete loss for words. Where on earth would she get that idea from? I wasn't the type to need honorifics. That was definitely more Drake's thing. I doubted he had told her to use one, since I'd heard her call him by his name.

There was a snort from the sofa. My eyes went to Mr Knox who was eyeing me with a rather knowing look on his face. I had no idea what he was thinking, but it couldn't be anything good.

“No, Francis is fine.”

“As you wish... Francis.”

Then she sauntered out of the room. My eyes followed her progress, my head turning to keep looking at her. Her hips swayed as if she knew I was watching. It had me wondering if she was doing all of this on purpose. Most likely. We knew she was here to get close to us. Perhaps she'd decided to use her assets to lure us in. Too bad for Scarlett, we already knew who she was.

The fact she'd allowed West to fuck her yesterday started to make sense in my mind. Would it mean she would let what we were planning on Friday happen without complaint? It gave me an idea. A fucked up idea, but one of the other three would be on board with it if I told them.

I turned back to the meeting at hand, knowing I shouldn't be thinking about her or what we had planned.

The rest of the hour went by in a flash and soon we were saying goodbye to Mr Knox and Miss Bykov. I stood by Prescott's door, shaking Mr Knox's hand and thanking him for coming. He let go of my hand and levelled me with a rather intense gaze.

“Perhaps you should consider letting her call you sir.” His eyes flicked to Miss Bykov. “Not every day a woman wants to play those sorts of games with a man.”

Before I had a chance to respond, he gave me a sly smile, grabbed hold of his woman's hand and walked out. I stared after him, having no fucking clue what the hell to make of what he'd just said.

“Well, they're clearly into kinky shit,” Prescott chuckled.

I glanced at him. He'd been standing next to me the whole time. He had a

huge grin on his face and a damn look in his eyes told me he'd overheard what had been said.

"You think?"

"If they aren't, I'd be surprised. After all, she's getting a dicking from four guys, isn't she?"

"What the fuck, Pres? You don't know that."

"Come on, Francis, weren't you listening? She all but admitted it when we asked about the other owners."

I must have not been paying attention because I certainly hadn't heard anything of the sort out of Ash Bykov's mouth.

"So what if she is? Not our fucking business."

"More power to her. Reckon a lot of women would love to get dicked down by more than one guy at the same time, they just don't want to admit it."

I almost cuffed him around the back of the head. I dug my hands in my pockets instead and thought about my idea for Friday.

"Speaking of dicking down, I take it you heard what Scarlett said."

"Mmm, she's a little flirt."

"Well, she is trying to get us to trust her. But that's not why I brought it up."

Prescott raised an eyebrow.

"Oh? Then pray what's going in that moral brain of yours."

I rolled my eyes and walked further into his office.

"First of all, we definitely need to tell Drake about the *sir* business, you know what he's like about that shit."

I turned back to find Prescott giving me a wink.

"And I think we should teach Scarlett a lesson for trying to use her sex appeal on us. I mean, fuck, it's working, but the girl has no idea what she's letting herself in for."

"What did you have in mind?"

"We deprive the girl of her senses, then she won't have a fucking clue what's coming."

The maniacal look in Prescott's eyes told me he was fully on board.

"Oh, you want to blindfold her."

"To start with... perhaps we don't talk too, and then she'll have no idea who is about to give it to her."

“You’re such a deviant little fuck, Francis. It’s a wonder people think you’re a nice boy. They have no fucking idea.”

I grinned. They called me the moral one, but I wasn’t. If I was being entirely honest, a lot of our ideas for group activities during sex came from me. Maybe I was a deviant little fuck, but I liked it. And perhaps I needed to embrace who I was inside a little more. I would certainly get less shit off Prescott and West if I did.

“No, they don’t. And she won’t either.” I waved a hand at him. “You in then? Should we tell the others?”

“Oh, fuck yeah, I’m in. All the way in.”

“Good.”

I walked out of his office, throwing a wink his way. I’d have words with West and Drake tonight. No doubt there would be no complaints from them either. My misgivings about what we were doing could go fuck themselves right now. All I wanted to focus on was getting exactly what we wanted from Scarlett. And that was her giving in to all of us.

TWENTY FIVE

DRAKE

There was something about being in the office when everyone else had left for the day. The silence and stillness in the air calmed me, kept me centred. However, having Scarlett at my desk, her fingers working across the keyboard as I stood staring out at the darkening skyline dictating this fucking speech I had to give next week was certainly testing my ability to keep myself under control. I prided myself on self-restraint. Right now, I was itching all over with urges I'd always kept hidden from the outside world.

Tonight was the night. And it was all I could do to keep talking.

“Actually, could you scratch that last line,” I told her, rubbing my chin. “I need something more... punchy.”

“Yes,” she murmured.

In the relative quiet of the room other than her fingers tapping on the keyboard, I heard it loud and clear.

I turned away from the window and looked at Scarlett. Her light brown hair was half falling out of the messy bun she'd put it in. A lock of it had fallen on her shoulder. I wanted to brush it away. To fix her hair for her. A stupid urge. I shouldn't give a shit about her comfort, but Francis' words from a few days ago kept ringing in my ears.

“You all seem so willing to forget she was our friend, our best fucking friend. She meant something to us.”

Caring about someone you knew had been sent here to ruin you was a paradox I hated. I could care about Scarlett and want to ruin her at the same time. How I wanted to tear her open and destroy every little piece of her soul. The others gave me shit for my fascination with the human mind. My addiction

to ripping apart a person's reality so it would feel as though they were dying on the inside. It made me feel so fucking free knowing I had *that* much power over another person.

Now was not the time to be getting wrapped up in those thoughts. I had to play my part in this evening's festivities.

"We should eat something."

Scarlett's head whipped up and she blinked.

"We?"

I looked at my watch. It was time to get this show on the road.

"Yes, it's after seven."

"I hadn't noticed the time."

We'd been working on this speech for the past hour. I hated doing them, but in business, they were necessary. We had to maintain our professional image. Couldn't go showing the world just how fucked up we all were. They might decide to take their business elsewhere and we couldn't have that. They'd certainly regret doing so if they did decide to fuck us over.

I moved towards the door, expecting her to follow me.

"Where... where are you going?"

Pausing in the doorway, I turned my head back.

"Upstairs."

"Should I wait here then?"

I reached up, running my fingers across my bottom lip. Her eyes tracked their path.

"No, Scarlett, you're going to come with me."

Would she say no? It wasn't as if I ever invited employees up to our penthouse. Scarlett wasn't just an employee. She belonged to us. And tonight she'd be taught a lesson in just how integral she was to her former best friends. Only we weren't really friends any longer. More like the men who would fuck her up in ways she couldn't begin to comprehend.

"Bring my tablet, we can continue working on it upstairs," I said when she didn't respond.

I walked out of the room, leaving no room for disagreement. A minute later, I heard her footsteps behind me. And her body heat when she caught up with me.

"I don't... I don't know if this is... I don't know if I should come upstairs

with you.”

“Why? Do you think I’m planning something nefarious?”

“Well, no. I don’t think that.”

Her eyes betrayed her. She was wary about why I wanted her to come upstairs. Well, she should be. In fact, if she had any sense, she would have run.

“I like to take care of my employees, Scarlett. That’s all this is.” The lie rolled off my tongue with ease.

We reached the lobby. I went over to the lifts, hitting the button and stepping back. I glanced at her. She had a tentative expression on her face. Her hands clutched the tablet to her chest as if it was the only thing shielding her from me. I smiled, knowing nothing would save her. Nothing at all.

When it arrived, I stepped in with Scarlett following behind me. After punching in the code for the penthouse, we didn’t let just anyone up there, I placed my hands behind my back.

“Will the others be around?” she asked when the doors shut and the lift began to move.

“Most likely.”

“Oh.”

“Don’t worry, they won’t mind you joining us.”

I watched her swallow, her fingers tightening around the tablet. The lift didn’t take long and the doors slid open a minute later after it stopped revealing our open plan living space. I strolled out, digging my hands in my pockets. I spied Francis setting out the takeaway boxes on the kitchen island. He’d changed into a more casual outfit of a t-shirt and chinos.

“We have an extra mouth to feed this evening,” I said, waving at the lift doors behind me without looking to see if she’d followed me out.

Francis looked up, his grey eyes glinting.

“Hello, Scarlett. There’s plenty, please come in and take a seat.”

I pointed at the table, unbuttoning my suit jacket and sliding it off my shoulders before slinging it over the back of one of the dining chairs.

“Where’s Pres and West?”

Francis shrugged as he reached up to get another plate out of the cupboard.

“Off doing whatever the fuck they want.”

I snorted, opening the fridge and grabbing a few beers out of it. As I set them

on the counter, I looked over to the lift. Scarlett stood just outside the door, her eyes darting around the room with the tablet still clutched to her chest.

“This is where you all live?” she asked, her voice full of wonder.

My eyes roamed around our space. The wall in front of me had floor to ceiling windows with a view of the city. We had three dark grey sofas with teal cushions, a large flatscreen TV and a huge mahogany dining table. Our kitchen was black with chrome finishing. Francis and Prescott had decided on all this shit. West didn’t give two fucks about what the place looked like, only his personal space upstairs.

“Yes,” Francis said. “We don’t let just anyone up here either. You must’ve got in Drake’s good books if you snagged an invite.”

She let out a nervous laugh but didn’t move from her spot by the lift. I didn’t bother saying anything, merely popped the bottle caps with the opener and picked up two of the bottles. I approached her. She watched me, nibbling on her bottom lip in the most fucking distracting way. When I came to a standstill in front of her, I offered her the second bottle in my hand. She released her tight hold on the tablet, taking it from my hand. Her eyes tracked my movements as I brought my own up to my mouth and took a swig.

“Sit down, Scarlett.”

It wasn’t a request but a command. She fidgeted before doing as I told her. I stepped back, watching her walk over to the dining table, set the tablet down on it before taking a seat. She fiddled with the beer bottle.

“Um, I don’t like beer. Could I have some water please?”

I gave her a nod. Francis was dishing up plates for the three of us. I wandered back over to help him and get a glass for Scarlett.

“All set?” I murmured, my voice low enough not to carry across the room.

“Mmm, Pres texted. He said our little problem is occupied for the rest of the evening.”

“Good.”

The lift doors closed and we heard it descending. Clearly, one of them was back.

I poured Scarlett some water before I carried mine and Francis’ plates over to the table, leaving him to bring Scarlett’s. Setting them down, I went back over to snag her drink. Placing the glass next to her hand, I took a seat and watched

Scarlett stare down at it. I grabbed the beer bottle and set it next to Francis' plate. He'd be happy to drink it instead of her.

"Do you live alone?" I asked.

"No. I, uh, live with a friend of my family."

I glanced over at Francis who set Scarlett's plate down in front of her along with a knife and fork. His eyes were dark. We both knew who she was referring to. A slight thorn in our sides when it came to Scarlett, but we had our ways of dealing with men like him.

Francis came around the table and sat down next to me, handing me the cutlery he'd brought over. He started in on his meal straight away. I watched Scarlett pick up her fork and stare down at the food we'd ordered.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Thai. You not had that before?" I replied as Francis had his mouthful.

"No... but guess I'm all about new experiences these days."

She let out another nervous laugh. She was in for one hell of a new experience this evening. I watched her pick up a forkful of curry and rice before sliding it between her lips. She chewed, swallowed then smiled.

"It's good."

Francis gave her a wink. I sat back and started eating myself, relieved she liked it, otherwise we might have run into a problem.

Francis made small talk with her while I watched Scarlett's every move. The lift doors slid open a few minutes after we'd started, revealing West, who strolled in without even looking our way.

"Food's on the counter," I said, my eyes still fixed on Scarlett.

West grunted in response. I didn't look around to see where he was going. I didn't need to. Scarlett's eyes tracked him into the kitchen. Her skin flushed, betraying her feelings towards our friend. He had fucked her a few days ago. She was probably remembering it. I held back a smile. The girl couldn't hide her interest in West's movements and he was probably completely ignoring her. That was one way to lure a woman in. Act like you didn't give a shit about her after you'd rocked her world.

He came over to the table a few minutes later and sat right next to Scarlett. Something I don't think she was expecting, especially not when he slung his arm over the back of her chair. He leant closer to her, but his eyes were on me and

Francis.

“Hello, Scarlett,” he murmured. “Did you beg one of them to give you an invitation up here so you could see me?”

She choked on her mouthful. West merely smirked and moved his hand to her shoulder, stroking his fingers along it. She swallowed hard and then picked up her glass, taking a long gulp before setting it down. She turned to West, her hazel-green eyes betraying her ire.

“Excuse me?” she hissed.

With his other hand, he reached up and tucked one of the tendrils of hair framing her face behind her ear.

“Mmm, I think you did.”

Her hand snapped up and curled around his wrist. She shoved it back into his chest before releasing him.

“Don’t touch me.”

“You were very willing to let me on Tuesday... in fact, you begged.”

Her eyes widened and her face went a deep shade of red. She didn’t respond to him, merely turned back to her plate and avoided everyone’s gaze.

I eyed Francis. His eyebrow was raised and I could see him holding back a smile. The whole thing amused me too, watching West give Scarlett a hard time. He’d unsettled her, as if she wasn’t already nervous about being up here with us.

West shifted back and started on his own plate, but not before he grinned at me and Francis.

The rest of the meal passed in relative silence. I continued to watch Scarlett. Her eyes had started to droop and her movements became laboured. Her head kept snapping back up every so often as if she was trying to stay awake.

Abruptly, she stood up and looked at me.

“Should we... should we work on... on...”

Her words became slurred. I rose from my seat as she swayed on her feet. I made my way around the table, catching her right when her knees gave out. She stared up at me, realisation dawning on her features. I smiled at her.

“It’s okay, Scarlett, close your eyes. You’re safe here.”

She didn’t have a choice. The sedative Francis laced her food with had set in. For a moment, she struggled to stay conscious. Her mouth opened, but she said nothing. I held her against my chest, waiting until she closed her eyes and went

completely limp. I picked her up and carried her over to the sofas, laying her down on one of them. Straightening, I stared down at her beautiful features.

“She’ll be out for an hour, right?” I asked.

“Yes, I gave her the right dose,” Francis replied.

“Good.”

I turned in time to see the lift doors slide open. Prescott walked in without a care in the world.

“I see you started without me.” He nodded at Scarlett as he walked by into the kitchen.

“Did you handle Mason?” I asked.

“Of course, I texted Francis to let him know. He’ll be occupied for the rest of the evening.” Prescott winked. “If you know what I mean.”

We’d sent Prescott to make sure Scarlett’s little bodyguard wouldn’t be an issue. West had secured Zayn Villetti’s details from Gary, his drug dealer and we’d paid Zayn a handsome sum to use one of his girls. She’d be keeping Mason Jones very busy this evening. West hadn’t particularly wanted to get on one of the mafia kingpin son’s radars but we needed a way of keeping Mason away from their flat that didn’t tie back to us. We had to tread carefully when it came to Mason because of who he was.

“Good. We’ve got less than an hour until she wakes up. Let’s get our shit together.”

I stared down at Scarlett again. She looked so peaceful. Pity we would be disturbing that peace. She wouldn’t know her own name by the time we were done with the girl. And I was so ready to start the fun.

TWENTY SIX

SCARLETT

The moment I regained consciousness, I sat bolt upright. The last thing I remembered was eating dinner with Drake and Francis while West had taunted me with the sex we'd had earlier in the week. The next thing I knew, I was fainting in Drake's arms while he stared down at me with a dark glint in his indigo eyes. One that told me I was in a fuck ton of danger.

Opening my eyes, I found I couldn't see a damn thing. Something was covering half my face. I tried to reach up and tear it off, but I found my wrists wouldn't move very far. Tugging on whatever was holding them down, I let out a little squeak of frustration.

What the fuck?

I felt below me. The material I sat on was very soft. I was on a bed or at least, it felt like I was on one. And it was the moment I realised I didn't have a stitch of clothing on me.

"You're awake," a rather disjointed sounding voice rang in my ears.

I looked left and right, wondering where the hell it had come from until I realised I had headphones on.

"Who are you? Why can't I see? Why... why am I tied up?"

The voice chuckled. Fear raked up my spine, making me aware of how vulnerable I was. Naked and bound on a bed, unable to see or hear anything other than the voice in my ear.

Why had I agreed to go upstairs with Drake earlier? I'd known it was a mistake the moment I stepped into the lift with him, but my need to get close to these men had me throwing my instincts out the window. Now, I was pretty sure I was going to regret that decision.

“You know who I am, Scarlett.”

A hand landed on my ankle, fingers stroking down my skin. I jerked my foot away only to have the hand grip it and hold my ankle down on the bed. Another hand did the same to the other one.

“Now, now, you aren’t going to be trouble, are you?” the voice said, making me flinch.

“What do you want?”

“You.”

I had no idea if the voice belonged to the person touching me or someone else. The whole situation was incredibly disorientating when you couldn’t see or hear what was happening around you.

“Me? What... what are you going to do to me?”

My mind blared the answer at me, but I didn’t want to believe it. There couldn’t be any other explanation for why I was naked and tied to a bed. And yet, the idea of it made my insides coil. I didn’t know if it was sickness or desire. Perhaps it was both.

“All the things you could possibly imagine, and everything in between.”

I shuddered as the hands on my ankles moved higher. They didn’t belong to one person, but two. Their body heat seared into me from both sides and the bed shifted underneath their combined weight. One of the hands was slightly calloused while the other was softer. I didn’t recognise either of them.

“What are you doing?” I whispered, knowing they could hear me even if I couldn’t hear them.

No response came, but the calloused fingers slid between my thighs, stroking along the sensitive skin. I gasped and tried to shut my legs, but they held them open, not allowing me any dignity or modesty. My fingers curled into the fabric below me, knowing I had little choice but to let them touch me. Hot breath dusted over my bare nipple, making me shiver before a mouth enclosed it. The way he sucked the hardened nub had my body bowing. Teeth dug into it, the sharp pain making me cry out.

“That’s it, Scarlett, let them make you feel good.”

I didn’t want to like the sensations they were eliciting from me, but my body was on fire, wanting so much more. Wanting everything they had to offer me.

One of the hands left me. The one with calloused fingers. The bed shifted

again as they moved behind me. I found myself tugged against a bare chest as whoever it was sitting up against the headboard.

There was one clear explanation for what was going on. I hated it, but there was no other. One of them had laced my food with something and made me pass out. And now... now two of them were naked with me.

Oh fuck. Fuck... what... oh god, they're going to...

The Horsemen had drugged and tied me up on a bed. I struggled against the person holding me. The other one knelt in between my legs. I could feel his knees pressed against my inner thighs, keeping my legs spread. Fingers traced the largest scar on my abdomen from one of the multiple surgeries I'd had after my accident. The one that reminded me I couldn't have children.

"No, please, don't," I whimpered, hating they'd seen it, hating them for touching it.

"Shh," came the voice. "Shh."

I had a feeling it wasn't either of the men who were touching me. It was someone watching us. That accounted for three of them. Where was the fourth? He was lurking somewhere. I could almost feel his presence in the room burning into me. His gaze seared into my skin.

West.

"Don't touch me there."

They didn't listen, continuing to stroke the scar and making me want to cry. It was the gentle touch decimating my soul. As if it hurt them to see it as much as it did me. The man behind me stroked my shoulders, the callouses soothing me as he nuzzled my neck with his lips. He must have said something, the words vibrated across my skin but I couldn't hear them.

The one touching the scar leant over me, his mouth latching onto my nipple. I jerked upwards, my wrists rubbing against whatever secured them. I didn't want to get lost in his mouth on me, but it was hard not to. Pleasure bloomed over my chest when he bit me. The way his teeth dug into my skin felt like he was trying to mark me. His fingers left my scar and dived between my legs. It's not like I could close them, so I didn't bother trying. I groaned when they slid between my lips, seeking out my clit and my wetness.

None of this should turn me on, but it did. Being taken by two men when I couldn't even see or hear them should make me scared. I should be screaming

and telling them to stop. I didn't want to. For the first time since my accident, I felt a sense of freedom. The ability to do what I wanted without thinking about the consequences.

"Oh fuck," I cried out, feeling his teeth dig in harder and his fingers on my clit, stroking and coaxing me along.

Who was touching me like this? And who was at my back? I had three options because neither of them were West. I knew what his hands felt like on my skin and between my legs.

"Our little lamb on our altar, ready for her slaughter," came the voice in my ear.

Well, that cleared one thing up. The person watching us was Prescott. The lamb reference gave him away. The firm grip of the man behind me had me suspicious it was Drake. It meant the one between my legs was Francis. And I was pretty sure I was about to get very intimately acquainted with him when he pulled away.

There was movement in front of me, but I had no idea what was happening. Only when the man behind me shifted did I understand what they were doing. He pushed me forward and encouraged me onto my knees. The one in front pulled me into his lap, my breasts brushing against his chest. The new sensation made me shudder. Being deprived of two of your senses intensified the others. Every touch was like an electric shock running through me.

He gripped one of my hips, while his other hand was between us. I didn't struggle when he shoved me down on his cock, impaling me in one brutal thrust. It knocked the air out of my lungs. My hands clenched into fists. It didn't exactly hurt, but the shock of it had me struggling to regain my composure.

"He wants me to tell you how good you are for taking it so well."

I had no idea what the fuck to say to that. I was a little distracted by the fact he'd pulled my hips up and slammed me back down his cock. I cried out when he did it again. Then I gritted my teeth.

"Slow down."

The voice chuckled.

"Oh, little lamb, can't you take it? We're only just getting started."

The taunting note to his voice made me shiver and want to give him a piece of my mind. However, the way I was getting fucked made it hard to think about

anything else. Especially when calloused fingers slid along my back and a warm body pressed itself against me, sandwiching me between the two of them. Those calloused fingers wrapped around my throat, pulling me back against him. I wondered how I'd never felt those before, but then again, I'd only ever shaken Drake's hand once. I'd been too intimidated by him to pay much attention to what his skin felt like.

"I can," I ground out. "I can take it."

Why the hell had that come out of my mouth? It wasn't a challenge, was it? Why did I feel the need to prove myself?

"Mmm, we'll see about that," the voice told me.

Never in my life did I imagine I'd be stuck between two men, one of them forcing me to ride him while the other held me against him to steady me. I couldn't exactly put my hands on them considering they were tied down, but I had some give. Reaching out, I gripped the one in front's sides. The hard muscle of his back under my fingers had me wondering what the hell they all looked like underneath their clothes. It didn't seem fair they could all see me, but I couldn't see them.

Abruptly, he lifted me off him. I let out a squeak of surprise when I was shoved down on another cock, the one belonging to the man behind me. He was thicker. My pussy fluttered around him, trying to accommodate the new sensation. I didn't have to do any work at all, he thrust up into me, eliciting a moan from my lips.

I should not be enjoying this. It shouldn't have turned me on, but my body had other ideas. It wanted more of their touch. The whole thing was madness, but if I struggled, screamed and told them to stop, would they? And wouldn't it be lying if I told them I didn't want them to continue?

The one in front of me took my nipple in his mouth again. My fingers tightened around his sides when his hand slid between us and he stroked my clit while the other fucked me from behind. The new sensation had me struggling against them. It was too much. Too overwhelming.

"I'm going to... going to... come," I cried out in halting tones.

I closed my eyes and let go. If the person in my ear said anything, I didn't hear it, too lost in the intensity of my climax. I'd never experienced anything like it, not even when West fucked me. Perhaps it was the denial of two of my

primary senses that heightened everything else. I could do nothing but give in and let the waves of pleasure drown me.

The depths they dragged me down into were dark and twisted. Tendrils curled around my legs, keeping me captive in their embrace. The abyss had never looked so fucking tempting before. I couldn't deny wanting to dive in and sink to the bottom. If I let this be what it was right now, I could deal with the consequences later. I could allow myself to fall for tonight. But I could never allow myself to forget who I was dealing with and why I was here.

If this was my fate, to be taken and used by them so they'd learn to trust me, so they'd let me in, I'd gladly walk down this fucked up path. At the end, the promise of freedom awaited. And the heavy price I had to pay was a burden I had to live with.

TWENTY SEVEN

PRESCOTT

I don't think words could describe the sheer pleasure of watching Francis and Drake take Scarlett between them. Her body was made for sin and seduction. She dripped with lust and depravity. West had been right. She was a kinky little thing, only she hadn't seen anything yet. This was merely a warm-up to get her ready for the main event.

West sat in an armchair in the corner of the room with the shadows curling around him. I didn't have a fucking clue what he was thinking about the display in front of us. He'd not said a word. I had a closer view, having set up a seat on the side of the bed. It helped me communicate with Scarlett via the microphone attached to my lapel, which I could turn on and off with the clicker in my hand. We'd given her noise-cancelling headphones. The only thing she could hear was me through a voice distorter. I was relatively sure she was clever enough to have worked out who had her, but the girl had given nothing away.

"Fuck," Drake grunted as Scarlett came all over him.

His hand around her throat tightened while Francis continued to suck her nipples and play with her clit.

We'd agreed we wouldn't take it too far this time. The full extent of the kinky shit we were into would be kept under wraps. Pretty sure getting fucked by four men in one night was enough for one girl to take when she had minimal experience in matters of a sexual nature.

I didn't care. Getting to watch her was a turn on all by itself for me. Seeing the guys touch her body. Listening to her moan. The very idea of watching a girl be fucked by your best friends appealed to me on a primal level. My dick strained in my boxers, desperate for touch, but I wanted to wait until I could get

my hands on Scarlett myself. When I could impale her on it and fuck her until she cried. I wanted her tears. There was nothing sweeter than a woman overwhelmed by an experience you were giving her. And Scarlett? Well, she was the sweetest damn woman of all.

Francis was definitely enjoying the fact she was tied down by the silk rope around her wrists. The two lengths were secured to rings on either side of the bed. We'd had everything in this room custom built and designed to suit all of our tastes in sexual depravity.

Scarlett struggled between Drake and Francis as if she couldn't take it any longer.

"Please, it's too much," she whimpered.

"Shut her up, Francis," Drake said. "She'll take what we give her."

"Savage," I chuckled, which only gained me a smirk from Drake.

"Always."

Francis released Scarlett and gave Drake a look, but he stood up and cupped her face. Who knew what she was thinking when he stuck his fingers in her mouth and hooked her jaw open. She let out a muffled cry when he shoved his dick in her mouth. He took a hold of her face and shoved it deeper.

"That's a good girl, Scarlett, take his dick," I said into the mic, grinning all the while. "Take them both."

I could almost feel her straining against them. Fuck, the sight of her was magnificent. I couldn't help running my hand over my cock, wanting to be in there with them, but also savouring watching the scene play out in front of me.

"You going to sulk in the corner all night, West," Drake called to the shadows. "Or you going to come join in the fucking party?"

"You seem to be handling her fine on your own," West said, coming into view as he leant forward in his chair. "Or did you want me to make her scream, is that it? I'm more than happy to oblige."

"She's not going to do much screaming with my cock down her throat," Francis said with a smirk.

Scarlett choked on his length. Her body jerked and her wrists moved as she tried to free herself from their grasp, but it was futile. Francis had tied the knots too tight. She was only making it worse for herself.

West got up from his chair and stalked towards the bed like a fucking hunter

about to pounce on his prey. He was shirtless. On the back of his right hand was a skull with smoke coiling around it. Curling around his right forearm were the words *mors tua, vita mea*, Latin for *your death, my life*. And on his left forearm, the words read *mundus vult decipi, ergo decipiatur* meaning *the world wants to be deceived, so let it be deceived*. He had another more sinister tattoo on his left hand. Twin axes crossing each other, dripping with blood. There were symbols tattooed on his fingers as well. They represented the lives he'd taken.

He made a rather imposing image to anyone who didn't know him as intimately as Drake, Francis and I did. His amber eyes glinted in the low light as he knelt on the bed next to the other three. The next thing I knew, he'd stuck his head between Scarlett's legs. My hand tightened around my cock as he bit down on her clit with his teeth. The muffled scream erupting from her throat had us all watching her with rapt attention.

Saliva dribbled out of her mouth as Francis fucked her throat. Drake continued to thrust up into her. And then we had West torturing her clit with his teeth. I was going to bust a fucking nut at the sight of it.

"Shit, she's coming again," Drake ground out through gritted teeth. "I can't fucking hold out."

"Don't worry, I'll happily take your place," I said, wanting to be nestled deep inside her pussy like they had all been. West had already sampled it earlier in the week.

Drake groaned while Scarlet thrashed against the three of them, her climax driving through her like wildfire.

"Fuck," Francis grunted, shoving his dick as far down Scarlett's throat as he could go before emptying himself in her.

A minute later, he pulled his dick from her. She choked and spluttered, cum and spit dribbling out of her mouth. Francis stepped away and sat down on the edge of the bed, panting heavily. West sat up and watched her as she struggled to regain her composure.

"Messy girl," I said into the mic.

"Fuck you," she choked out. "Fuck all of you."

"Mmm, did you want to take four at once, Scarlett?"

She tugged on her bonds, clearly wanting to be free of them, but she didn't respond to me.

Drake pulled her off him. West helped him put Scarlett on her hands and knees. She complained about it, but they ignored her. Neither of them bothered to clean her up.

“You want her pussy, Pres?” West asked, giving me a wink.

“Fuck yes, I do.”

“Have at it... you can prepare her for what she’ll get from me.”

I knew very well what he had in mind when he slapped a bottle of lube down next to Scarlett’s leg. I removed the mic from my lapel and dumped the equipment on the bed. My clothes came next, then I knelt behind Scarlett and gripped her hips. She yelped when I shoved my dick inside her in one brutal and unforgiving thrust. I didn’t care if Drake had just come inside her, she felt good. Her pussy was hot, wet and tight as fuck.

“Shit, this pussy,” I groaned.

“Quite the fucking prize,” Drake said.

He and Francis had pulled on boxers and had taken a seat on one of the sofas. West picked up the discarded mic. He gave me a grin as he turned it on.

“You like that, Scarlett?” he taunted. “Dirty girls like you need to get fucked and covered in cum.”

I laughed, proceeding to fuck Scarlett harder. She gripped the covers below us and didn’t respond to him.

“You all shy now? Won’t be for long... we’re going to have you screaming.”

He flipped the mic off and gave me a look.

“You want to DP her?”

“As if I’m going to say no.”

I slid out of her. Scarlett let out a whimper as if she didn’t want me to stop. The girl was going to get more dick than she bargained for. I got underneath her and pulled her down on my cock, impaling her once more. She let go of the covers and placed her hands on my sides, the rope pulling taut. Her little squeak of frustration made West chuckle.

“She doesn’t like not being able to touch us properly.”

“Did you let her touch you when you fucked her on Tuesday?” I asked, wrapping my hands around her hips and encouraging her to ride me.

“No. I had her bent over my desk. She just had to take it.”

He knelt behind her and picked up the lube. Then he shoved her down on my

chest. Her tits rubbed against me as I thrust upwards. This was likely uncomfortable for her, but West and I didn't care about that.

"What are you—" she started but was cut off by West touching her, presumably running his lubed finger over her little hole. She squealed when he penetrated her, shifting against me as if she was trying to get away. I held her hips tighter, refusing to allow her an inch.

"Please, no, don't... don't do that."

Considering both our hands were occupied, neither of us could talk to her. I could feel West's fingers through the thin barrier separating her two holes. Not like it was the first time we'd fucked a girl this way. We liked to share our women with each other.

"Please, I can't... it's too much."

I looked back at Francis and Drake who were watching, both their expressions dark with desire even though they'd already emptied themselves inside our girl.

When West was satisfied she was ready, he pulled his fingers from her and coated himself in lube. He placed a hand on her back and shifted closer to her. Her strangled cry of pleasure mixed with pain when he pressed against her and breached her tight entrance was music to our ears. I could feel him impale her slowly and fuck, if it didn't feel good. Made her so much fucking tighter.

"It hurts! Fuck, please!"

I held her still, letting West press deeper, his fingers rubbing her lower back as if to reassure her. The man might be a psychotic bastard, but he cared about Scarlett in his own way. He loved her even if he wouldn't admit it to the rest of us.

"So. Fucking. Tight." The words came out of his mouth all strained as if he was having a hard time holding back. "I want to tear her apart. You ready to make her scream, Pres?"

"Fuck yes."

He pulled out and pressed back in. It wasn't rough at first, but as his pace increased, I started moving with him. Scarlett cried out, jerking in her restraints as the two of us fucked her tight holes together. West pulled her up from my chest and held her against his, thrusting up into her, forcing her to take more of his cock. It gave me room to touch her body, running my hands up her stomach

and pinching her nipples between my fingers. I twisted them, making her cry out. She gasped and spluttered, her senses clearly overloaded by everything we were doing to her.

West wrapped a hand around her throat, squeezing her airway to show her who the fuck was in charge. He nodded at her headphones. I gave him a nod back. He slid them from her ears and tossed them away.

“Do you like that, hmm?” he murmured in her ear. “You’re saying no, but we don’t believe you. Dirty girls like to get used and fucking abused, don’t they, Scarlett?”

She whimpered, shifting against him.

“Answer me.”

“Yes,” she whispered. “I’m a dirty girl.”

“Tell us what you want.”

I twisted her nipples harder. She bucked, letting out a small cry of pain.

“Fuck me, please.”

West smiled at me over her shoulder. He wrapped his free arm around her waist for leverage before thrusting up, harder than before. The combined sensations of him fucking her, that tight pussy clenching around my cock as I fucked her were making me crazy.

“That’s not good enough, Scarlett. Tell us what you really want.”

“I want... I want you to make me scream,” she choked out. “Use me... come in me... fill me up with cock and cum.”

I groaned at her words while West’s smile grew devious.

“Such a bad girl.”

None of us said another word while West and I hammered into her. The only sounds were our skin slapping together and Scarlett’s moans. My free hand slid between us, my fingers landing on her clit. It took a few minutes before she detonated. Her scream echoed around the room. West grunted, fucking her ever harder and I just lay there, watching her tremble, her pussy clenching so hard around my cock, I thought I’d died and gone to heaven.

West fell over the edge next, pressing as deep as he could go before erupting inside her tight little hole. He held onto her, biting down on her shoulder to prevent any sounds from leaving his mouth. She let out a sharp cry of pain from his teeth. The sight of it set me off. I groaned, emptying myself in her

thoroughly used little pussy.

Scarlett was limp when we all came down from mutual highs. She'd been used every way she could be. While we'd not introduced her to our darker desires, we'd certainly shown her what it could be like to get fucked by the four of us.

West pulled out of her before lifting her off me so I could move out from under her. He settled Scarlett down on the bed. She lay there, her breathing shallow and her hands still tied to the bed. Francis and Drake had got up off the sofa and came closer. The four of us watched her as she fell asleep, clearly worn out from our fucking session.

"Well, that was quite the adventure," I said. "Now what?"

"We clean her up and take her home," Francis said.

"Looks like we have a volunteer for that then," I said, slapping his back.

He gave me a dark look but didn't say a word.

West looked at us for a moment before he walked out of the room, not even bothering to pick up his clothes. It was better to leave him to deal with whatever shit was going through his head.

"We'll handle her," Drake said. "You can go after that one." He waved at the door.

"Fuck off, I am not dealing with his shit tonight. Not after this."

"We should leave him alone," Francis said, moving away to tidy up the room. "Unless you want to get a fist in your face. I'm definitely not volunteering for that."

Drake gave us both a dark look, but he nodded.

"Fine, go get a damn cloth so I can sort her out."

I gave him a wink before snagging my clothes, pulling them on and wandering out to fulfil Drake's request. This evening had been more than I could have ever imagined. Who knew what we would deal with come Monday morning when Scarlett arrived back at work. All bets were off now we'd drugged and fucked her. We would have to wait and see what she would do next. And the thought of it excited me far more than it should have.

TWENTY EIGHT

SCARLETT

I jerked awake from the sound of birdsong. Opening my eyes, I found myself tucked up in my own bed in the flat I shared with Mason. The curtains were open along with the window and the light streamed in, hurting my eyes. I rubbed my face before shifting. My body ached with the movement.

I brought my hands away from my face and stared at my wrists. There were faint marks around them. I swallowed, the memories of the previous night flooding back to me in a rush. No wonder my body hurt. I'd been drugged and fucked by four men who had given me so much delirious ecstasy I'd passed out. The worst part was, I couldn't be sure who was who. Well, at least not until West had pulled the headphones off and taunted me while he fucked me from behind.

I covered my eyes with my hands, remembering where his dick had been. It fucking hurt at first, being impaled on two cocks, especially since I'd never done anal before. Hell, the first time I'd ever had sex was earlier this week. The pain of the experience had somehow morphed into pleasure. And I'd been utterly lost in what they were doing to me.

I'd fallen headfirst into the deep, dark abyss, welcoming the depravity lying in wait at the bottom.

I dropped my hands and sat up. How did I get home and into my own bed? Did they bring me here? How did they even get in?

Looking around, I found the clothes I'd been wearing neatly folded on the chest of drawers, along with my bag sitting next to it. My keys had been in there. I stared down at myself. They'd dressed me in pyjamas.

I sat there, absolutely dumbfounded. Given the way they'd handled me last

night, the fact they'd brought me back here and dressed me was beyond my comprehension. There was no way this was West. The fucker didn't have a tender bone in his body. The only one of them who I could envision taking any care over my wellbeing was Francis. I might not know him very well, but he appeared to be kinder than the others.

Well, if he had been the one who jammed his cock down my throat and painted my damn chin with his cum, then perhaps not.

Did it even matter? I was home now. The problem was, I felt kind of used. They hadn't even bothered to talk to me afterwards. I'd fallen asleep, but they could have woken me up. They could have said something rather than drugging me, fucking me and putting me in my own bed to sleep it off. What the hell was their game? Why would they even do this to me in the first place? It made no sense. None of it did. The whole thing confused me. Why had they decided to fuck with me? It made me feel like they knew something I didn't. They had reasons for their behaviour I wasn't privy to. And it made them even more dangerous than I'd anticipated.

I got out of bed, taking tentative steps towards my chest of drawers. My body ached with the movement. I checked through my bag. Nothing was missing. Knowing one or more of them had been in my room and gone through my things made me uneasy. I didn't know what they wanted with me. Well, other than they clearly wanted to defile me in ways I could barely begin to comprehend.

How on earth would I face them on Monday? I'd have to pull myself together and deal with it. My mission here was too important for me to run away and hide. No matter how uncomfortable I felt about what they'd done, I had to stay the course.

First things first, I needed a shower. No way I wanted to walk around today still smelling of them even though they'd cleaned me up while I'd been passed out. I grabbed my robe and a towel before dashing into the bathroom. The hot water soothed my aching muscles.

When I stepped out, I looked at myself in the mirror. One of my nipples was darker than the other like it'd been bruised. They'd been rather insistent on the whole biting thing last night. The marks on my wrists were still there. Long sleeves were a must until those faded. Couldn't have Mason asking me questions

about them. I didn't want to tell him what happened last night. He would lose his shit over it. To be honest, the whole thing made me want to do the same, but I couldn't afford to fall apart.

I dried myself off, pulled on some comfy clothes along with a hoodie to hide the marks on my wrists, and went out into the kitchen to find Mason. He wasn't in there nor in the living room and when I checked his bedroom, I found his bed neatly made. Made me wonder where he'd got to. Padding back out into the kitchen, I made myself some tea and cereal, taking a seat at the table to eat.

A few minutes later, the sound of the front door opening rang through the flat. I barely had time to swallow when Mason walked in, looking a little dishevelled. His brown hair was messy and his clothes were rumpled.

"What's this?" I asked. "You a dirty stop-out or something?"

He gave me a dark look and went over to the kettle, flipping it on.

"Or something," he muttered.

"Where you been?"

If he'd been out all night, I could use it to my advantage. He might not ask about what I'd done last night.

"Nowhere."

The way he said it told me it was not open for discussion. I frowned. It's not like I knew a lot about Mason's life outside of his work for my father, but I thought we were friends. It wasn't like him to be so cagey or out of sorts.

"Did you come home last night?"

He turned and gave me a look.

"Shouldn't you know the answer? You were here, right?"

I swallowed, my words getting stuck in my throat, having not expected him to turn it around on me.

"I told you I was staying late at work."

He raised an eyebrow.

"What time did you get in?"

I shrugged and looked at my mug.

"Guess it was like after ten."

In all honesty, I had no fucking clue what time it had been. I hadn't been conscious.

"They should not be keeping you that late. Did you even eat?"

“Of course, I did, Mase, they’re not completely heartless.”

Though, after last night, I was beginning to wonder if they weren’t the most psychotic men I’d ever met. They’d acted one way with me in the office, and a completely different way when they’d had me alone in their penthouse. Well, except for West. He made his intentions towards me very clear. He didn’t care about me, but he saw me as his and wanted to use my body for his pleasure.

Mason narrowed his eyes.

“Not heartless? You do remember why we’re here, Scar, right? Those men are not right in the head. Not after what they did as teenagers, and I dread to think what they’ve done since.”

I flinched, not wanting the ugly reminders of the past. The one I’d only heard about and not seen with my own eyes. It was the reason I was here, however, being lectured over it had got old fast. I wanted to see for myself who the Horsemen were and why everyone seemed to fear them.

“As if you’d ever let me forget,” I muttered.

I wasn’t exactly scared of Prescott, West, Francis, and Drake. They were an enigma I hadn’t yet worked out. It didn’t help that I was drawn to them. There was a sense of familiarity between us, which was fucking crazy, but I felt it all the same. I wanted to find out why they’d taken me last night. Why they’d decided to use me for sex.

“I’m worried about your safety, Scar.”

“Safety? Are you kidding me? If you cared so much about my safety, I wouldn’t be here.”

He gave me a wounded look.

“You know I don’t have a choice.”

I went back to my food, wanting this conversation to be over. It was the very last thing I needed, Mason giving me a hard time. He had no clue what I’d been subjected to by them. And how much I’d liked it when I shouldn’t have.

“Scar...”

“Don’t, Mason. I don’t want to hear it.”

“I’m sorry.”

I scoffed.

“Yeah, so sorry you came home and started on at me when you’re the one who spent the night out doing god knows fucking what, huh? You don’t get to

give me shit. I'm an adult, I don't need you babysitting me."

I shoved my chair back, picked up my mug, and stormed out of the kitchen, not caring if he followed me or not. My feet carried me into the living room. I sat on the sofa, pulled a blanket over me and switched on the TV, cuddling the mug to my chest as I flipped through the channels. For a moment, I wished they hadn't brought me home. Right now, I'd much rather be dealing with my four psycho, but attractive as hell, bosses than Mason. And that was too fucked up for words. At least I knew I shouldn't trust them nor like them. With Mason, I didn't know how to feel. I loved him like a brother, but his behaviour always made it very clear where his loyalties lay, and they weren't with me. They were with my parents and their insane schemes. Their damn revenge plot they'd dragged me into... well, more like blackmailing me into going along with. Dangling freedom over my head and making me jump way too high to catch it.

"Scarlett."

I didn't look at Mason, even though I knew he was standing in the doorway.

"Go away."

"I really am sorry. I shouldn't have had a go at you."

My eyes fixed on the screen, ignoring his presence because his apologies were meaningless to me. They didn't make a difference. Didn't change a fucking thing.

"I was with a girl last night."

"Well, good for you."

"Scar, please, I'm trying here."

"What do you want me to say, Mase? You aren't making my life any easier, you know."

He sighed. It wasn't his fault I'd had a night of it, but he'd given me a hard time for no reason.

"I just... I hate that you have to be near them. I hate it so much."

I looked at him then, not understanding why he sounded so distressed.

"It's not like I enjoy it either." *Liar. You want them. You crave what they give you.*

I hated my brain telling me things I didn't want to hear or admit to.

Mason came into the room and sat down next to me. He took the mug from my hands and placed it on the coffee table. Then he wrapped them in his own hands.

“You think you have to get them to want you, but you don’t. I... I don’t want you doing anything with them like that.”

I’d only ever hinted at getting the Horsemen to want me so I could manipulate them. I’d not outright told him it was my plan. Somehow, they’d turned the tables on me, but I wasn’t going to think about that. Not when Mason was staring at me with a look I’d never seen on his face before.

“It makes me sick to think of them touching you.”

“They haven’t.”

The lie didn’t stick on my tongue. I’d said it out of self-preservation. For some reason, I knew telling Mason the truth would not end well for me.

“But what if they do?”

“I’ll deal with it. You heard Dad. He said by whatever means.”

“Fuck what Stuart said, Scar. You do not have to use your body to get them to trust you.”

Too late. Way too fucking late.

I tried to pull my hands from his grasp, but he held them tighter.

“Please, find another way, okay? You’re smart. You’ll think of something.”

“I don’t think I can.”

He shook his head, his eyes growing pained.

“You can... just try, please... for me.”

The last part came out all shaky as if he was trying to confess something to me. A thing I didn’t want to think about or even consider. And I couldn’t promise him I would try. There was no retracing my steps. The wheels had already been set in motion. If the only way to get the Four Horsemen to let me in was to allow them to use my body any way they wanted, I’d do it in a fucking heartbeat. As messed up as it sounded, after last night I couldn’t deny how much I liked it. How much I wanted it. How I needed it all, even though I shouldn’t.

“This is how it has to be. It’s my way in. You have to understand, I need this. I need my freedom. I can’t live another day locked up on their estate. It almost killed me, Mason. I was drowning. I can’t do it again.”

His expression fell and he let go of my hands, only to wrap me up in his arms. I gritted my teeth as my bruised nipple rubbed against his chest. Damn the Horsemen for their biting.

“I know... fuck, I know, Scar. I’m so sorry. You don’t have to go back. I promise. Whatever it takes, I won’t let them lock you up again.”

I wanted to cry. I bit the inside of my cheek to keep my emotions at bay. Instead, I let Mason hold me, all the while wishing I could be holding a different man... if I was honest, four different men. And I realised I hadn’t had a nightmare last night. I hadn’t dreamed of the past, nor woken up covered in sweat.

I couldn’t help wondering if it had something to do with the Horsemen and why they felt so familiar to me. What it all meant and whether the reason I kept remembering things from the past was because of them, even though I had no clue why it would be that way. Nothing about my life had made any sense since I’d come here. And I wished more than anything I could remember what happened all those years ago before my accident had changed my life for good.

TWENTY NINE

PRESCOTT

Monday rolled around, leaving us all curious about Scarlett's next moves. Whether she'd turn up today after what we'd done on Friday night. Well, the only person who didn't seem to care was West, but he'd spent the weekend in a drug-induced haze. The Scarlett thing had fucked him up way worse than he was willing to let on. Sharing had become like second nature to us, but she was different. Scarlett was the only woman any of us had ever felt connected to. The only one we'd allowed in. She was ours on a fundamental level. It was fucking destiny.

I heard my office door close and the lock flip. Looking up, I found a rather determined Scarlett striding towards me.

"To what do I owe this pleasure, sweetness?"

"Don't you sweetness me. I have a bone to pick with you."

I remained expressionless, but inside I was a mess of emotions. The way her eyes flashed and the anger in her voice brought back memories of the old Scarlett. The girl she'd been before the accident. The one who stood up for herself and never backed down from a challenge.

"What am I going to do with you, Pres?"

I shrugged and gave her a wink.

"Go along with my batshit crazy idea, anyway?"

She shoved my arm and gave me a look.

"You're lucky I care about you enough not to let you do a stupid thing alone."

I wrapped my arm around her shoulder.

"You care? How sweet."

She grinned and spun away from me.

“The sweetest damn thing you’ll never taste.”

The memory dissipated as Scarlett rounded my desk and came to a standstill by my chair. I turned to face her. Those hazel-green eyes blazed with fury, but there was something else in them. Trepidation mixed with desire. It made me smile. She couldn’t hide it. We knew each other on an intimate level now, after all.

“Well, spit it out then. What did I do to earn your ire? I assume you’re pissed at me for something.”

To my surprise, she stepped between my spread legs, placed her hands on the arms of the chair, and leant closer.

“You know exactly why.”

“I don’t think I do.”

“I am not in the mood for games. You and the rest of them owe me an explanation.”

I shifted in my seat. Her closeness combined with the memory of her coming over my cock had it thickening. Not to mention her smell. Cinnamon. Fuck. I loved the way she smelt.

“We do? What for?”

She lifted a hand and stroked it down my tie. Then she gripped it in her small fist.

“For what you did to me.”

“And what was that?”

Her fist around my tie tightened. She pulled me towards her until our faces were inches apart. I wasn’t afraid of what she’d do, merely curious.

“Do not play dumb, Prescott.” Her eyes flicked down to my mouth and back up. “You’re going to tell me why and who did what to me.”

“Oh, I am, am I?”

“Yes.”

I reached up and tickled the inside of her wrist where she was holding my tie. She shivered at the simple touch, her eyes growing darker.

“And what will you give me in return for the information you’re seeking?”

Oh, but the fire in her eyes at my question had me biting my lip. If I had less self-restraint, I would pull her closer and kiss the living shit out of that mouth of hers. But no, she didn’t yet deserve the pleasure of my lips on hers. I only gave

kisses to women as a reward for good behaviour.

“You expect me to give you something?”

My fingers left her wrist and stroked her jaw instead.

“Yes, sweetness. I don’t give things away for free.”

Her eyes narrowed.

“What do you want?”

I had the advantage here. If she desired the information that badly, she’d do as I asked and deal with it.

“Pull up your skirt, sit on my desk and spread your legs.”

The door was locked. No danger of anyone walking in on us. Wouldn’t matter if one of the guys did, but I didn’t want Tonya getting an eyeful. The bitch would likely give me shit over it and get in a mood. No doubt she craved my dick. I wouldn’t give her a seeing to, even if she was the last woman alive. Fuck that. Besides, I was no longer interested in what was between other women’s legs. Not when the one in front of me had such a delectable little pussy. One I could spend forever with.

“What?”

“You heard me.” My fingers curled around her jaw. “If you want me to answer your questions, you’ll do exactly as I tell you.”

For a long moment, she merely stared at me. The range of emotions flickering across her face gave away her conflicted feelings. She let go of my tie and smoothed it down before straightening, forcing me to drop my hand from her face. Scarlett took a deep breath, then tugged on her skirt, pulling it up slowly as if to tease me. My dick was already straining against my zipper.

“Take those off before you sit down.”

I pointed at the lacy little knickers she’d revealed. She clenched her jaw but said nothing, merely tugged them down, bent over and picked them up. She set them on my desk before she hopped up on it, her bare behind pressing against the glass. I turned my chair so I could face her. Her legs were squeezed together as if she didn’t want to open them and let me see.

“Show me your pussy, Scarlett.”

It took her a second to do as I asked, spreading her legs and showing me the pussy I’d watched my friends fuck on Friday. The one I’d had around my cock while West fucked her tight little arse. It was as fucking sweet as I remembered.

She gave me a look as if to say what next. Her compliance was intoxicating. Right now, she would do anything for me to get what she wanted.

“I want you to slide your fingers between your lips and show me how wet you are.”

Her hand lifted from the desk and she used two fingers to spread her pussy for me. I moved closer and stared at her arousal glistening in the light streaming in through the windows.

“You can’t hide it, can you?” I murmured. “You like being told what to do.”

“Fuck you.”

I smiled.

“Mmm, as much as I’d love that, it’s not what we’re here for. Fuck yourself on your fingers.”

The mutinous look she gave me had me biting my lip again. She slid her fingers lower and impaled herself on them. My mouth watered at the sight of her thrusting them in and out of herself. She let out a pant a moment later. No matter how she tried to hide it, Scarlett wanted to be on display for me. She wanted to be told exactly what to do, when and how.

“You can do better than that. Show me how you liked to be fucked.”

Her fingers worked faster. I leant closer, my hands landing on either side of her on the desk. I could smell her arousal, and it almost did me in. My tongue wanted to taste her essence from the source. My primal instincts flared, wanting to pin her down and take my little lamb as she offered herself up to me.

Fuck, how I want to chase her down and fuck her like an animal until she’s a sobbing wreck.

It would be the sweetest damn hunt I’d ever had in my life.

A moan left Scarlett’s lips. My restraint was shot to pieces at the sound. As her fingers moved out of her pussy, I dove in and licked them. I groaned, my hands landing on her spread thighs, gripping them tightly. My tongue sought out her clit, running over the hardened bud.

“Prescott,” she whimpered, continuing to fuck herself.

I didn’t get to hear her moan my name on Friday. This was more than I could fucking take. One of my hands left her thighs. I gripped her wrist, pulling it from her pussy. I replaced her fingers with my own, shoving them deep and making her buck in my grasp. My tongue bathed her clit. She panted, her hand

landing on my head and digging into my hair. It only spurred me on, made me want to give her more.

“Sweetness,” I groaned against her clit. “You’re so fucking delectable.”

I’d never tasted a better pussy in my life. Never wanted a woman this much. I was almost desperate to have her. I didn’t have to share her with the others right now. Her moans and pants were just for me. All for fucking me. I wanted to drown in Scarlett’s pussy and never come up for air. This girl I’d known my whole life. She might not know me right now, but we were fucking bound. The five of us were essential to each other. I couldn’t live without her for another ten years. Not now that I’d had her like this.

It didn’t matter that she was here to destroy us. All that mattered was having her back. Having her here with me where I could feel her, see her, and be near her.

“Don’t stop,” she cried, her nails scraping across my scalp. “Please.”

I thrust my fingers harder. This Monday morning was proving to be one of the best of my life. Usually, I fucking hated coming down for work after the weekend, but this... I could get used to this.

“Fuck! Pres... oh fuck.”

She shuddered, her body clenching around my fingers with her climax. I was lost in it. In her calling me Pres. In the memory of the way she’d been when we were younger. All of it crashed down on me. I couldn’t help it. I was utterly fucked for Scarlett.

I’ve missed you.

But there was no way I could reveal that shit to her. No way I could let on how I felt about our girl. I had to get my shit together and bury it. There was no room for emotions when it came to Scarlett.

I pulled my fingers from her pussy and rose to my feet. She was still panting, her eyes closed. I grabbed her face with one hand. With the other, I shoved my fingers in her mouth, the ones coated with her cum. I watched her eyes snap open and widen.

“Suck them.”

Her tongue curled around my fingers, tasting herself on them. I brought my face to her ear, my breathing laboured. I couldn’t hide how turned on I was. My dick was fucking painful with the way it ached to be inside her.

“Do you want me, sweetness?” I pressed my fingers deeper, wanting to make her gag on them. “Want me to fuck you so good, you forget your own name?”

She moaned around my fingers.

“Mmm, my little lamb, you’re such a good girl.”

I kissed her ear before shoving my tongue in it. She whimpered around my fingers when they hit the back of her throat.

“Get my cock out. Now.”

Her hands went to my belt, unbuckling it. She unbuttoned and unzipped me next, her hands fumbling in her desperation to do as I told her. My fingers went deeper and she gagged on them. The sound was fucking everything.

The moment she had me free, she was guiding it to her pussy without being told. My hips shunted forward, shoving my cock deep into her pussy in one thrust. She gasped around my fingers, her spit dribbling out of her mouth as she continued to gag on them. Her fingers curled around my waist, pulling me closer so our bodies were almost flush with each other.

“You’re so wet, you’re soaking my dick. This is what you wanted, isn’t it? You came in here, all riled up because you wanted to get *fucked*. You wanted me to punish your sweet little pussy with pleasure.”

I pulled back and thrust deep, eliciting more moans and gags from her. I fucked her mouth with my fingers in time with my cock in her pussy. She had no idea how much I wanted to wreck her. I wanted her makeup running, her lipstick smeared all over her face. There was no hotter sight than a woman ruined after getting railed. She’d been a mess on Friday, cum running down her face and leaking from her well-used holes.

Her hands slid from my waist and under my clothes. She gripped my behind, her nails digging into my skin. I grunted in her ear, loving the pain they caused. Wanting her to drag her nails down my back while I took her with savage brutality after I’d chased her down.

You can make her your prey and wreck your woman with your cock soon.

“You want the truth, hmm?”

She nodded and whimpered around my fingers.

“We’re not nice men, Scarlett, but you already knew that, didn’t you? When we want something, we take it. And you just happen to be our latest possession. We own you.”

It was a partial truth. As if I was ever going to tell her the real reason. The others would crucify me.

“Now, my little lamb, it’s time for you to come again, and maybe I’ll tell you whose dick you took on Friday. Be a good girl and rub that clit for me.”

There was no point denying it. She knew it was us. We’d fucked her so good, she’d come multiple times and passed out on us.

She released my behind and dug her fingers between us, stroking herself. I punished her sweet pussy and mouth with my cock and fingers, driving her ever higher. When she snapped, she choked around my fingers, her spit running down her chin. Her climax set me off. I groaned in her ear, emptying myself in her. There was nothing like fucking a woman bare, coating her insides with cum and watching it spill out afterwards.

We’d all seen the scars on our woman on Friday. We knew what happened to her. We knew everything. There was no danger of us knocking her up. Seeing the evidence of her accident had made my chest burn, but I’d shoved it away. The pain of that night was a memory I’d rather forget.

Scarlett whimpered when I pulled my fingers from her mouth. She slumped against my body, pressing her face into my neck and wrapping her arms around me. I didn’t know what to do or say. The gesture was entirely unexpected.

“Please,” she whispered against my skin. “Please... hold me, Pres.”

The desperate note to her voice made a long-dormant part of me expand in my chest. The one I’d buried after she disappeared. I held her against me despite knowing it would be a mistake to be remotely soft with her. I stroked her hair, trying to soothe her after what I’d done to her.

“Shh, I’ve got you, sweetness.”

What the fuck? Who are you right now?

“Will you tell me... please?”

“Are you sure you want to know?”

She nodded into my neck, keeping her face buried in it.

“Francis, Drake, me, then West.”

For a moment she said nothing, then she clutched me tighter as if she never wanted to leave my embrace.

“Thank you.”

With her words, a small crack appeared in the shell around my heart. And I

knew it meant one thing and one thing alone.
The crack spelt disaster.

THIRTY

FRANCIS

The office had been quiet yesterday. I had seen no one but Drake. When I asked him, he assured me Scarlett was here and didn't appear to be annoyed. If anything, she was acting like nothing untoward had happened. The knowledge of that didn't sit well with me. The Scarlett I'd known ten years ago didn't take anything lying down. Had she changed that much or was I just trying to see glimpses of the girl I'd once known like the back of my hand?

Later on, when we were upstairs, Prescott had been oddly quiet. Drake asked him what the fuck was up with him. Prescott merely shrugged and went back to his phone. His behaviour made me suspicious, but if he wasn't going to answer Drake, he certainly wasn't going to talk to me.

Everything about Prescott being weird and Scarlett's lack of reaction to what we'd done made me uneasy. Probably why I'd made her tea as an excuse to talk to her. I wanted to see for myself how she was dealing with what we did. The whole tag-teaming thing had been my idea after all, along with the blindfolding, binding her wrists and restricting her hearing.

Her door was wide open when I approached. Scarlett sat behind her desk, her eyes intent on her screen. She didn't immediately look up when I walked in. When she did as I stood in front of her desk and set the mug down, her eyes widened.

The last time I'd seen her was when I tucked her up in her own bed on Friday night. It had been me who'd taken her to her flat after Prescott retrieved her things from her office. Having her keys made it easy for me to carry her in from the car. It'd been late so there weren't many people milling around to see me with her cradled in my arms.

When I got her inside, I'd found her bedroom and set her on the bed. It didn't feel right to leave her naked. We'd wrapped her up in a blanket to take her home. I folded her clothes, placed them and her bag on her chest of drawers before rooting around in them to find her pyjamas. I could imagine what the others would say about me dressing her and tucking her up in bed, but I didn't care. I had an urge to take care of her. To protect her. To keep her safe.

It was stupid. I couldn't save her from any of this shit. Fuck, I fully participated in it. I wanted it. But seeing her bare before us and the evidence of her accident almost fucking killed me. The way she'd told me to stop touching one of the scars on her abdomen was soul-destroying. Having to shove down my misgivings took some effort because it made me sick. Because we were all responsible for what happened to Scarlett that night.

There was no point in thinking about how if we'd made smarter choices things could have been different. It wouldn't bring any of us peace. It only led down a dark path I'd already travelled along before. One I was stuck on. We were all glued to it. Me, Drake, Prescott and West. None of us could deviate from it. It was all or nothing.

"Is that for me?" Scarlett asked, her voice sounding shy and hushed.

I nodded, not yet trusting myself to speak.

"Thank you, Francis."

My heart thumped at her using my name. I'd missed the sound of it on her lips.

"You're welcome."

She gave me a smile and picked up the mug, bringing it to her lips. Her eyes glinted over the rim as she sipped at it. I glanced over at her door before deciding I didn't want to leave. Her presence was equally soothing and damning.

"Are you okay? Did you want something else?" she asked, cocking her head to the side as she put the mug on a coaster.

Why is she being so nice? I don't like this.

I'd seen a few sides to Scarlett since she'd returned to us, but this one... it didn't feel *her*.

A part of me was terrified about opening up to Scarlett. The only women I'd ever cared about I'd fucked up with. The first being Scarlett herself, who I'd only ever seen as a friend until now, and the second... Chelsea. What I did to

her I couldn't take back. I was usually so fucking careful, but that day, I'd been distracted. And the cause of the distraction happened to be in front of me. The knowledge we were almost at the point where we could get her back had me reeling. Ten years of being without the woman who belonged to us was a nightmare I thought would never end. Chelsea had suffered for my lack of concentration. And West's solution to the problem hadn't helped either.

"I'm... fine."

"You sure? You don't look fine."

I frowned. Were my emotions displayed all over my face? I wanted to laugh it off but found myself unable to crack a smile.

"No, I'm good." I waved a hand at her. "What about you? I didn't see you yesterday."

"I'm okay. Drake kept me busy, so I didn't have time for chitchat."

She nibbled on her bottom lip, which told me that was a lie.

"Did he? Bit of a taskmaster that one."

She eyed the open doorway as if making sure no one was lurking.

"I'm kind of intimidated by him if I'm honest."

I almost snorted. Drake's aloof nature most likely. He wasn't known for opening up to anyone. Instead, people told him their secrets. He gave off that locked fortress vibe, making it easy for them to think they could trust him.

"He is rather stoic."

She shook her head.

"It's not that. More the 'if you fuck with me, I'll ruin you' vibe he gives off. I dread to think what would happen if I did something he didn't like."

I backed away towards her door and closed it. Then I wandered back over to her desk, but this time I walked around to her side of it. Leaning against it, I placed my hands at my sides, gripping the edge.

"I don't suggest you try his patience, but he's not so bad when you get to know him."

She looked up at me. Flashes of Friday night appeared in my brain. Particularly the part where I'd pulled my dick out her mouth and cum had run down her chin. The next time that happened, I wanted to see her eyes staring up at me like they were now. Wanted to see her full expression.

"No? How long have you known him?"

“Drake? Since we were babies. Our mothers were best friends.”

That was probably safe enough to tell her. If I went into any more detail, it would be a mistake. I might want Scarlett to remember us, but it didn't serve our purposes. We were keeping her in the dark for good reason. There would be a massive fallout if she discovered our secrets too soon.

“That long? Wow... and the others?”

I shrugged.

“We met in primary school.”

“You've been friends a long time. I don't even remember that far back.”

I nodded, wanting to reach out and touch her. The sadness in her eyes felt like someone had dug a knife in my chest.

“No?”

She shook her head.

“I have retrograde amnesia... they don't know if my memories will ever return.”

It felt strange to have a normal conversation with her after we'd been intimate, but she didn't appear to want to acknowledge the events of Friday night. And for her to admit her condition so readily to me? It was unexpected.

“I'm sorry. Can't be easy for you.”

She gave me a smile.

“No... that's why...” she faltered and looked away. “Why I have so many scars... because... because I had an accident.”

The air refused to leave my lungs, my chest constricting at her words.

“I know you saw them,” she continued, her voice quiet. “We don't have to pretend it didn't happen.”

I couldn't help reaching out then, my hand catching her chin and turning her face back towards me. Her expression made me stroke my thumb across her jaw. Scarlett looked like a little lost girl in a world she didn't understand. I couldn't allow myself to get sucked into her beguiling gaze no matter how much I wanted to take away the pain lingering there. She wasn't innocent. She wasn't on our side. And I certainly couldn't forget the fact she was here to tear us apart.

“No one here is pretending anything of the sort,” I murmured.

I wasn't going to insult her intelligence. Not after West had taken her headphones off and made it very clear who had a hold of her.

“Why did none of you kiss me?”

My hand fell from her face, her question startling me.

“What?”

“None of you kissed me. I don’t know what it feels like to be kissed and I guess I was kind of disappointed.”

I had no fucking clue how to answer her. We weren’t the type to do the whole kissing thing. And Friday had not been about anything other than using her body for pleasure. To mess with her head. But the Scarlett I saw in front of me didn’t seem particularly put out by what we’d done to her. Was this how she thought she could manipulate me? Or did she genuinely want to experience a kiss? I hated not knowing. Hated navigating this path when her intentions weren’t clear.

“Are you asking me to kiss you?”

I figured being direct was the best option.

“No.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“No? Then why bring it up?”

She blinked.

“Curiosity.”

“Did no one tell you curiosity killed the cat, Scarlett?”

She licked her bottom lip.

“I guess not.”

Her tongue peeking out was all I could concentrate on. Fuck. I wanted to taste her. And I didn’t believe her. Scarlett wouldn’t have brought it up if she didn’t want to experience it.

Leaning down, I gripped her wrist and pulled her up out of her chair. I straightened and backed her towards the shelves behind her desk. Before she knew what was happening, I pinned her wrists above her with one of my own against the shelves. Scarlett’s eyes snapped to mine as I leant into her, pressing my leg between hers.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to kiss you?”

She sucked in a breath, her lips parting, but no sound came out. I shifted closer, our breaths mingling together, lips inches apart, ready and waiting to taste each other.

“If you want something, you merely need to ask, Scarlett,” I whispered. “I’m in a giving mood.”

My mouth dusted over hers, waiting for her response. She shuddered against me. I expected her to try to escape my hold, but she didn’t. My eyes flicked up to where I held her wrists. I could imagine ropes around them, intricate knots running down her arms, keeping her bound and unable to move. She’d hang there, suspended in the air while I knelt at her feet and feasted on her essence.

“You want to kiss me?” Her mouth formed the words over mine, her lips brushing against my skin.

“There are many things I want to do to you, but none of them are appropriate at work.”

She inhaled, almost as if she was breathing me in.

“You smell of apples and cinnamon.”

I eyed her, wondering why she’d brought that up. They had been Scarlett’s favourite scents when she was younger. To remind me of her, I had my cologne specially commissioned. It was my way of staying connected to the girl I’d grown up with. Did she retain her tastes even after her accident? I couldn’t think of any other reason she’d have commented on it.

“I like it,” she whispered.

Then she kissed me. The press of her mouth against mine awakened all my senses. My free hand went to her face, fingers gliding along her soft skin. I tipped her head to gain a better angle. There was a sense of clumsiness to the way she kissed me like it was alien to her. To ease her into it, I took control, dominating her mouth with mine. The moan leaving her lips a minute later had me gripping her tighter. Fuck, did I want more. Her mere presence sent me into a tailspin, desire leaking from my pores and infusing with hers.

I parted her lips with my tongue, tasting her with practised care even though I wanted to kiss this woman with savage brutality and drown her. Scarlett was the light in the darkness. A beacon shining so fucking bright. I watched her closed eyes and listened to her make these adorable noises of pleasure. There was no more beautiful sight than her losing herself in me.

Her tongue tangled with mine in a mess, but I didn’t care. Scarlett tasted sweet. She was compliant, her body rocking into mine, almost as if she was trying to grind herself on my leg. The one situated between hers. It made me

smile with how easily I could make her give in. Make her want more. Fill her with a need she couldn't contain.

I sucked her tongue into my mouth, making her eyes flick open. She stared at me, the ring of hazel and green almost invisible with her blown pupils. Releasing her tongue, I nibbled on her bottom lip, drawing a gasp from her.

"Did I disappoint you further?" I murmured, my teeth making indents on her lip.

"No," she whispered back.

"Good."

I dove back in, taking her mouth without any sort of restraint. She could do nothing but give in and let me wring every ounce of pleasure from her lips. The two of us were out of breath when we finally drew apart.

"Your scars make you who you are, Scarlett, and who you are is perfect. Never forget that."

I kissed her cheek then released her and backed away towards the door. Her eyes tracked my movements as she dropped her arms to her sides like she couldn't keep them off me. I opened the door and was about to step out when her voice brought me up short.

"Thank you."

"For what?"

"Showing me what a real kiss should feel like."

I bit my lip but said no more. We stared at each other for a long moment before I strolled out.

As I walked down the hallway back to my office, I rubbed my bottom lip with my thumb. That had been some fucking kiss. I didn't know where it had come from nor why I'd allowed it, but I didn't regret it. Getting to taste her was in some ways far sweeter than fucking her with the others on Friday. It was just me and her in that moment. It made me feel like we were in a little bubble of our own, where the outside world and all the shit that came with it didn't exist.

I knew I couldn't lose my damn head to the woman but fuck it. If we were going to burn the world down, then I might as well enjoy myself in the process. Sharing a kiss with Scarlett wasn't going to derail our plans. And so fucking what if I indulged myself a few more times after this. She was ours. And I wasn't going to be the one to let that girl forget it.

THIRTY ONE

DRAKE

I watched Scarlett move towards my desk, her hands clutching the mug she was carrying and her cheeks holding a slight flush to them. My eyes roamed over her face, taking in the swollen nature of her bottom lip.

Had she been nibbling on it?

Or had someone else?

I shoved the fleeting thought away as she set the mug down on my desk. I looked at my watch. Exactly on time. The way she averted her eyes had me wondering if she feared me. I didn't want to make her afraid. No, I wanted her to obey. And after Friday night, I knew she could if she was so inclined.

Thoughts of her coming over my cock twice had it rising to attention. I clenched my jaw and tried not to shift in my seat. The woman had an effect on me I didn't appreciate. The desire coursing through me was evidence of her strange power over me. Her mere presence made it difficult for me to think about anything else other than holding her down on my desk. Of making her do exactly what I wanted. Of punishing her, making her skin break out in welts. Making her bleed for me.

The others gave me shit about my fascination with blood and death. It was a rather fucked up thing to be turned on by, but I wasn't normal by any stretch of the imagination. None of us were. Still, the others had more palatable kinks. It'd always been a challenge finding a woman who wouldn't balk at the thought of blood mixed with sex, let alone be willing to indulge me.

“Can I get you anything else?”

Scarlett's eyes were still averted. She fidgeted, her fingers gripping her skirt.

“Can you pick me up lunch today? I don't have time to go upstairs.”

This event we were going to on Thursday evening was taking up far too much of my time. Yes, I was pleased I'd been asked to open this business awards ceremony, but it was a pain in the arse at the same time. It was some fancy black-tie event with cocktails, canapes, a band and dancing. West complained last night when I told him there was no excuse for him not to attend. After we'd announced our new employment scheme, we'd been nominated for an award in the financial services, banking and insurance category. Prescott had organised all that shit, but they wanted the opening speech from me, the CEO. The one who they thought ran the company. In reality, the four of us did so equally, all playing to our strengths.

"Of course, the usual?"

I gave her a nod and picked up my mug.

"Did you get the tuxes back from the dry cleaners yet?"

"They said they'd arrive tomorrow morning."

I sipped my coffee.

"Good."

Setting my mug down, I opened my drawer and pulled out an invitation. Scarlett watched me slide it across the desk towards her.

"I spoke to the others and we all agreed you should attend with us."

Her eyes scanned over the invite.

"Is it mandatory? Like a work thing?"

I didn't want her getting out of it even though I didn't strictly need her to come with us.

"Yes. I need you there."

She gave me a nod but didn't meet my eyes.

"Okay... it's black-tie, right?"

"Mmm. It won't all be work. You're welcome to enjoy yourself too."

I couldn't deny I was looking forward to seeing Scarlett in a dress. Would she wear her hair up? No doubt it would please West if she did. He had a thing about necks. And I had a thing about women kneeling for me. The thought of her doing so with her beautiful wavy hair spilling down her back waiting for my command had me clenching my fist. I shook it out the next moment.

Scarlett picked up the invite and scanned it before giving me a nod.

"Anything else?"

I breathed out through my teeth, jaw clenching because I wanted to hear her at least say my name or call me something else. Francis had mentioned she'd joked to him about the 'sir' business. And fuck, if I didn't want her saying it to me. Obeying me. Being *mine*.

"Yes. Come here."

Her eyes flicked up to mine, apprehension in them. Scarlett had been content to ignore what happened on Friday, but I wasn't. While I might have retained my self-control, there was no doubt now I'd had her, I wanted the woman again. The need to touch her pounded in my veins, making me drunk off it.

"Now, Scarlett."

My little wisp.

She came around the desk with no further hesitation. She let out a yelp when I gripped her wrist and tugged her closer.

"Sit."

I released her and sat back, rubbing my hand over my lap to indicate where I wanted her. Her hazel-green eyes widened and she blinked.

"What?"

"Do I have to repeat myself?"

Scarlett swallowed, her eyes flicking between my lap and my eyes. I waited, knowing she would eventually do the right thing.

"Why?"

I didn't expect her to talk back. Scarlett had been a fiery little thing when she'd been a teenager, but every time we'd interacted now she was an adult, she'd deferred to me. It gave me a sick thrill to see the old Scarlett remained somewhere inside her. I wanted to rip it out of her. Have her disobey me only to punish her for it.

"My patience is wearing thin. Sit down."

There was a moment's hesitation before she finally conceded and perched herself on my lap as far away from me as she could possibly get. Her small act of defiance made me want to smile, but I refrained, keeping my face void of expression. She folded her hands in her lap and stared at me, waiting for me to speak.

My hand flicked up and I caught her chin, tugging her face closer to mine.

"You've been awfully quiet these past two days."

“You kept me busy,” she retorted.

“Don’t talk back to me, Scarlett, you won’t like the consequences if you do it again.”

Her mouth snapped shut and thinned. The woman was walking a fine line with me as it was. My free hand wrapped around her waist and pulled her body closer, seating her more firmly in my lap. She put her hands out to steady herself, her two palms landing on my chest. The touch had me gritting my teeth. This woman would be the fucking death of me if I wasn’t careful. I itched to run my hands over her body, underneath her clothes to feel that soft skin. To make her scream.

“Here’s what’s going to happen. You’re going to answer my questions with complete honesty. If you lie to me, I’ll know. If you hide anything from me, I’ll know.” I gripped her chin harder and ran my thumb over her still swollen bottom lip. “I won’t hesitate to deal with you in a manner I see fit if you decide to keep anything from me. I don’t like liars. They meet with the rough end of my form of justice.” My thumb slipped between her lips, stroking across the tip of her tongue. “Am I making myself understood?”

She nodded.

“I’m going to need verbal confirmation.”

“Yes, Drake.”

My chest tightened.

“Oh no, you don’t get to use my name when we’re alone. Not any longer.”

“What should I call you?” she whispered, her body trembling in my hold.

“I think you know.”

She swallowed and as she did, her tongue brushed over my thumb again as I hadn’t removed it from her lip.

“Yes... sir.”

Keeping my cool with her words took a considerable effort. It fed the darkest parts of me, taunting them to come out and play with her.

“Why is your lip swollen?”

Her eyes grew conflicted, but I didn’t allow her to respond.

“And what did you do to Prescott yesterday?”

“What makes you think I did something to him?”

Pulling my thumb from her mouth, I tightened my grip on her face further.

She winced, but I didn't care. She needed to learn a lesson.

"What did I just tell you?"

"Not to talk back to you."

The challenge in her eyes was like lighting the fuse to the detonation button on my temper. My fingers dug into her waist, the only sign of how her words affected me.

Breathe. Stay calm. Do not allow her to rattle you.

Having her in my lap didn't help matters at all. Her pert behind was far too close to my dick. Fuck. I wanted to rip her skirt off and plunge inside her. Punish her with cock so she'd know her damn place.

"This is not a game, nor will you like it if you continue to push me."

She pursed her lips. Fuck me. Had the others encountered her attitude? It shouldn't surprise me. Scarlett had never been one to let anyone walk all over her. She was strong as fuck. Our equal in every sense of the word. And yet, I wanted to fuck that attitude out of her so damn bad, I could barely think straight.

"Francis kissed me."

I raised my eyebrow.

"Just now?"

"Yes. He brought me tea, we talked and... I may have asked him to kiss me in a roundabout way."

I rubbed her bottom lip again.

"Why did you want him to kiss you?"

Her cheeks flushed in the most adorable fucking way.

"I wanted to experience a kiss. Prescott—"

She looked away, closing her mouth.

"Prescott what, Scarlett?"

"He didn't kiss me yesterday," she whispered, still not meeting my eyes.

I had a feeling the reason Prescott was quiet had something to do with her. Getting answers out of him was like pulling teeth. Better to go to the more pliable source. Scarlett would tell me what happened if I pushed her hard enough.

"Explain."

Her eyes flicked back to mine and there was resignation in them.

“I asked him to tell me why you took me on Friday and who did what to me, and in exchange he made me...”

She nibbled on her lip.

“He made you do what?”

“Let him do what he wanted.”

I wanted to shake my head. For a girl who'd demanded she get fucked and filled with cum on Friday night, she was rather reticent now. And the fact she'd gone to Prescott for information concerned me. Why would she think she could manipulate him in that way? What exactly had he told her about Friday?

“And what was that?”

“To... to...”

“Did he want to fuck you, Scarlett?”

The way her pupil's dilated told me exactly what I needed to know. She was remembering what he'd done. And what we'd done to her too.

“Yes... and I let him.”

“And what did he tell you afterwards?”

She took a breath.

“That you all wanted me... that I'm your possession... that you own me.”

“Is that all?”

“Well, he told me who did what to me on Friday, but yes, that's it.”

Typical. Prescott lured her into thinking he'd tell her the truth of why we decided to fuck with her head. She had no clue and it would stay that way for now. Scarlett didn't remember who we were. When she did find out, there would be hell to pay.

“Did you like it?”

“Like what?”

I drew her closer to me.

“The way he fucked you.”

A shiver ran through her.

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you want him to do it again?”

She nodded as I loosened my grip on her chin, caressing her skin with my fingertips. I almost smiled. She could hide her real intentions for being here, but she couldn't hide her desire. It was written all over her face.

“Do you want to get fucked by all of us again?”

Her lips parted with her breath.

“Answer the question.”

She fidgeted in my lap. It didn't help with the need to fuck her into next week lacing my body. If she moved any closer, she'd be right on top of my dick. Then I'd have no self-control left. I'd force her down on my desk and make her scream so loud, it would carry down the hallway.

“Yes, sir,” she murmured.

I needed her off my lap and as far away from me as possible. I was so close to calling the rest of them in here, making Francis tie her down on my desk and for us to use her until she was crying and begging for it to end.

“Go back to work, Scarlett.”

I released her. She blinked and the disappointment flooding her features gave me so much fucking satisfaction. She would have to wait because she sure as fuck did not deserve a reward right now. Her attitude would need an adjustment first.

“Now.”

There was no more hesitation. She jumped off my lap and walked away. I turned back to my computer, but it didn't stop me from watching her leave. At the door, she glanced back at me, confusion spreading across her features. Probably wondering why I demanded answers from her before sending her away with nothing to show for it. Well, other than her likely drenched knickers. There had been no mistaking the desire and arousal flickering in the depths of her irises, no matter how hard she tried to hide it.

When she left, I let myself smile and adjusted my cock. Our plan to mess with her head was working perfectly... even if it was giving me a fucking headache in the process. No matter how I wanted to use her little wisp of a body for my pleasure, I wouldn't. Not yet. Not until she proved herself worthy of such a fucking privilege. And she would... eventually. Because that girl was nothing if not resourceful. After all, she'd come here to battle against the four of us. It took a special sort of woman to have the balls to take on the so-called Four Horsemen. And Scarlett was the only girl in this entire world who could match us blow for fucking blow.

THIRTY TWO

SCARLETT

I walked into the huge room set up for this business awards thing the Horsemen had insisted I attended. My eyes searched the room, looking for the men I worked for. When I saw them, my jaw almost dropped. They stood in a group, all with tumblers between their fingers. Their tuxes fit them to perfection, highlighting every inch of their powerful frames.

Holy shit on a stick.

I pulled my arm out of Mason's hold, meaning to go over to them.

"What are you doing?" he hissed, gripping my hand to stop me.

I looked up at him, feeling incredibly frustrated I even had him here. When I told him about the event, he insisted he come with me. The invitation said I could bring a plus one if I wanted. I had not bargained on Mason wanting to go with me. Probably had everything to do with the fact he hated me being alone with the Horsemen. And the events of last Friday. While he didn't know about the whole being drugged and fucked incident, his guilt regarding spending the whole night out hung around his neck like a damn lead weight.

"My job, Mase. Did you forget I told you I'm here to work?"

He scowled.

"No."

"Stay here."

He let go of my hand, but not before giving me a warning look. I rolled my eyes as I walked away, pushing through the crowd of people towards the men who had done a number on me. Having Mason here made me far more uneasy than I'd been before. I couldn't stop him from attending. He wanted to keep an eye on the Horsemen. I thought he was being stupidly overprotective, but

whatever. He'd taken it upon himself to be my bodyguard. Little did he know, the men he was trying to prevent me from getting too deeply involved with had already fucked me every way a man could. They'd already played with my head and got me hooked.

I hadn't forgotten why I was here and what I had to achieve. Didn't mean I couldn't enjoy myself at the same time. They'd awoken my hidden desires. Putting those back in the box would be impossible. I wanted to drown in their depravity. But I knew I couldn't give in. There was only so much I could allow them to see. If I fell any further, I'd have no hope of digging my way out of this mess.

My eyes were drawn to West first. The way he rubbed his tattooed hand across his chin. I'd never paid attention to the fact he had them across the backs of his hands before. Not to mention the ones on his fingers. Too busy staring into his amber eyes and being distracted by his words. The man had a way of commanding all of my attention. And holy fuck, he scrubbed up well. He wore all black with a crisp white shirt. His muscles strained against the fabric, making me want to run my hands over them. Would he ever allow me the freedom to explore his body?

What the fuck? Why are you thinking about that?

I clenched my fists, turning my attention to Francis. He had a purple bowtie on, his grey eyes dark with irritation as he stared out across the room. Who knew what was going through his mind. Prescott was the only one who looked relaxed, his tumbler dangling precariously from his fingertips as he murmured something to West. The beast of a man gave him a dark look, his amber eyes full of violence. Prescott merely grinned at West, giving him a wink. The man had a bowtie that matched his blue eyes and his tux was like a second skin. I couldn't help swallowing at the memory of him shoving his fingers in my mouth while he fucked me on his desk. How he'd ordered me around and made me desperate for him. The man was like a damn predator. And I wanted to be his prey. His little lamb.

Lastly, there was my boss, Drake, who'd given me whiplash on Tuesday when he told me I would need to attend the event with them. The way he demanded I tell him what happened between me, Francis and Prescott gave me heart palpitations. And it made me want to disobey him for some reason. Yes, Drake

intimidated the fuck out of me, but at the same time, I wanted to push his buttons. I wanted to see the man underneath his stoic and intense demeanour. The only way I'd get him to open up was by cracking that shell and forcing his hand. Even so, the thought of what he'd do when I did, terrified me to my very core.

Drake had an indigo bowtie, matching his eyes like Prescott's. All in all, the four of them were certainly striking. All eyes were on them, watching their every move. They commanded the room as if they were gods. And I supposed in a lot of ways, they were. Gods of their industry. Ruthless men who would stop at nothing to get what they wanted. And right now? That was me.

I arrived in front of them. All four sets of eyes fell on me. Prescott gave me a sly smile as if he was impressed by the way I'd scrubbed up. Francis' eyes softened a fraction. Drake remained expressionless. And West? Well, he looked like he wanted to rip my dress off and fuck me in front of all these people. I tried not to react to their presence, but it was almost impossible. These men had done things to my body that would make most women blush.

"Evening, Scarlett," Prescott said, reaching out and taking my hand. He brought it to his lips and kissed the knuckles, eyeing me with deviancy in his eyes. "You look... delectable."

"Sweetness, you're so fucking delectable."

His words from Monday rang in my ears. The man knew exactly what he'd said and what it had conjured up for me.

"Thank you, Pres."

As he dropped my hand, his tongue ran over his bottom lip. I couldn't help my own lips parting in response. The tension in the air was charged with sex and lust. It pulsed between the five of us, drenching the room with its potency.

My eyes dropped, staring down at the dress I'd picked out. It was black and clung to my figure, falling to just below my knees with a slit up the back. I picked out sky-high black peep-toe pumps and painted my nails dark red. My hair was down with my natural waves curling around my face.

Mason had told me to change when I'd come out of my room earlier but I ignored him. He didn't want them seeing me like this. Little did he know, they'd all seen me bare and dripping with need for them.

I raised my eyes again, meeting Drake's. He didn't give me a reaction, but I hadn't expected it. As if he would allow his control to slip even a little.

"Come here."

It wasn't a request. No, Drake didn't request anything. He demanded and expected me to obey. I stepped over to him. His eyes roamed down my body, taking in every inch of me, but his expression remained the same. The only indication I had that he liked what he saw was the way his pupils dilated, the indigo taken over by the black. It made him appear almost menacing. Like the man would break me in half if I displeased him.

"Is my tie straight?" he asked.

I reached up and fiddled with it, not strictly needing to, but wanting to touch him all the same. My insides clenched. Even though it was the briefest of touches, it was significant for me.

"It is now."

He gave me a nod. I dropped my hands and bowed my head. It was the first time I'd been around the four of them at the same time since Friday. Their mere presence was making me have flashbacks. I hadn't been lying when Drake asked me if I wanted them all to fuck me again. No way I should want it. Not knowing who these men were and what they'd done. I didn't care though. Not right then.

No doubt Mason would remind me of my goals. Why we were here. I didn't want to be constrained to them, but I had no choice. If I didn't do what my parents wanted, they would take me back to Kent. They would lock me up on the estate and never let me go again. Their threat weighed heavily on my mind. It kept me from entirely giving in to my bosses and their plans for me. I had no idea what they were, but I knew they couldn't be anything good.

Something caught Drake's eye. He took my hand and pulled me with him. I looked back at the others. All of their eyes were on the slit at the back of my dress. It went higher than was appropriate, hence why Mason didn't want me going out in it.

Drake took me over to the raised platform and let go of my hand when he stopped.

"Do you have my speech?" he asked, looking down at me with a hard expression.

"Yes, hold on."

I'd brought a larger bag than necessary to make sure I had everything he needed. Fishing out the tablet, I brought up the speech we'd finished yesterday and handed it to him. He scanned the screen.

"Prescott is better at this shit," he muttered.

I didn't think he meant for me to hear it. My eyes scanned the room. The other three were watching us. And Mason was glaring, his dark eyes full of unrepressed rage. He didn't like them touching me at all. It'd been a terrible idea to allow Mason to come with me, but what else could I do? He was outright threatening to keep me at the flat. It wasn't worth the aggravation.

"Wait here whilst I do this," Drake said to me as the announcer got up on the platform.

A minute later, he was called up. A mask fell over his face as he walked away from me. The smart but ruthless businessman took the stage and started to talk. I barely listened, having heard the thing too many times to count. I'd helped him compose it. Instead, I watched West who was staring right at me. His gaze made my back stiffen. I didn't know if it was hate or lust in those amber depths burning into me. Those tattooed hands flexed at his sides, reminding me of the way they'd wrapped around my throat.

Christ, stop thinking about it.

I couldn't deny I liked it. The first time he'd done it when we met, I was shocked by his blatant disregard for polite societal standards. He was the type of man who cared little for anyone else's opinions of him. The one who did whatever the fuck he wanted without bothering to think about the consequences. He'd ruin anyone who got in his way. No wonder he'd told me people were afraid of him. Hell, I was, on some level. Afraid and turned on as hell by the violence simmering underneath the surface.

I was so busy staring at West, I didn't realise Drake had joined me again until he shoved the tablet into my hands. My eyes flicked up to his as he leant closer.

"Go have fun, Scarlett," he murmured. "I'll find you when I need you again."

"Yes, sir," I whispered back.

His lip twitched, but he didn't smile. I stuffed the tablet back into my bag. Hastily, I retreated towards where Mason was standing, feeling Drake's eyes on me the entire time.

"Are you fucking kidding me, Scar?" Mason hissed when I reached him.

“They’re like vultures circling around you.”

I shrugged, placing my bag on the small table he was standing by.

“What do you want me to do? Tell them all to go fuck themselves? Doubt that would go down well.”

Mason said nothing, silently seething next to me. He’d got me a glass of champagne. I sipped at it, my eyes roaming across the room as I tried not to look at the four men who made my pulse race out of control every time I was near them. The award presentations would happen later in the evening, so the band started up and a few people started dancing on the floor set out for it.

Mason grabbed hold of my hand and tugged me over to the floor with him.

“What are you doing?”

“Dance with me.”

I sighed, but went along willingly, sure my bag would be fine where it was for now. We weren’t far from the table. There was no point making a scene and Drake had told me to have fun. Doubt he was referring to me dancing with Mason.

I let my friend take me in his arms and sway to the music with me. He was probably holding me way closer than was necessary or appropriate. I frowned but didn’t comment. Did he want to piss them off? If he did, I would be in big fucking trouble. Mason didn’t realise the Horsemen saw me as their possession. And I had an awful feeling about Mason’s actions and the repercussions they might have.

THIRTY THREE

WEST

Raising my whisky tumbler to my lips, I watched Scarlett walk across the room and stop by a table next to a man I knew all too well. My hand curled tighter around the glass as I lowered it.

“What the fuck is he doing here?”

Francis looked at me with a raised eyebrow.

“Who?”

“Mason,” I ground out.

Both he and Prescott looked over at where Scarlett was standing with the man tasked by the Carvers to watch over her.

“Huh. Didn’t think she’d bring him,” Prescott said, eyes narrowing.

“He looks pretty pissed,” Francis commented, giving me a sideways glance.

Prescott grinned.

“Maybe he doesn’t like us.”

Francis snorted and rolled his eyes.

“Of course he doesn’t. We’re a threat to the girl he’s sworn to protect.”

“Looks like he wants to do more than just protect her.”

I watched the man drag Scarlett onto the dancefloor. Setting the tumbler on the table beside me, I clenched my fists. If I kept it in my hands, it would have been smashed against the wall, the pieces littered on the ground and the liquid dripping down it. The way the prick held Scarlett against him had me taking a step towards them.

“Easy there,” Prescott said, setting a hand on my shoulder as Drake joined us again.

I growled at him, wanting to tear apart the dickhead holding my woman limb

from limb. Especially when he had the fucking audacity to look over at us with a smirk on his face.

“Is that cunt for fucking real?” I ground out.

For a moment I forgot where we were. All I could think about was tearing across the room to get my woman away from the fuckface holding her like he damn well owned her. She wasn't his. She was *mine*. All fucking well mine. She'd been mine since the day I laid eyes on her. No one else except for the three men standing beside me could touch her. I'd kill every motherfucker who thought they could put hands on the woman belonging to me.

I strained against Prescott's hold, rage filling my veins as the fucking piece of shit ran his hand down Scarlett's back. It was too damn close to parts of my woman he should not be touching. I would brand myself on her damn skin as a warning to anyone else to stay the fuck away.

“He has a death wish,” Francis muttered.

“You're telling me,” Prescott replied, keeping a tight hold of my shoulder. “I'd quite like to punch his pretty-boy face in myself.”

“I'm going to kill him. He can drown in his own fucking blood,” I outright growled.

“Hey, none of that,” Drake interjected, placing his hand on my other shoulder. “We can't touch him, you know that.”

“I don't give a shit. He doesn't get to touch her like that.” I raised my arm, waving my hand at the display. “She is *ours*.”

“And you need to calm the fuck down, West.”

I shoved Drake and Prescott's hands off me, glaring at the two of them.

“Or what?”

“Did you forget where we are? Do not make a scene. This is fucking important. We cannot afford to screw it up.”

I hated how right Drake was. Hated it so fucking much. The anger and rage inside me burnt hot, flooding me with the need for violence. The need to take it out on the piece of shit who'd caused it. Fuck, I wanted to hurt him. To make him regret ever taunting me. The prick had no clue who he was messing with. He didn't want to see the monster inside me. The one who would ruin his entire fucking existence.

Not like I could allow Scarlett to see how she affected me either. She had no

idea of the man lurking beneath my skin. How he'd had such intimate access to her thoughts and feelings when we'd been younger. How he fucking well bled for her every day of his life. And how he would kill everyone who hurt her. It pained me, knowing she had no fucking clue who I was to her. Who we were to each other.

"You're the whole world to me, West. I don't know why you can't see that."

I almost snarled with the memory, her voice echoing in my ears. Her words were like taking a knife to my chest. Scarlett had ruined me. Seeing her now, aware she couldn't remember ever saying those things was decimating.

No fucking wonder people said I wasn't right in the head. How could I be? How could I ever fucking well be normal when the light in my life had been torn away from me? From all of us.

"How can you stand there and not give a shit about this?"

"Who said I didn't give a shit?" Drake hissed. "Do you think I like seeing him touch her? I'd quite happily help you rip his limbs off, but unlike you, I understand our position is precarious. We kill him, we bring down a world of trouble on our heads. I'm not going to let you fuck this up."

I wanted to punch him in the face. Drake didn't fucking get it. None of them did. They had no clue. None whatsoever.

You haven't told them, that's why. If they knew, they'd understand.

As if I was going to reveal the truth about Scarlett's feelings towards me. It hurt too fucking much already. I couldn't speak of it.

I didn't care what Drake said. There was no way in fucking hell I would stand here while the worthless fuckhead danced with her and watched us with that damn smirk on his face.

"West."

I'd taken a step forward and Drake's tone brought me up short.

"Don't."

I glanced at him, baring my teeth.

"Lighten the fuck up, Drake, I won't do anything to him."

My feet started forward again.

"What are you going to do?"

I turned my head back, looking at the three of them with no small amount of

smug fucking satisfaction.

“I can’t hurt Mason, but no one said anything about Scarlett.”

If any of them had a response, I didn’t hear it. I stalked across the room, not giving a shit what I looked like. My damn woman would pay the price of allowing him access to her body. I didn’t care if she wasn’t fucking him. His meaty palms did not get to feel her up.

Halfway across the room, one of them caught up to me and directed me away from Scarlett and Mason. I glanced at Prescott. His mouth was a thin line and his expression dark. I didn’t stop him from bringing me over to the bar area.

“What are you doing?”

“Making sure you don’t do something stupid.” He glanced at me. “Look, I’m with you. The fucker deserves a beating, but Drake is right. Now is not the time.”

“I wasn’t going to touch him.”

Prescott curled an eyebrow up. The fucker didn’t believe me. Probably wise.

“If you want to take it out on her, then by all means. Just do it when he’s not hovering over her like a guard dog, eh?”

I leant up against the bar, glaring over at where the prick was still dancing with my woman.

“You’re right.”

“Did you just agree with me?”

“Don’t push your fucking luck, Pres.” I cracked my knuckles. “I’m not above decking you as a substitute for him.”

Prescott merely snorted before ordering us more drinks. I sipped mine and watched Mason take Scarlett back to their small table. She was giving him a hard time or at least, it looked like they were having a heated conversation. Made me think she wasn’t so happy about his presence here either.

“Do you think she knows?” I asked Prescott a moment later.

“Knows what?”

“His real reason for being here.”

“No. And we’re not going to tell her either. Let him dig his own grave.”

“Mark my words, one day, I’ll help him into it.”

Prescott grinned and shook his head.

“We can’t and you know it, but we can fuck with him.”

I grunted in response. Oh, I would be fucking with Mason Jones all right. He had thrown the first stone. All bets were off. I would take pleasure in torturing him with mind games if I couldn't hurt him any other way.

Prescott and I stayed by the bar. I didn't feel like dealing with Drake. He'd forced me to attend this event. Being here in this stuffy room full of stuck up rich pricks and business types made my skin itch with the need for violence.

The announcer started up with the award presentations. Prescott wandered off to find the others while I watched the crowd gather by the raised platform. My eyes found Scarlett. She stood near the fringes of the crowd, her guard dog nearby.

I dropped my glass on the bar and stalked towards her. The woman didn't stand a chance nor did she see me coming. I came up behind her and wrapped my hand around her wrist.

"Come with me."

She looked back at me, her eyes wide.

"What?"

I smiled before dragging her away from the crowd. She stumbled trying to walk with me. Those heels she wore were death traps. I kept her upright because I couldn't have her falling over and making a fucking scene.

"West, what are you doing?" she hissed.

I didn't reply, merely tugged her into an alcove and shoved her up against the wall. Leaning over her, I trapped her body against mine. My hand wrapped around her throat, the skull tattooed there gleaming in the low light.

"Do you think it's acceptable to let another man touch you?" I asked her in hushed tones.

"W-what?"

"I saw his little display. He thinks he can start a pissing contest with me. And you allowed it."

Scarlett's eyes widened. She swallowed against my palm.

"We were just dancing."

My hand tightened around her throat.

"You are mine, Scarlett. That means you don't let anyone else touch what's *mine*."

Her breath came out halted and erratic.

“You’re crazy,” she whispered.

I grinned.

“You think this is crazy? Don’t try me. I will show you fucking crazy if you do that again.”

Her expression darkened.

“So what? You let your friends touch me, but when my friend dances with me, it’s not allowed?”

“Yes, exactly.”

She looked incredulous.

“You have some fucking nerve, you know that? All of you do.”

There was that temper I remembered all too well. Scarlett had never been the shy, retiring, obedient type. She had sharp claws. Ones she’d shred you with. And I’d always found it incredibly alluring. A woman who matched my own insanity.

“Is that so?”

“Yes. You think because I let you fuck me, I’m now your property. Well, fuck you.” She shoved at my chest. “I don’t want to deal with your bullshit right now.”

She said the wrong thing and she knew it. I wasn’t about to let it slide even though we were at a public event and Drake’s warnings blared in my head. My free hand slid down her leg and underneath her dress, pushing it up as I ran my fingers up her inner thigh. She let out a gasp.

“You are mine and the sooner you get that into your skull, the better. You think us being in a public setting will stop me from taking what I want?”

“West—”

I squeezed her throat, cutting off her airway for a moment so she couldn’t continue.

“Oh no, now isn’t the time for talking.”

My fingers met her knickers. I rubbed the front of them, right over her pussy lips. She stared up at me with fear in her eyes.

Good. Be fucking scared. I’m going to make you come in a room full of people and there’s nothing you can do about it.

I dipped my fingers underneath her knickers, stroking down her slit and finding the beginnings of her wetness. It made me smile and lean closer to her.

“I see how it is,” I murmured. “Your mouth likes to say one thing but your body tells me another. You want this.”

“No,” she whispered.

Seeking out her clit, I circled it. She bucked her hips into mine in response.

“Mmm, do you get off on telling me to stop, huh? Want to pretend I’m making you do this? Is that the type of game you want to play?”

“No.”

I bit my lip. The lust mixing with fear in her eyes gave her away. It made me shove three fingers inside her wet pussy and thumb her clit.

“I bet you wish it was my cock buried in this tight little pussy right now, don’t you?”

She shook her head, gulping down air as I squeezed her throat again.

“What if I fucked you in front of everyone? Showed them who owns your tight little holes, hmm? Would you like that, Scarlett? I’ll make you cry out my name whilst I wring every fucking climax out of your body until you’re a mess of tears and shame.”

The way she panted and ground against me told me everything she couldn’t voice out loud. The thought of me doing it turned her on. Made her want to sink into the deep, dark pit of depravity I lived in. There was no room for morals here. No room for airs and fucking graces. Only corruption, debauchery and sin.

Leaning ever closer, I ran my tongue up her cheek.

“Tell me who you belong to,” I whispered. “Tell me and I’ll let you come.”

She shuddered, her body bucking as her hands gripped my waist to anchor herself.

“West.”

“Tell. Me.”

“You... I belong to you.”

I buried my face in her hair, breathing in her spicy scent and thrust my fingers harder.

“That’s right. You’re mine.”

Her body tensed and she came apart. Whether or not she’d said it so she could come, I didn’t care. Letting her pleasure wash over me was fucking everything. I allowed myself a moment to bathe in her body before I pulled

back, slipping my fingers from her dress. She stared up at me, her eyes unfocused.

“Open.”

She did as I asked, allowing me to slide my fingers inside her mouth. I didn't have to ask her to clean them. She did that all by herself.

“If you let him touch you like that again, Scarlett, there'll be worse consequences for you. Do you understand?”

She blinked as my fingers slid out of her mouth. Then she glared at me.

“That's my friend. What you're asking is ridiculous.”

I shook my head, my fingers flexing around her throat.

“Friend,” I scoffed.

“I don't get what your problem is. You don't even know Mason. Why do you care?”

I laughed and dropped my hand from her neck.

“I don't take kindly to anyone messing with my belongings. You'd best remember that in the future.”

Before she could say a word, I walked off. If I stayed any longer, I would fuck her in front of the whole room and then Drake would have my head. It was lucky everyone was currently distracted by the awards presentations. I might be unapologetic about who I was, but I did understand the importance of this evening. It's why I was even here in the first place or I'd have stayed home and got high.

I could do with a hit right now. It would calm the raging storm brewing inside me. I didn't pity the fool who got in my way. They would regret it, of course, but I would enjoy ripping them to shreds without a single shred of remorse. The only thing I regretted this evening was not pulling Scarlett from the room and shoving my cock so far down her throat, she'd feel it for days.

You're going to get it worse next time, Scarlett. Mark my fucking words. You fuck with me, I'll fuck with you right back, only I'll do it dirtier and meaner. Then you'll really see who you belong to.

THIRTY FOUR

SCARLETT

I couldn't move away from the wall. If I took a step, my knees would buckle and I'd collapse on the ground. Never in my life had I been so terrified and turned on at the same time. Not even when I'd been drugged and fucked by the four of them. West had turned my whole entire damn existence upside down in those moments he'd pinned me here and made me come on his fingers. He hadn't done it to please me. He'd done it to punish me. I hadn't wanted to come in front of all these people. It was humiliating how much his words and behaviour turned me on. How his actions drove me insane with lust and desire for the man who was turning out to be my worst nightmare.

What woman wanted someone who fucked with their head the way West did to me? Every time he walked away felt like a punch to the gut. I was dismissed. No longer on his radar now his lesson was over. And what a fucking lesson it was.

West's possessiveness made my heart pound. I didn't understand it. He didn't know Mason and he barely knew me. Would it have mattered if it was another man? I doubted it. West didn't want anyone touching me by the sounds of it other than Drake, Prescott and Francis. The whole thing made absolutely no sense to me. None. The way these men had come after me was the most confusing part of it all. I'd come here to catch them, but they were catching me instead.

I pulled myself together. Not like I could hide in this alcove for the rest of the night. Drake would need me later or maybe now.

Shit, I need to get back out there.

I straightened my dress. My underwear was drenched but there was nothing I

could do about it. Fucking West. Why did he have such a profound effect on my senses? Why did he make me wet and achy? I got off on his crude language and downright degrading behaviour. The way he told me he'd fuck me in front of the whole room and make me cry out his name had me completely lost and at his mercy.

Shaking myself, I walked out of the alcove on wobbly legs, trying to regain my composure. The presentations were still going on. I wandered back over to the small table where I found Mason waiting with my bag. His expression made me flinch.

“Where have you been?” he hissed, brown eyes flashing with anger.

“Nowhere.”

“No? You weren't dragged off by one of them then? What the fuck did he want with you?”

I took my bag from him, not wanting to have this conversation. No way I would tell him how West had stuck his hand under my dress and made me come all over his fingers. How horrified I'd been about the way it turned me on. Mason didn't get to know those things. He would lose his mind. West had mentioned Mason had tried to start a pissing contest with him. It didn't surprise me considering how much Mason hated the Horsemen. If he found out what was really going on, I was pretty sure he would wind West up further. And no doubt I would get the brunt end of West's wrath. His parting words to me had served as a warning. One I took seriously.

“What he wanted with me is none of your business.”

I wasn't going to deny being dragged off. Mason had clearly seen it.

“Everything to do with them is my business, Scar. You know the deal.”

My hand curled into a fist.

“Oh what? Because Dad said so? Fuck you. It's my arse on the line, not yours.”

Mason's eyebrows shot up.

“What the hell has got into you? Where has this attitude come from?”

I should walk away from him before I said something stupid. Something I couldn't take back. Anger and frustration flooded my body, making me sick to my stomach. I'd already had to deal with West and now Mason was giving me shit. I didn't have the energy for it.

“What’s got into me is that I’m sick and tired of you giving me a hard time. You didn’t have to come with me today. In fact, I told you I didn’t want you here.” I pointed at my chest. “I am the one who has to live with all of this, Mason. Me. If you can’t handle watching them with me, then that’s on you, not me.”

Before he could say another word, I stormed off, hating the way he’d made me feel. Like I was fucking this all up. And in reality, I was. The Horsemen were formidable opponents who always appeared to be ten steps ahead of me.

I’d planned on going to the ladies to calm down when someone wrapped their arm around me and led me away from the crowd towards the bar. Looking up, I found it was Prescott. His blue eyes were dark and his expression hard. He ordered drinks when we reached the bar, keeping me pinned to his side. When the bartender set them down, I picked one up and raised it to my lips. Prescott watched me as I took a sip. I almost spluttered as the alcohol burnt its way down my throat.

“Jesus,” I coughed. “What is that?”

He gave me a smile.

“Whisky to calm your nerves.”

“More like to choke me.”

Prescott’s eyes twinkled.

“That’s West’s thing, not mine.”

He set the glass down and picked up his own.

Didn’t I fucking well know it? Every time I was alone with the damn man, he put his heavily tattooed hand around my throat. I couldn’t deny it got me hot and bothered. But after the stunt he’d just pulled, I was not inclined to admit such things to anyone.

“Don’t talk to me about him.”

Prescott’s hand around my waist tightened.

“No? What has my unhinged friend done to cause that murderous look in your eyes, hmm?”

Unhinged was an appropriate word to describe West and his bullshit.

I picked up the glass and sipped at the whisky, not caring how strong it was, nor the burn it caused. It was the distraction I needed from my chaotic thoughts.

“Do you really want to know?”

“Of course, sweetness, I wouldn’t have asked otherwise.”

I looked up at him, raising an eyebrow. His grin was making my heart do somersaults in my chest. There was a hint of longing in them, making me aware there was far more to this than him just lending me his ear.

“Hmm, I’m sure.”

He leant closer to me.

“Tell me what’s wrong.”

A part of me wanted to sink into Prescott, but I didn’t want an audience for it. I could feel Mason’s gaze boring holes into my back. Picking up my glass once more, I indicated the doors leading out of the room with my head. Prescott got the hint. He picked up his own glass and encouraged me away towards the doors. We were outside in the hallway the next minute and walking towards a seating area in the reception by the windows. He set our glasses down on a high table and turned to me.

“Are you sure this is okay? Aren’t you guys up for an award?”

He grinned. Prescott was the head of marketing. This type of thing was his responsibility.

“Francis and Drake can handle it if we win.” He tucked an arm around me, tugging me closer before placing his fingers under my chin, tipping my head up towards him. “Now, my little lamb, what made you so angry?”

My arms went around Prescott’s waist without me thinking about it. His body radiated heat, warming me from the inside out. He dropped his hand from my chin and put his other arm around me, holding me against him.

“West punished me for dancing with my friend.”

Prescott’s blue eyes twinkled with my admission.

“Punished you how?”

I couldn’t look up at him any longer. Instead, I buried my face in his shoulder, feeling my cheeks growing hot.

“He made me come in front of all those people in there,” I whispered. “It was humiliating.”

Prescott nuzzled the top of my head, a completely unexpected gesture.

“Mmm, tell me more.”

I shivered in his arms. Somehow I had a feeling Prescott got off on this shit.

The way he'd watched me finger myself had shown exactly how much he liked to be the observer. It didn't take a rocket scientist to put two and two together. The man had voyeuristic tendencies.

"You expect me to believe you don't know he got crazy jealous over me dancing with Mason?"

"I never said I didn't. And I can't say I liked it either."

"You didn't?"

He slid his hand from my back to my behind, pressing me harder against him.

"No. Why the fuck would I want to watch that, sweetness? You're mine."

For some reason, when Prescott said I was his, it didn't make me mad. If anything, I was safe here in his arms. And I really shouldn't feel safe with him at all. The man was a predator wrapped up in an incredibly attractive outer package. He'd feed on me until he bled me dry if I let him.

I turned my head up, finding his blue eyes intent on me, full of possessiveness that should have made me run away. Instead, I found myself wanting to run towards him. To drown in him.

"Pres, I don't want to go home. I don't... I don't want to be around Mason tonight."

He cocked his head to the side, a frown appearing on his brow.

"Why not?"

"We got into a fight, but I don't want to talk about it and I don't want to deal with him either."

"So, it wasn't just West who pissed you off."

I shook my head. For a moment, he was silent, merely observing me with a curious expression on his face. It was obvious what I was asking for even if I hadn't voiced it. He leant closer, his lips brushing over my ear.

"You do know what will happen if I take you back with me, don't you?" he whispered.

I nodded. There was no doubt in my mind. Prescott would want something in return. And I'd give it to him willingly.

"Yes."

His arms tightened around me.

"Then let's get the fuck out of here, sweetness. This shit is boring anyway."

THIRTY FIVE

PRESCOTT

Scarlett clutched my hand as we rode up in the lift to the penthouse. Leaving the awards event would land me in hot water with Drake and Francis, but I didn't give a shit. West had already disappeared from it after he'd got his own back on Scarlett for dancing with Mason. Those two could hold down the fort just fine without us. As if I was going to pass up on the opportunity for some alone time with Scarlett.

The doors opened as we stopped on our floor. I pulled Scarlett out into our open plan living area. She looked around, her expression darkening as if she remembered what happened when she was last here. How Francis laced her food with a sedative to knock her out and we'd taken advantage of her.

To distract the girl, I tugged her against me, tipping her face up to mine. She blinked, those hazel-green eyes full of emotion.

“Do you want something to drink?”

She shook her head. I stroked her jaw, unsure of where this tenderness had come from. I didn't treat anyone with care. Somehow, Scarlett made me soft for her without even fucking trying. Her fragility made me want to wrap her up in cotton wool and shield her from everything coming her way. And yet... I wanted to wreck her too.

My knowledge of her from when we were kids made this complicated. Made it hard for me to bury my feelings towards her. She'd been one of my closest friends. My confidant. And I couldn't stop all the memories of our childhood flooding my brain whenever she was around me. The way she'd smile and challenge the four of us. Our Little Nyx had such a beautiful soul. She was the brightest part of us. The one we'd lay down our fucking lives to protect. And

now... well, we weren't protecting her at all. We were using her as a means to an end. But it was to keep her by our sides too. None of us wanted to live without Scarlett again. She completed us.

"Should I give you a tour?"

She reached up and fiddled with my bowtie.

"Of your bedroom?"

I couldn't fight my smile.

Oh, my dirty little lamb, you are asking to get railed.

"Is that what you want to see?"

"I thought..."

"Thought what?"

"That you'd want something for letting me stay with you."

I didn't blame her for thinking that given our last encounter. And she'd be right too. She owed me for this. The shit I'd get off Drake and Francis would be fucking annoying, but they'd be directing their ire at West too. I might get off lightly this time.

"Mmm, last time you weren't so... willing."

Her cheeks went a rather fetching shade of red.

"I liked what you did to me," she whispered.

And fuck if her admission didn't rattle me. I shoved my whirling emotions away, concentrating on the fact she wanted me to fuck her again.

"Did you now? Well, perhaps we'll play a little game." My hand left her back and curled into her hair. "It's called..." I tugged her head back by her hair. "Good girls who beg get rewarded."

Her eyes widened and her lips parted.

"What do you want, little lamb?"

"I can ask for anything?"

I chuckled.

"Anything within reason, sweetness."

Her hands slid down my chest and underneath my lapels.

"There are three things I want." She nibbled on her bottom lip, gazing up at me with hesitation in her expression. "I want to see all of you... I want to touch you... and I want you to kiss me."

I expelled a breath. Those were very simple requests. And I wasn't sure what

to make of them, especially the kissing part. While I prided myself on my skilled mouth, I rarely allowed such... intimacies. Kisses had always been a reward for good behaviour. Somehow, I didn't think Scarlett wanted me to kiss her as part of a game. No, she wanted me to kiss her purely because I wanted to. And that fucking terrified the shit out of me.

Instead of answering her, I let her go, only to take her hand and pull her towards the stairs. Scarlett followed me without hesitation. Taking her into my sanctuary was something I shouldn't allow but fuck it. I wanted her in my bed, her naked body spread out for me. To fuck her where I slept every night. And I wanted her scent on my sheets to remain long after she left.

We walked up the stairs and down the hallway together until we came to my door. I opened it and strolled into the dark room, shutting it firmly behind me and flipping the lock. I dropped her hand and hit the switch, bathing the room in light. The floor to ceiling windows spread across one wall, giving an impressive view of the city. The rest of the walls were a dark grey. One had shelves with a huge TV in the centre mounted on the wall. The shelves contained many trinkets I'd acquired over the years. Scarlett made a beeline for them, running her fingers over a steel skull with gold snakes coiling out of it.

On the other side of the room sat my bed, its pale green sheets neatly folded across it. I was in the habit of making it just right every morning. West told me I was anal about appearances, but he was a fucking idiot. I liked things being in their place.

"What's this?" she asked, picking up a small statue of a crowned rider with a bow on his back seated on a white horse.

I made my way over to her, curled myself around her back and plucked it out of her fingers, setting it back on the shelf in its rightful place next to the other three riders on horses.

"Pestilence."

She turned her head, looking up at me with wide eyes. I pointed at the next horse, which was red and the rider carried a sword raised high in the air as if charging towards something.

"War."

My hand fell next to the merchant upon a black horse.

"Famine."

And I indicated the final horse with my fingers, pale green with a cloaked figure carrying a scythe.

“Death.”

Scarlett looked at them and swallowed.

“Did you get these before or after people started calling you the Four Horsemen?”

I chuckled and wrapped my arms around her waist, tugging her back against my front. My nose went to her ear, nuzzling it.

“Before. I’m far from religious, but they fascinate me. Would they be flesh and blood mortals or beings of a higher power? Who knows. I like to think they’re symbolic of humanity’s greed and corruption... how it infects everything, seeping into your soul and making you weak to your baser desires. They’re sent to punish the wicked. To tear them to pieces for their wanton desires.” I stroked her stomach, needing to be skin on skin with this woman who I shouldn’t want to get closer to. “But little do they know, the Horsemen are just as wicked and destructive as they are.”

“Wicked men hiding in plain sight,” she whispered.

“Exactly.”

She turned around in my arms and pressed her face to my chest, her hands slipping under my tux jacket again. In that moment, I let myself feel the sense of belonging she brought on. Scarlett should be in my arms. She was a part of me. A part of us. She was home.

“Be wicked to me, Pres.”

“Ask nicely, little lamb, and maybe I will.”

“Please show me your wicked side.”

Leaning down, I gripped her legs and picked her up. She yelped, wrapping her legs around my waist and her arms around my neck. I carried her over to my bed and laid her down with me covering her body. I ran my hand down her bare leg, watching her parted lips, her hands gripping my collar to keep me close. Then I ran my fingers down the centre of her chest, making her shudder.

“Do you wish Pestilence would infect you, sweetness?”

She panted out a breath and didn’t respond. My fingers paused between her breasts.

“Use your words... I won’t reward you otherwise.”

“Yes, I want you to infect me, please.”

Did she have any idea what she was doing to my self-restraint? The neediness in her voice had my dick throbbing, desperate to be in her. While I loved to watch and hunt, there were times like this where I wanted to indulge myself in touch, taste and the sounds of begging, pleading wantonness from a woman.

My fingers resumed their path. This dress needed to come off. I needed to see her exposed. All of her on show.

“Mmm, me? Do you think I’m your Pestilence? Am I going to corrupt you?”

“Yes,” she gasped, hips bucking into me. “Please, fuck, please, Pres.”

Her fingers tightened on my clothes, her eyes wide with an intense craving for me. I leant towards her and nuzzled my nose along her collarbone before pressing a kiss to the bare skin above her dress.

“Say it,” I murmured against her skin. “Fucking say it, little lamb.”

Her hands slid from my collar up to my neck and into my hair. I groaned with the feel of her nails against my scalp.

“Fuck me, Pestilence.”

I’d died and gone to fucking heaven. Never in my wildest fantasies did I ever imagine how damn sweet it would be to hear her call me that. I was going to ruin this woman completely tonight. Break her apart piece by piece until she could do nothing but give in to me.

Reaching behind her, I unzipped the back of her dress before tugging it down her shoulders and off her body. My mouth watered when I realised she wasn’t wearing a bra, her full breasts on display. I took her heels off her feet and discarded them with the dress off the end of the bed. Her little lacy knickers were drenched in her arousal, no doubt from West’s earlier exploration and my own right now. I ran a finger through them.

“Such a dirty little lamb.”

She squirmed before pushing herself up on her elbows.

“Can... can I touch you... please?”

I smirked.

“If you wish.”

As quickly as I answered, she was on her knees with me, her hands splayed out across my chest. First, Scarlett undid my bowtie and threw it away. Next, she unbuttoned my jacket and I shrugged out of it. Her fingers made quick work

of my shirt. She pulled it open and stared at my bare chest.

“Fuck,” she whispered, her fingers tracing lines down my skin.

All of us utilised our home gym downstairs to keep in shape. I wasn't crazy about working out, but I had a routine to maintain my appearance.

“Do you like what you see?”

She bit her lip and nodded, her eyes intent on me as if she couldn't tear her gaze away. I undid my cufflinks and threw them on the bedside table before pulling my shirt off completely. Her hands went to my belt, unbuckling it before she unzipped me. I watched her tug my trousers off my hips. Pulling away, I slipped off my shoes, socks and trousers. I stood in front of her in my boxers, the clear outline of my hard cock straining against them. Her eyes were on it, her hands fisting in her lap as if she was struggling not to reach out for me. As if she wanted everything I had on offer.

Don't worry, sweetness, I'll give it to you. All of it. Just be a good girl for me, hmm? Do as I say and beg me for my dick. Beg me to kiss you. Beg me for it all. I want to do my worst to your sinful little body. To my Little Nyx.

“So, little lamb.” I ran my hand over my dick. “If you want this... you're going to have to make me believe it.”

Her eyes flicked up to mine, widening slightly.

“Beg.”

THIRTY SIX

PRESCOTT

Scarlett's expression darkened with need. Her lips parted, and her chest heaved. Those fucking tits of hers had me holding back from stepping closer. I wanted to bite down on those hard nubs and make her scream. Brand myself all over this girl. She was fucking well mine.

"I want you to fuck me. Use me... please. Take me whatever way you want. I want your cock in me, in every part of me. Please, please give it to me. Let... let me suck it. I want to taste you... please, Pres, please."

Holy. Fuck.

The desperate pitch of her voice was damning. I curled my finger, beckoning her over as I stepped up to the end of the bed. She crawled to me before she turned her head up to mine. I slid a hand around her jaw, stroking my thumb down her cheek.

"Such a good little lamb."

"I want to be your dirty little lamb. I'm... I'm burning for you."

I licked my lip.

"Mmm, go on then, suck my dick and show me how dirty you can be."

Reaching for me, she slid my boxers off my hips, making my cock pop out right in her face. She slipped them down my legs and I kicked them away. Her small hand wrapped around my dick, stroking up and down in the softest, most torturous manner. I groaned, digging my fists into her hair.

"No teasing. Wrap those pretty lips around it before I get impatient and shove it down your throat."

Her eyes were like saucers, but she leant closer and licked the tip. I shuddered, not giving a shit about showing her how much I wanted this. How

she turned me on to the point of insanity.

“In your fucking mouth. Now, Scarlett, right fucking now.”

And oh, how she took me. Her soft lips slid over my dick like they were made to. Her hand curled around my waist as she took me deeper. A grunt left my lips from the intensity of the wet, warm mouth encasing my cock.

I'm burning for you too, sweetness. Burning like a fucking inferno.

My hands tightened around the strands of her hair, pulling it tight and making her wince. But not once did she stop taking me.

“What a corrupt little thing you are already. You were fucking made to serve at my feet.”

She moaned around my length, agreeing with me. And to reward her for it, I shoved her face down hard, making her take me down her throat with no warning. Her choking sounds were fucking everything. Her eyes were on my face, the beginnings of tears forming in the corners of them. When I pulled my dick out of her mouth, she spluttered, spit spraying across me and dripping down her chin.

“Mmm, messy girl. I like seeing you struggle.” I let go of her hair. “On your hands and knees.”

She was quick to comply, turning around and presenting herself to me. My fingers hooked into her knickers, and I slid them down her legs, throwing them halfway across the room. She wouldn't be needing those any time soon. I spread her cheeks with both my hands, staring down at her two beautiful holes on full display. Leaning down, I tasted her, my tongue running from her clit all the way up to the puckered skin where I knew the darkest delights lay in wait for me.

“Tell me what you want,” I murmured, my tongue focusing on her last hole I had yet to sample with my dick.

“You,” she breathed, her body jerking in response to my stimulation. “Please don't stop.”

I dipped two fingers into her pussy, groaning at how sopping wet she was. Thrusting a few times, I slid them out and pressed them against her beautiful little arse, circling the tight hole I would be fucking without any damn restraint soon.

“Oh god, Pres, fuck!” she cried out when I slid a finger inside her.

“Hold on to the covers, little lamb.”

Her fingers fisted them. I wasn't going to let her touch herself to ease her into this.

I straightened and leant over to my bedside table, ripping open the drawer and extracting a bottle of lube. She was going to need it to take my cock. Dumping it next to me, I gripped her hip and shoved my dick deep into her pussy in one brutal thrust. She lurched forward, letting out a cry of pleasure and pain.

While I fucked her pussy with my cock and her little arse with my finger, I leant over her and pressed my lips to her shoulder.

"Mmm, your needy little pussy is so hungry for dick, isn't she?"

"Yes," she whined, pressing back against me. "Punish her for it."

For the first time in my life, I wanted to kiss the shit out of a woman. I wanted to taste her dirty words right from the source.

"Has she been a bad girl?"

"So bad, please, please punish her."

I kissed her shoulder again, the temptation to grab her face twisting my gut up in knots. Instead, I straightened and fisted her hair, pulling her head back.

"Dirty little lamb."

Another finger joined the first in her tight little arse before I picked up the pace, fucking my woman with brutal and unforgiving strokes. Her cries fed my damn soul. Made the darkest, most primal part of me come out to play. I leant over her again, my mouth landing on her ear.

"One day, I'm going to chase you, Scarlett. Chase you until your legs give out and you can't run any longer. Then I'm going to fuck you in the dirt like an animal. I'm going to mark your skin over and over with my teeth, litter you with damn fucking bruises and show the entire damn world you're *mine*. My sacrificial lamb. I'll lay you down on my altar and devour you whole."

"Pres," she whimpered. "Please."

"Mmm, you want that. You want me to destroy you."

Her cries as my fingers tightened in her hair, straining her neck with the way I held her head back and thrust deeper in her tight, wet pussy fed me. The noises of our skin slapping together were fucking magical. They echoed around the room, ringing with my savage brutality.

"Please."

“What do you want?” I growled in her ear.

“Kiss me, please.”

Fuck, how I wanted to give in. Wanted to give her exactly what she asked for.

“How desperate are you for my lips?”

“I want them so bad. I want you to kiss me, please, Pres, I’m begging you. Please.”

She was eroding my self-control. Eroding everything inside me. The walls I kept built up around my fucking soul. Only Scarlett had the power to dig her way inside me and tear me to shreds. And for some fucked up reason, I wanted to let her.

Releasing her hair, I pulled myself back up and out of her completely. I scooped up the bottle of lube and slathered it all over my dick before pressing some inside her. She looked back at me, those hazel-green eyes wide.

“You want a kiss, hmm? Then you’re going to take my dick without complaint, you hear me? Take the whole fucking thing.” I rubbed my thumb over her rim. “All up inside this tight little hole.”

Her body trembled.

“I will,” she whispered before biting down on her lip.

“Spread those cheeks for me. Show me where you’re going to take my dick.”

She shifted, leaning on her shoulders so she could reach back and spread herself for me. And fuck if it wasn’t the most stunning sight I’d ever beheld. I couldn’t take another moment to admire it because my cock wanted in her. I wanted to come in her tight little arse and paint her insides.

Notching the head of my dick against her, I pressed forward, leaning my free hand on the small of her back to steady her.

“Bear down, little lamb, let me in.”

When she complied, the head of my dick lodged itself inside her. The pained whine coming from her lips had me smiling. She didn’t tell me to stop or attempt to move away. No, my girl took my dick like she’d been told. I grunted as I pressed deeper, my cock being enveloped by such tight heat. I couldn’t get enough of it.

“Pres,” she whimpered.

“Is that a complaint I hear?”

“No! No... please, I want it. I want it so bad.”

Another inch slipped inside her. Fuck, nothing else could compare to the way her tight walls gripped my dick. Her whole body strained with the effort of holding herself open there for me. Letting me sink my cock deep inside her hot little arse.

When I finally bottomed out, I slapped her hands away from her cheeks and gripped her hips, holding myself inside her so she could get used to being filled. She shifted back up onto her hands, looking back at me with hazy, lust drunk eyes.

“Does that feel good, hmm? Do you like my dick all up in your arse?”

“Yes, I want you to fuck me hard, please. Give it to me.”

Slowly, I inched out, listening to her moan with the sensation of my dick rubbing along her hole. Then I thrust back in, taking her deep. The rhythm I built was steady, letting her adjust to my size and length until there was no resistance left.

My fingers tightened around her hips. I gave her no mercy as I pounded her tight hole, making her cry and gasp, her fists clenched around the covers.

“Rub that needy clit, little lamb. Come all over my dick.”

She let go and slid her fingers between her legs. A choked moan erupted from her lips as she stroked herself into a frenzy. Her body bucked and she thrust back against me, trying to take more, trying to make me go faster. I obliged, giving her it all. Then I leant over her and bit down on her shoulder, marking her with my teeth.

“Pres,” she all but screamed. “Fuck!”

Her climax followed, her whole body trembling with the intensity of it. And fuck if she didn't squeeze my dick hard. I bit down harder on her shoulder, trying to starve back my own need to come. I couldn't help it. My balls ached with the need to explode. Her scream was the final damn straw. I had no control left. None whatsoever.

I groaned around my teeth on her shoulder as I kept pounding her tight hole and my dick erupted, spurting inside her like wildfire. Letting go of her shoulder, I pressed my face into her hair. Her scent flooded my veins, making me want to hold her close and never let my girl go. Never allow her to leave me again.

“Little Nyx,” I breathed into her hair, forgetting for a moment I should not have voiced that name out loud to her.

When I realised, I almost fucking lost my shit, unsure if she'd heard me or not. I couldn't afford to let her remember us. Not yet. Not now. The others would crucify me.

Pulling out of her, I flipped her over onto her back and covered her body with my own. Her eyes were wide when I took hold of her face and pressed my lips against hers. Warmth and fucking need spread through me at the touch of her mouth. Scarlett had no choice but to kiss me back, her hands threading into my hair. It only made me delve into her mouth with my tongue and taste her. The moan leaving her lips encouraged me. I kissed her deeper, taking and taking until I was breathless and needing air, but I couldn't stop. This was nothing like kissing other women. Scarlett felt so fucking different. She was everything to me. Absolutely fucking everything. The strain of my lungs was the only thing to pull my mouth from hers. I let the air fill them, panting with the effort of trying to breathe normally again.

"Pres," she whispered, her own breathing heavy. "Kiss me again, please, kiss me until I don't know my own name."

"I thought my cock already did that," I murmured, smiling at her.

"Please."

Her hazel-green eyes were full of need. I did as she asked, taking my time to explore her mouth with mine, loving the way she moulded to me completely. And when we came up for air, her smile lit my whole fucking world on fire. I stroked her hair back from her face and wanted to drown in her. The scent of her. The beauty of this woman below me.

I slid off her and reached over, grabbing the wet wipes I kept on my bedside table and handed them to her. The two of us cleaned ourselves up before chucking that shit in the bin. Then I pulled back the covers and tucked Scarlett up in them with me. I lay on my back while she pressed her head to my chest, tucking herself into my side and stroking her fingers down my pec.

"I don't know why, but you feel so familiar to me," she murmured after a long silence.

I tried not to stiffen at her words. My fingers danced along her shoulder, stroking her perfectly soft skin, while my other hand curled around her waist, keeping her pinned to me.

"That's odd."

She nodded, sliding her hand from my chest into my hair and stroking my scalp instead.

“It’s stupid really, probably wishful thinking on my part. Hoping I can find a connection to the person I was before my accident. Before I lost all my memories.”

The way my heart lurched with her words had my hand tightening around her waist. My jaw clenched, preventing the words to soothe her aching soul from coming out of them.

You know me, Scarlett. You know all of us. We’re your best friends. And now we’re so much more than that.

“I’ve been getting these weird flashes of conversations and pictures in my head. I don’t know if they’re real or not, but... they feel real. Maybe I just want them to be real.”

I pressed my mouth to her hair. Why did this hurt so fucking much? Like taking a damn sledgehammer to my chest. Scarlett fucking decimated me with her words.

“Maybe they are real, little lamb.”

I shouldn’t have said it. I knew that, but the desperate part of me wanted her to remember me. Wanted her to look at me with recognition in her eyes.

“I hope so. All I’ve ever wanted is to remember who I am.”

And that was the final fucking straw. I pressed my face harder against her head, trying not to let my emotions out. The utter devastation of knowing she suffered as much as we had, even though our suffering was different. And I think if she knew the truth, she’d want to remember us. She’d want to break free of the prison her mind held her in.

Releasing her for a moment, I clapped three times and the lights went out, plunging us into darkness. Then I turned on my side and wrapped myself around her small frame, cradling her against my chest. Pressing my face back into her hair, I breathed in her scent of cinnamon, letting it soothe me. Allowing her body and fucking soul to damn well fill the void inside me that her words had caused. And when Scarlett drifted off, I kept holding her, listening to the steady rhythm of her breathing.

“You will,” I whispered into her hair. “One day, you will remember it all. I promise.”

THIRTY SEVEN

SCARLETT

Waking up having spent the night in Prescott's bed, curled up against the man himself was an experience in and of itself. I'd never slept next to a man before, especially not one who knew my body as intimately as he did. His body heat radiated off him, keeping me warm and cosy beneath his covers. And I hadn't dreamt. The haunting nightmares didn't plague me. His presence kept them at bay.

Peeking my head out of the covers, I looked up at Prescott who was fast asleep. The morning sun dappled across his face, highlighting all the curves and edges. His dark blonde hair was ruffled from sleep. A hand rested on his chest, right over his heart, as it rose and fell at a steady pace. The other was curled around me in a manner I could only describe as possessive.

The man was undeniably attractive in every sense of the word. He was built to beguile and lure the unsuspecting in. The perfect male specimen. And yet there was a peacefulness to him in slumber I'm sure few ever had the opportunity to witness. Like his perfect mask slipped away and the deadly man underneath was finally visible.

And what a man he is.

The way he'd looked at me last night as if I was something precious to him. No matter the way he spoke to me or treated me, his blue gaze gave him away. It spoke of secrets kept, desires hidden and loss, soul-destroying loss. I had no idea what it meant, but a part of me broke inside for him. The part of me that had started to care for Prescott.

I knew I shouldn't. He was my enemy. Somehow, the lines between friend and foe blurred until I could barely see them.

Why does it feel like I've known you forever? Why does my heart yearn for you? Why am I falling under your spell with so little resistance?

I didn't know how to stop my descent into madness. Into the trap he'd laid so expertly. And at this point, I had no idea if I even wanted to. All I knew was I wanted to stay in this bed with him, away from the world outside. Savour this stolen moment where I didn't have to guard my secrets and lie to him.

Without thinking about it, I pressed a kiss to his chest and placed my hand over his. My head settled in the crook of his shoulder, my eyes drawn to his features, wanting to document each and every one to keep as a memento of the first time I'd felt safe and secure in years.

"I don't think I can do this," I whispered into his skin, a tear slipping from my eye. "I can't hurt you even though I know you're going to hurt me."

The words were fucking damning. They wrecked me. The guilt overwhelmed my being. My hand around Prescott's tightened. I didn't want to wake him and allow him to see me like this but fuck if the pain in my chest didn't half burn with its intensity.

I wanted to scream and rage at my parents for putting me in this position. They'd sent me to destroy the Horsemen. To tear them apart. To bring them their heads. And instead, the Horsemen had infected me.

I had no idea who I was. Who this woman inside me had become, or who she wanted to be. The real Scarlett was locked away behind a wall of bulletproof glass. No matter how many times I smashed my fists against it in desperation to unlock my secrets, it never cracked. There was no chink in its armour. The wall remained an impenetrable force in my brain. And I hated everything about it.

I'd been so overwhelmed by the sex with Prescott last night, my words about wanting the truth came spilling out without me thinking about it. Without me considering what it meant to reveal to him that I'd had flashes of the past seeping into my head. They had to be real. There couldn't be any other explanation for the vivid nature of the memories. But why did being around these men cause them? It was a question I hadn't yet found an answer to.

"Little lamb."

His melodic voice brushed across my ears. Opening my eyes, which I'd closed when my tears slipped out, I found Prescott's blue ones staring down at me.

"Hey."

He slid his hand from underneath mine and brushed away the tear leaking from my eye. The skin below me was damp. I hadn't realised I'd started crying in earnest. Prescott didn't say another word. He merely leant closer and pressed a kiss to my hair and cupped my face with his large palm as if to tell me it was okay. That I could cry and he wouldn't belittle me for it.

I gulped down a breath of air, my heart aching with the tender care the man was showing me. A side of him I didn't know existed until the day in his office when he'd fucked me on his desk.

"I don't understand you," I whispered. "Any of you, but right now, especially not you, Pres. How can you be so cruel with one hand and give me so much care with the other?"

He wasn't going to answer me. I knew it. But the words came out anyway. They made me sound so fucking broken. And I was. Inside held a mess of conflicting feelings, emotions, and guilt.

A sob left my lips, the dam breaking and opening up the void in my chest. Prescott turned on his side and tucked me up against his chest, stroking my back and letting me cry on him. Allowing me to fall apart in his arms as the stress of the past few weeks with these men bore down on me.

"Shh, sweetness," he whispered into my hair as he pressed his face into it. "I've got you."

His words only made me cry harder. I clutched him to me as if my life depended on being close to this man who was slowly destroying me from the inside out.

Who knew how long we stayed like that, me lost in misery and him taking care of me. It was only when a loud noise blared next to us, I realised today was Friday and we had work. Prescott shifted, reaching over to turn off his alarm. He settled back down and pressed a kiss to the top of my head.

"Feel better, my little lamb?"

I nodded.

"Thank you," I mumbled into his skin.

He reached up and pulled my face away from his chest. Both his big palms cupped my cheeks, and he wiped the tears from under my eyes with his thumbs. The softness of his expression rendered me utterly damned for this man. I couldn't destroy Prescott for my parents. Not when he'd let me purge my

emotions on his chest. Not when he made me feel safe.

“Let me make you breakfast, hmm? Then I’m giving you the day off. Drake can just deal without you.”

“Are you sure about that?” I sniffled.

“He can’t fire me.”

I snorted and shoved at his chest.

“He can fire me.”

“But he won’t. Not if I have something to do with it.”

I didn’t want to create conflict between him and Drake. I imagined there might already be given Prescott had skipped out on the awards ceremony for me.

“As sweet as that is, Pres, I think I need to be here, though I have nothing to wear. I’ll just nip home for a change of clothes even if it means I’m late.”

He smiled.

“You can’t get out of breakfast.”

I gave him a nod. As if I would turn down his offer when he’d been so nice to me this morning.

He let me go and slid out of bed, stretching. I tried not to drool over his beautiful, very naked form. He went around the bed, picking up our clothes and straightening them out. I watched him take his tux over to hidden wardrobes in one of the walls. He hung up the items. Everything was so neat and had its exact place. Next to the wardrobe was another hidden door, which he opened and disappeared into.

I slipped out of his covers and padded over to it, stopping in the doorway. The secret bathroom had a large rainfall shower. It was decorated in slate grey tiles with pale green accents in the towels and toiletry holders. Prescott had turned the shower on. He glanced back at me with a twinkle in his eye.

“Are you joining me?”

He stepped behind the glass separating the rest of the bathroom from the shower without waiting for a response. The water cascaded down his body, making my mouth water. My feet carried me into the room, around the glass, and then I was wrapping myself around his back, my fingers running along the grooves of his stomach. The water hit me, washing away all evidence of my tears. He didn’t say a word, merely pulled me around to his front and grabbed

the shower gel.

He didn't allow us to linger in the shower after he'd washed me and then himself. Afterwards, he dried me with a fluffy towel and tucked me up in his giant dressing gown. My hair was damp, but I couldn't do much about that. I sat on the end of his bed, watching him dress for the day in a dark grey suit with a waistcoat and a dark blue tie. The man moved with liquid grace. The whole experience of seeing him ready himself for his day was a treat for me in a lot of ways. It was the first time I'd had such intimacies with a man.

He styled his hair before coming over and pulling me up. Prescott clasped my hand in his and we left the room. I could hear the sound of voices spilling up from the floor below as we got nearer to the stairs. It made me falter in my steps. Prescott glanced at me with concern in his eyes.

"Are you sure about this?" I whispered. "Aren't they going to be mad that I'm here?"

He gave me a wink.

"If they are, fuck 'em."

I swallowed when we descended the stairs together. Prescott didn't let go of my hand, even as the voices stopped. When I looked over, Drake and Francis stood in the kitchen with mugs in their hands and West standing by the windows, his hand up against the glass as he stared out at the skyline. Francis' eyes narrowed as we reached the bottom of the stairs. Drake remained expressionless and I'm not sure West had even registered we were there. The last time I'd seen that damn man was when he stuck his hand up my dress and forced me to come in a room full of people. My face grew hot at the memory.

"Morning," Prescott said with a sunny smile on his face, which I'm pretty sure pissed Francis off, judging by the way his face soured.

Prescott made me sit down at the dining table, stroking my shoulder and giving me a wink before he wandered over to the kitchen.

"Did we win?" he asked as he opened the fridge, clearly not caring about what my appearance had caused. I could feel the disapproval radiating off Drake in waves, not to mention the irritation from Francis.

"Yes, which you would have known if you'd been there," Francis said through gritted teeth.

Prescott merely shrugged as he pulled out some items from the fridge and set

them on the counter next to him.

“I’m sure you handled it just fine without me.”

Francis’ scowl only deepened.

“It’s your fucking—”

“Francis,” Drake said, cutting him off. “Enough.”

His voice sent a chill down my spine. The absolute command and control in it silencing the entire room. West turned his head, looking at the others with a raised eyebrow. Then he spied me sitting there. A slow smile curved along his lips, making me grip the dressing gown tie in fear of what he would do. Shoving off the window, he stalked over to me. I swallowed hard when he approached my back and leant over me, placing his palms on the table in front of me.

“Hello, Scarlett,” he murmured in my ear. “Fancy seeing you here.”

I clenched my jaw shut, trying not to show how much he terrified the shit out of me. Especially after what he did last night.

“Did you not get enough from me, hmm? Or did Pres take it easy on you?”

Prescott had not taken it easy on me at all. I had a bruise on my shoulder from his teeth. He marked me as his, claiming my whole damn soul and binding me to him. It’d felt like that to me anyway. I had no idea of how Prescott felt about it, as he didn’t exactly voice his feelings aloud.

The fact West had decided to taunt me in front of the rest of them irritated me. Instead of doing what I should have, which was to remain silent, I turned my head up towards him and met his amber eyes.

“If you must know, I begged for his dick, which is more than I’ve ever done for you.”

As soon as the words left my lips, I regretted them. The way West’s eyes flashed had me shrinking back. And the silence echoing around the room told me the rest of them had heard me.

Do you ever learn? Do not antagonise the psychopath who thinks you’re his.

“Is that so?”

The deadly calm of his voice made me tremble. Every part of me screamed to run very, very far away from this man. I was trapped between his arms and the table. And his vicious smile made my heart pound so hard the beat of it rang in my ears. He leant closer, his face right up in mine.

“You say that,” he told me, his voice low and full of deadly violence. “But

mark my words, you'll be singing to a very different tune soon."

His hand left the table and he curled a lock of my wet hair around his finger. For a moment I thought he might stop, but he tugged on it hard, making me yelp.

"And by soon, I really mean right now."

I barely had a chance to take a breath when he ripped me out of my seat, slammed me against the table, and winded me. His hand curled around my neck as he pressed my face into the wood. The man leant over me, his breath dusting across my cheek.

"I should fuck that attitude out of you, Scar," he whispered. "I should teach you a fucking lesson in front of him."

The next thing I knew, he'd stabbed a knife into the table right by my face, making me flinch. His fist clenched around it, the tattoo of two bloody axes stark against his skin.

"But I have a feeling Drake and Frankie might have something to say about that... so here's what's going to happen. You're going to get on your knees and apologise to me or I will make you bleed out all over this table whilst I fuck you into a stupor."

THIRTY EIGHT

WEST

The way she trembled below me with my words had the darkness inside me smiling. How she continued to defy me when she knew exactly what I would do had me thinking she did this shit on purpose. She wanted me to punish her. Her guilt was showing. The whole fucking reason she was here was clear as day. It seeped out of her pores. Scarlett had not re-entered our lives with good intentions. And while I knew it wasn't all her fault, she still carried the fucking responsibility of going along with it.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "Please don't hurt me."

"Now, now, what did I tell you about your apology?"

She shivered. I could feel her heart hammering against me. Her fear was fucking intoxicating. I got drunk off the terrorised woman below me.

"I'll do it, just please, don't hurt me."

I caressed the skin on her neck.

"And here I thought you weren't going to beg me, Scar. Is that not reserved for Pres?"

"No," she whimpered. "Please, West. I'm sorry."

I nuzzled her hair. Fuck, her fear smelt so sweet. I dug my knife out of the table and ran the edge across her bottom lip.

"If I cut you right now, you know what would happen?"

She shook her head.

"We'd make Drake hard as fuck. Then you'd be in bigger trouble."

"W-what?"

"Mmm, I'll leave you to work that one out."

I released her and pushed myself up off the table. Then I straightened my

clothes. Scarlett didn't move, frozen on the table where I'd pinned her. My eyes went to the others. They hadn't heard the full extent of my conversation with her. Prescott looked like he wanted to deck me. Drake had his arms crossed over his chest with a dark expression. And Francis? Well, he had his fists clenched on the counter. I was in for quite the conversation when she left.

"On your knees, Scar. You wouldn't want to keep me waiting now, would you?"

She scrambled to obey, pushing herself off the table onto the floor and kneeling at my feet. Her head raised slowly, her hazel-green eyes meeting mine. I put the tip of my knife under her chin and forced her head up further.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have spoken to you in the way I did, West. I didn't mean it."

"And... what else?"

She reached out and gripped my belt between her fingers. Her expression was full of earnestness and stark honesty.

"I want your dick as much as I want Pres'. I need it."

I fought my smile so fucking hard.

"Who is allowed to touch you?"

"You, Drake, Francis and Pres."

"And who do you belong to, Scar?"

"You."

I stroked my knife down her cheek.

"That's right. You best not forget that again, you hear me?"

She nodded, her fingers tightening around my belt. There was nothing sweeter than watching her beg me to forgive her with her eyes. Beg me to not unleash my inner deviant and wreck her soul. It was only a matter of time until I did. Until she saw the monster living inside me. The one who had no mercy for anyone. Not even her.

"I won't."

Before I could stop her, she'd released my belt and took my hand. She pressed her lips to my knife. Then she licked it, her tongue running up the smooth side of the blade. And finally, she kissed my knuckles where I had symbols tattooed representing the lives I'd taken. The important ones and the scum of the earth who didn't deserve to breathe air.

Dear fuck, I have no words.

“Yours, West,” she whispered. “I’m yours.”

Then she let go and rose to her feet. Her actions proved to me the real Scarlett was still in there. The one who was as fucked up and psycho as the rest of us. We had to tear her out somehow. Not yet, but soon.

She stared up at me, a fucking queen in her own right but she didn’t know it yet. I flicked my knife closed and slipped it back into my pocket. Stepping closer to her, I wrapped my hand around the back of her head and leant down, watching the others over her shoulder.

“We’re going to fuck you all together again, Scar. Not now, but soon. And this time you’re going to watch every moment. See the way your body strains and struggles to take us all at once.”

Slipping my free hand beneath her dressing gown, I cupped her bare breast. My thumb flicked over the hardened peak.

“We’re going to fuck you until you’re crying and then I’ll lick away your tears. They taste so damn sweet.”

She shuddered and let out a little gasp.

“Don’t piss me off again, Scar, or I won’t let any of them make you come when we use you for our damn fucking pleasure.”

I pinched her nipple for good measure. She squeaked, rocking back on her heels.

“And I really, really want to make you come so many times, you pass out again.”

I released her, stepped back and pointed at the dining room table.

“Sit.”

She obeyed straight away, taking a seat and stared down at the wood. I took a seat next to her, stroking my fingers along her shoulder as I leant my arm over her chair. And I fucking dared the rest of them to give me shit with my eyes. None of them did. They wouldn’t in front of Scarlett.

I watched Prescott shake his head and give me a dirty look before he turned away to continue making her breakfast. Something had happened between him and Scarlett last night. I wasn’t sure what, but he kept glancing at her as if to reassure himself she was okay.

Drake and Francis were clearly unimpressed with both me and him. They

were having a rather heated whispered conversation and kept giving us disapproving looks.

“They’re not very happy Pres let you stay,” I murmured in Scarlett’s ear.

She looked at me.

“Are you?”

I gave her a smile.

“Pres can do whatever he wants. I’m not his fucking keeper.”

“Can I ask you something?”

I curled my hand around her shoulder.

“If you want.”

She searched my eyes for a long moment.

“Why are you okay with them touching me?”

I shrugged.

“We’ve always shared our toys.”

“That’s all I am to you? A toy for your amusement?”

She was far from a fucking toy. Hell, this woman was my damn soul, but until she remembered who the fuck I was to her, I wouldn’t be giving her anything.

“Aw, Scar, am I destroying your fantasies of a loving, caring relationship or something? Hate to break it to you, but I don’t do romance or any of that other bullshit.”

She frowned.

“No. And I didn’t say you could call me Scar.”

My hand tightened around her shoulder.

“I don’t recall needing your permission.”

“You’re not big on asking for anything.” She reached out and curled her fingers around my thigh. “You take what you want and don’t care who gets hurt in the process.”

I licked my lip. Raising my free hand, I curled it around her neck, stroking her pulse point. She didn’t try to stop me or push me off. I cocked my head to the side and gave her a sly smile.

“I like hurting you, Scar. You cry so sweetly on my dick.”

She pursed her lips, clearly trying to refrain from giving me a smart remark back.

“I won’t punish you if you tell me what you’re thinking right now.”

Her nails dug into my leg. I didn't wince. No, I fucking loved the sharp pricks of pain.

"I want more than good dick," she whispered. "But I don't think you're capable of giving it to me."

"You have the others for conversation if you need it."

Her free hand curled around mine around her neck, fingers caressing my skin.

"One way or another, West, you're going to show me who you really are. Don't kid yourself into believing you won't."

Such a bold little thing she was. And I fucking loved it.

"We'll just have to see, won't we?"

Her eyes darkened. There she was. My girl showing her true colours once again.

I released her and leant back in my seat as Prescott approached with a plate for her. He set it down and returned to the kitchen to get his own. Then he sat on her other side and stroked a hand down her back.

"Eat, little lamb," he murmured.

Had this prick gone soft for her? Was that why he kept giving me those murderous looks? He needed to chill the fuck out. I wasn't actually going to cut her with my knife. A little pain didn't kill anyone, but I'd already hurt her enough to last a lifetime. As if I would endanger her life again.

My eyes went to Francis, annoyance flooding my veins. *If it wasn't for...* I stopped my thoughts in their tracks. No point taking a trip down memory lane. It wouldn't do me any good.

Scarlett and Prescott shared a whispered conversation with each other while they ate. I'd already had a liquid breakfast after my workout. I'd been waiting to go downstairs with the others when these two had shown up.

When they were done, Prescott took her back upstairs to dress. I stood up and leant against the table, eyeing Drake and Francis warily. They didn't say a single word, only looked at me with reproach in both their eyes.

Scarlett and Prescott returned a few minutes later, Scarlett in her clothes from last night. She left Prescott to approach Drake with cautious steps. He stared down at her, his expression blank as usual when she stopped in front of him.

"I have to go home and change. I'll be a little late, but I promise I'll make up the time."

Drake said nothing for a long moment. The only reaction he had was the flexing of his hand, something only I noticed. Drake's tells were so fucking obvious. He wanted to tell her it wasn't okay, but I had a feeling he was way more pissed with Prescott right now.

“Don't let it happen again.”

She gave him a nod. Prescott walked over to the lift and pressed the button for it. Scarlett gave Drake a tentative smile before saying good morning to Francis. Then she retreated to Prescott's side as the lift arrived. He leant down and whispered something in her ear, stroking her lower back with his fingers. She smiled up at him, touching his arm before walking into the lift and pressing a button, presumably for the ground floor.

The moment the doors closed and the lift descended Prescott turned around. There was a certain fire in his eyes I rarely ever saw. The next thing I knew, he'd closed the distance between us in three long strides and his hand came up. I didn't have a chance to duck as his fist collided with my jaw. My head snapped back, pain radiating up my face from the impact.

Lowering my head, I put my hand to my jaw and rubbed it. Fuck me, Prescott had a decent right hook. I'd been on the receiving end of it before, but I forgot how damn fucking strong the guy was.

“What the fuck was that for?”

THIRTY NINE

FRANCIS

This morning had turned into one huge shitshow and it had barely begun. Prescott had taken it upon himself to let Scarlett stay in his fucking room last night. Then West had to go psycho on her for talking back to him. And now Prescott had decked West for fuck knows what reason.

“You did not need to take it that far,” Prescott ground out through his teeth, staring at West with murder in his blue eyes.

West shoved Prescott away from him and bared his teeth. There was blood on them. Prescott’s right hook had always been deadly. He rarely hit anyone. The man was almost as calm as Drake, too busy making idiotic jokes to get mad, but when he did, it was sure as shit a good idea to run as far away from him as possible. Even then, you weren’t guaranteed to escape his wrath. The man was damn fast. He needed to be, given he was into primal play. I did not envy the woman who ran from him. I’d seen Prescott in action and he was fucking deadly.

“Me? Take it too far? What the actual fuck, Pres? What’s got into you?”

Prescott stabbed a finger into West’s chest, getting up in his face.

“Threatening her like that. She’s been through enough already without your psychotic bullshit on top of it.”

Drake leant over to me.

“You grab Prescott, I’ll handle West.”

We didn’t need this to dissolve into an all-out war between them. Being at each other’s throats wasn’t helpful in the slightest. Especially not when it was clear Prescott was in the mood for violence.

Drake and I walked out from behind the counter towards the dining table.

Before West could get another word in, Drake dragged him away from Prescott, who tried to go after them, but I stopped him with an arm around his chest.

“Take a breather, Pres,” I hissed in his ear.

“He needs to learn some fucking self-restraint.”

“We all know that, but you need to calm the fuck down. Kicking the shit out of him isn’t going to change the way he is. You know better.”

Prescott shook me off and paced away, but not before I got a death glare off him. Drake had pinned West against the window, who was grinning at him in that fucking manic way of his.

“What the fuck has got into you?” Drake asked, his voice a quiet calm that told me he was close to losing his temper.

“Me?” West scoffed. “What about him? He’s gone all fucking soft over her like she’s a porcelain doll.”

That comment made Prescott start towards him, but I grabbed his shoulder to stop him from going after West again. We did not need to go downstairs with black eyes or any other sort of facial bruising. If we did, Scarlett would know we’d been fighting when she returned later. And it would be obvious it was over her. Something we did not need to deal with on top of everything else.

“Trust me, I want to know the answer to that too, but this isn’t about him. It’s about you.”

West glared at Drake but didn’t answer. Who the fuck knew what went on in his brain. West had never exactly been what anyone would call sane, and it got worse after Scarlett disappeared. As if the only thing holding him together was gone. I thought when she came back, he might regain his equilibrium, but it was wishful fucking thinking on my part. If anything, it had only exacerbated his psychotic nature.

“West.”

“Nothing has got into me, Drake,” West ground out. “Nothing at all.”

None of us believed him, but it wasn’t worth pressing the subject. If he didn’t want to talk, he wouldn’t. West could be a locked box. He had many secrets, things he’d hidden from the three of us. No doubt they were things we should know, but the man was a law unto himself.

Drake let West go, the latter smoothing down his suit and walking it off. I kept hold of Prescott just in case. I could feel his anger radiating off him next to

me. Drake turned to Prescott, his indigo eyes narrowing.

“You have some explaining to do.”

“I don’t want to do this anymore.” Prescott shoved my hand off and walked away into the kitchen, leaning his hands on the counter and taking a deep breath. “I can’t hurt her... I won’t hurt her.”

“What?”

I couldn’t believe my ears either. What the hell happened between him and Scarlett? He’d always been fully on board with all our plans right from the start. He even argued with me over taking Scarlett when she’d told him she hadn’t been with a man before. He advocated for taking her, regardless. And now here he was dropping a huge fucking bombshell on us like he’d undergone a personality transplant in the last twelve hours.

“Last night, she told me her memories are bleeding back into her present. She fucking told me she wants to remember who she is.” His voice shook with his words. “She sounded so... broken. So lost. Fuck, I can’t look at her without thinking about how we used to protect her with our lives. How we’d do anything for that girl.” He dropped his chin to his chest. “And look at us now, what the fuck are we all doing? We’re fucking her up worse and for what? For fucking what?”

I couldn’t remember the last time I saw Prescott look so defeated.

“You know what, Pres. You know exactly why we’re doing this.”

I flinched at Drake’s hard tone like he couldn’t believe that out of all of us, it was Prescott who’d cracked. For a moment Prescott did nothing, then he spun around, his blue eyes full of turmoil.

“They stole her from us. They fucking stole her away. They took her before she even woke up. We never stood a chance. One day she was there, the next she was gone. And now she doesn’t know us. She doesn’t know who I fucking am.” He slammed a fist against his chest. “She was everything, fucking everything. The sweetness and light I never got anywhere else. She understood what it was like to grow up the way I did, something none of you fucking well gets. So no, you don’t get to stand there and tell me I know why. You don’t get it. I can’t turn off my feelings at the fucking flip of the switch like he can.” He waved at West who was leaning against the wall by the staircase. “I care. I fucking care and I can’t hurt her.”

The brokenness of his tone had me walking over to him. I understood his pain. I got it. It was the exact same pain festering inside me. Prescott looked at me when I stopped in front of him. The haunted expression on his face echoed the ache in my chest.

“I know,” I murmured. “I know they took her and it destroyed all of us.”

“I want her back, Francis. I just want her back.”

Prescott didn't stop me from pulling him against me and holding him. He looked like he was about to break apart.

“I want her back too.” I sighed, hating myself for what I had to say next. “But you realise we can't deviate from the plan, right? There's too much at stake.”

To his credit, he nodded on my shoulder, which actually made me feel worse.

“What really happened last night, Pres? Why did you leave with her?”

He pulled away from me and stared out the window, swallowing hard as he dug his hands in his pockets.

“I wanted to pretend for one night she was still our Little Nyx.”

The low growl emitting from the other side of the room told me West wasn't happy about Prescott calling her that, but fuck if his words didn't rip into me too. I didn't know what the fuck to do with him. Prescott had clearly been harbouring these feelings for longer than just last night.

“She's not the same girl we knew,” Drake said.

“Like fuck she isn't,” West retorted. “She's still in there. I see her. Every time she fights us, those snappy fucking remarks she makes... that's our Scarlett, our fucking girl. We need to remind her of who she is. We need to fucking undo what they did to her before it's too late.”

Drake glared at West.

“And how the fuck do you suggest we do that? We can't just sit her down and tell her the truth. She's not going to believe us. Ten years, West, ten fucking years they've had her. Do you really believe we can undo that without ruining her?”

West shoved off the wall and stabbed a finger in Drake's direction.

“Did I say we tell her? No.”

“Then what?”

“I don't have the fucking answers. If I did, we wouldn't be in this situation.”

Drake turned away, clenching his fists at his sides.

“Then we need to stick to the plan. We can’t afford to have feelings like this. We can’t afford to care about her.”

Prescott stepped around me and gave Drake a dark look.

“So what? That’s it? You’re asking me to stop caring and just go along with this shit?”

“Yes, that’s exactly what I’m asking you to do.”

“Fuck you, Drake. She cried in my damn arms this morning.”

That made Drake’s expression falter and his mask slipped. My ever calm and controlled friend’s eyes filled with pain.

“What?”

“She asked me how I could be so cruel to her in one breath and treat her with care in the other. Not like I could answer that damn question, but it made her cry. I made her fucking cry. She’s broken inside. She wants to know who she is. Desperately. It’s all she wants.”

I stared at Prescott’s back. It finally made sense. His behaviour and reaction. Prescott had never been able to stand it when Scarlett cried. He’d always been the one who was most affected by her tears, her pain. At least when they were tears of misery. He liked it when he made women cry during sex, but that was different.

“You are cruel, Prescott, don’t fucking stand there and deny it’s who you are. It’s who we all are.”

It would be pointless to refute his statement. We couldn’t pretend otherwise.

“She’s one of us, Drake. One of us.”

“No, she’s not. She’s their agent and you know it. Until she remembers who she is, we can’t trust her. And even then, there are no guarantees she will choose us or even want to be near us. You know this.”

“Drake’s right,” I said, my voice quiet. “I hate it, but he’s right. We can’t trust her.”

I couldn’t see Prescott’s expression, but his shoulders sagged. The truth hurt like a bitch, but none of us had ever sugar-coated anything. It would be doing a disservice to each other if we did.

“Fine,” Prescott said, his voice echoing with his resignation. “Stick to the plan it is.”

He walked away towards the lift then, slamming his hand down on the

button.

“Pres—” Drake started.

“No, don’t you fucking well make it worse, Drake. Just don’t.”

Silence descended upon us as the lift opened. Prescott walked into it, pressed the button for our floor. When the doors closed, Drake sighed and walked over to the table. He ran his finger over the dent West had made with his knife in it.

“Did you really have to mark our damn table?”

West smirked and shrugged. Drake tsked before picking up the plates on the table and taking them into the kitchen. He bent down to put them in the dishwasher.

“What are we going to do about Pres?” I asked.

“Nothing. We’re doing nothing.”

“We’re just going to leave him like that?”

Drake looked at me when he straightened, his eyes full of sadness.

“Yeah, Francis, we are. There’s nothing any of us can say. He doesn’t like this, fine, but he knows we have no other choice. He thinks I don’t care, but I do.” He rubbed his chest. “I care about her more than he realises. This shit keeps me awake at night. No matter how much I wish things could be different, they are what they are.”

Didn’t I fucking well know it. Things were shit, but Drake had a point. We didn’t have another choice. If we had any chance of getting all of us out of this mess, we had to do as we set out to. We’d risked everything to get Scarlett back. If we handled this wrong, all our cards could come tumbling down. We could lose everything. The company we’d built. Our livelihood. Our fucking lives. And I wished we had another option or path in front of us... but we didn’t.

FORTY

SCARLETT

The whole way back to the flat, I kept running over what happened this morning in my head. What West had done shook me to my core. The fact he'd threatened to bleed me was a line I didn't think he would cross, but it turned out I didn't know what the hell I was talking about when it came to him. The man was unhinged and terrifying. One minute he'd be fine and the next he'd go full-on psycho on me before returning to normal again. And yet... and fucking yet, I wanted to know him anyway.

Maybe I was certifiable, because no normal girl wanted to get close to a man like him, let alone the rest of them. But I couldn't help it. Something about Prescott, West, Francis and Drake drew me in. I recognised them on a fundamental level. It didn't make any sense. How could it? They didn't know me from before. If they did, they would have said something. They would have told me.

I sighed as I unlocked the front door of the flat and trudged inside. Kicking off my heels, I walked into my bedroom and discarded my clothes. Walking over to my wardrobe, I selected an appropriate outfit for work. A three-quarter length sleeved dark blue blouse, black wide-leg trousers and a pair of nude heels. I'd just finished drying my hair and perfecting my makeup when Mason barged into the room with a face like thunder.

"Where the fuck have you been?"

The venom in his voice made me take a step back. He'd never spoken to me like that in all the years I'd known him. After last night, I thought he might have calmed down, but clearly not.

"Excuse me?"

He descended on me, taking me by the arm and getting up in my face. I swallowed when I saw the rage in his dark eyes and the vein popping in his temple.

“Where have you been, Scarlett?”

After the shit I’d been through with the Horsemen this morning, I was not in the mood to entertain Mason and his jealousy act. That’s what this was. I couldn’t deny it any longer. He didn’t want me near the Horsemen. He knew they wanted me. And it pissed him off.

“Where do you think I was?” I spat back, wrenching my arm out of his grasp.

“I swear to god, Scarlett, if you tell me you spent the night with them...”

“Or what, Mason? Or fucking what? You don’t get to walk in here and start on me first thing in the morning. This has nothing to do with you.”

I shoved past him, knowing I needed to get back to work. No way in hell I wanted to be later than I already was. Mason didn’t like that at all. He grabbed my arm again and spun me around. His grip was harder this time, his fingers digging into my skin. It made me let out a whimper from the pain. And he didn’t stop at the noise like I expected him to.

What the fuck?

Mason had never handled me this way before. Not once had he got remotely physical with me. He knew better. I wanted to tell him to stop, but I was frozen on the spot, too shocked to do a thing about it while he squeezed my arm tighter. It was like he was trying to hurt me. To make me feel his anger.

“This is my fucking business and you know it. Did you spend the night with them?”

I’d had enough of this. All of it. Something inside me snapped. My emotional breakdown in Prescott’s arms, West’s threatening behaviour, the way it’d made me want him to take me on that dining room table and punish me for talking back to him, how fucked up that all was, and now Mason. It was too much for me to handle. Too much for me to keep a lid on.

“Yes. Yes, I fucking well did. I spent the night with Prescott and guess what? I don’t regret it. And you know what else? Huh? You know what fucking well else? All four of them fucked me last week. And I don’t regret that either.”

Mason reared back with my words as if they were a physical blow.

“What did you just say to me?”

I pulled my arm from his fingers again, not wanting him to touch me any further. West's words about no other men being allowed near me rang in my ears. I took his warnings seriously. And in all honesty, I had no interest in being touched by anyone else but him, Prescott, Francis and Drake. I didn't care if they hurt me, but I sure as shit cared about Mason doing it.

I rubbed my arm where his fingers had clasped it, hating him for it.

"You heard me."

For once I didn't care what I'd said to him. I didn't give two shits. I was done. Mason could go fuck himself.

"You had sex with... all of them?"

I crossed my arms over my chest and glared at him. If he was going to start up with how I shouldn't have sex with four guys, he could save it.

Mason turned away and dragged his fingers through his hair. It was almost as if I'd broken his mind when I'd blurted that shit out. As if he couldn't believe I would do such a thing. The problem was, Mason didn't know who I truly was, because neither did I. There was a part of me kept in a locked cage. She was rattling her bars, screaming at me, telling me to break her out. And I wanted to. I wanted that girl back.

"Why? Why would you do that, Scar? Why would you let them touch you in that way?" His voice was quiet, but in no way calm. It shook with his words. His questions.

"I didn't exactly have a choice."

His eyes met mine. The concern and anger in them had me digging my nails into my elbows.

"Did they force you? Are you telling me they raped you?"

"No! They didn't force me to do anything." *Well, they kind of did, but you liked it.* "Do you think I'd be standing here telling you I don't regret what happened if they had?"

"No... but I don't understand." He reached his hands out to me, but I took a step back, not wanting any more physical contact with him after the way he'd manhandled me. "You didn't need to take it that far."

I shook my head. He had no idea what the Horsemen were like. He didn't know the allure they held for me. The way they demanded things from me. How I was helpless, trapped in their web and my need to be closer to them. How

being around Prescott made me feel safe and wanted. He made me feel... seen.

“I did what I had to, Mase. I did what I fucking well had to. I’m earning their trust the only way I know how. The only way that’s going to work.”

“No. No, it’s not.”

“You don’t know them!”

He poked a finger in my direction.

“I know they’re no good for you. They’re making you think if you give up your body to them, they’ll trust you. Well, that’s bullshit and I won’t have it.”

He paced away again.

“I’m done with this, Scarlett. I’m fucking done. It’s gone too far. The fact you let them have sex with you tells me they’re getting inside your head, making you believe shit that’s not real.”

His fists clenched at his sides before he looked at me again.

“I’m calling Stuart and we’re pulling the plug on this shit.”

I staggered back, my arms falling to my sides as his words sliced right through me.

“No. You can’t do that. You can’t, Mason.”

He’d promised me I’d never had to go back. That he’d do anything in his power to keep me away from the estate. How could he go back on his promise now?

“I can and I will.”

He pulled his phone out of his pocket. I couldn’t let him call my father. Not when it would only send me back to my prison. There were bars on my fucking bedroom windows, for crying out loud. Not to mention the place they locked me in when they thought I was being insolent. I trembled, the memories flooding my vision. The anger and rage in my father’s eyes when I told him no. The bruises he left. The way my mother would turn a blind eye to her husband’s temper tantrums. And how Mason knew the truth, but he didn’t do a single fucking thing to stop it.

Yet, despite all of that, he’d been my only friend for the past ten years. He’d held me when I cried and patched me up when the beatings went too far. I didn’t hate Mason for not stopping it. His hands were tied just as much as mine.

“Mason, please,” I choked out. “You know what will happen if I go back there. You know. Please, don’t call him. Don’t do that to me.”

The agony in Mason's eyes decimated me. I couldn't move. If he did this to me, I would never forgive him. Never. Now I'd had a taste of freedom, I would fight tooth and nail to keep it.

"I have an in with Prescott, okay? He'll give me what I need, I promise. Please, just give me a little more time. I'll get them to trust me enough to let me in."

There was no way in hell I wanted to use Prescott like that, but the threat of my family was too damn terrifying for me not to. He couldn't protect me from them. No one could. And I didn't think Prescott would anyway. We might be building something, but it was on lies. I wasn't being honest with him and I was damn sure he wasn't being honest with me either. Yet, it didn't matter. My feelings overrode my common sense. My connection to him was a thread I wanted to tug on until it all unravelled and the truth laid bare before our feet. And if I had to damn myself for him, I would.

Mason lowered the phone. His gesture filled me with relief. If I could convince him to give me another chance, I could work this out, couldn't I? Somehow I had to make the Horsemen trust me. And get me the fuck away from this shit. I didn't care if they were all a little psychotic and possessive over me. I was safer with them, wasn't I?

Don't kid yourself. You're no safer with them than you are here with Mason or back with your parents.

"You have until Monday, Scar, you hear me? Until then. I don't want to call Stuart. I don't want you to go back there, but you get me something to work with and I won't tell Stuart what you did with them."

I nodded, going over in my head how I could persuade Prescott to trust me.

"I promise, I'll make it work."

"Good."

"I have to get to work."

He gave me a grunt, the conflict in his eyes clear, but he wasn't going to stop me from going. He'd given me a lifeline and I was going to grab it by the horns.

I left the room, pulling on a coat and snagging my bag before leaving to get the tube. The whole way to Fortuity, I was trying to work out how the hell I would approach this conversation. I rubbed my arm, wincing at the pain from Mason's grasp. He'd betrayed me today. He'd physically harmed me and

threatened to send me back to my parents. In all honesty, I wanted to get away from him as much as I did my parents.

When I got to the building, I went straight upstairs to my office and hung up my coat. Then I pulled up my sleeve and looked at my arm. There were the beginnings of faint bruises on it. I put my hand to my mouth. They reminded me too much of my father. Of what he'd done to me. How could Mason think this was okay after all the times he'd taken care of me? He'd taken it too far. I didn't think I could forgive him for this.

I steeled myself. There was nothing I could do now but throw myself at Prescott and hope to god he had a heart in there somewhere. Because I had no idea what the hell I would do otherwise.

FORTY ONE

PRESCOTT

Fuck Drake. Fuck West. And fuck Francis. Fuck them all.

Rationally I knew I shouldn't be mad at them, but after the conversation we'd just had, I didn't give a flying fuck about being rational or sane. I wanted to kick the shit out of something. Take out my anger on anything. Decking West hadn't made me feel better. The fucker deserved it. In fact, I should have hit him again for good measure. Normally, I wouldn't care about how far he took things, but Scarlett's emotional state was fragile right now. She didn't need West unleashing his psycho nature on her.

I sat at my desk, staring out the window. I couldn't concentrate on work. All I could do was seethe in anger and hope to fuck Scarlett was okay. She'd not said anything to me about it when I took her upstairs to get dressed. But what could she say? She'd got on her knees and begged him for forgiveness. He'd not given her any other choice. And while I knew she felt something for West as she did for me, it didn't make me feel any better.

I was fucked over the woman. Utterly fucked. She'd made me feel things I'd kept buried. Having her around reminded me I still owned a heart, even if it was black, and she was tugging on its strings.

Dragging my hands through my hair, I let out a huff. What was I going to do? I had to act like nothing had changed. But last night and this morning had altered everything irrevocably. I wanted to protect Scarlett, but I couldn't. My hands were tied behind my back.

The boys were right. They were and I hated them for it. I couldn't trust her. Couldn't allow myself to put my faith in the girl I'd known since I was a kid. She was with the enemy, the people actively trying to ruin us. Trusting Scarlett

would be a mistake. A lapse in judgement. But everything I'd done recently with her had been exactly that. I'd ignored my better judgement and allowed my emotions to fuel me.

It was time to lock this shit down and remember why we were here. Why the fuck we were even doing this. To anyone else, it would seem insane and batshit crazy. We'd done all of this for her. Everything we'd achieved was for our girl. To return her to our sides.

My office door opened. I glanced over at it, dropping my hands from my hair and found Scarlett closing it behind her and turning the lock. My heart lurched when she looked at me. Her eyes were haunted and her whole demeanour was somehow more broken than she'd been earlier.

What happened between when she left the office to go home and now?

“Pres.”

Her beautiful voice carried across the room to my ears, warming me from the inside out. Why did she have the power to render me helpless for her?

I didn't respond. My tongue got stuck to the roof of my mouth trying to prevent everything I shouldn't say from spilling out and ruining everything.

Her feet carried her over to me and when she dropped to her knees by the side of my chair, I swallowed. She placed her hand on my knee and stared up at me.

“What are you doing on the floor, little lamb?”

“I need your help.”

“And you think you need to be on your knees to ask me?”

She nodded, her eyes turning haunted again.

I didn't want her down there. During sex, yes, I would have her on her knees for me in an instant, but this didn't feel right. And why on earth would she need my help?

I refrained from reaching out and stroking her hair, Drake's reminder about the plan still fresh in the forefront of my mind. No more casual affection or being 'nice' to her. I couldn't allow her to see how much I cared or she might pierce through my damn barriers. She might take advantage of my feelings towards her.

“Spit it out then.”

She looked away, her hand tightening on my thigh. Her touch was not doing

my self-restraint any good.

“I can’t... I don’t know what to do.”

“About what?”

“Mason doesn’t like me working for you.”

Of course that prick didn’t like it. He was jealous. The way he’d smirked at West yesterday while dancing with Scarlett was like waving a red flag at a bull. And made it very obvious he wanted her for himself. Too fucking bad she was ours.

“So what? You’re a grown woman. Where you work is your choice.”

She blinked before looking at me again.

“I know, but...”

“But what?”

I sounded impatient, but I didn’t see how this had anything to do with me. What did she expect me to do about it? I didn’t need this shit when I was already in turmoil about her and the fucking things we had to do next.

“He... he said some really terrible things to me this morning.”

Her bottom lip trembled and when she looked up at me again, tears welled in her eyes.

Fuck, please don’t cry again, sweetness. I’ll fucking break if you cry.

“Pres... he... he...” she choked out, making me stiffen.

“He did what?”

“He hurt me,” she whispered, a tear sliding down her cheek. “And I’m scared he’ll do it again.”

“He hurt you.”

My tone was completely flat, but she nodded, causing more tears to roll down her face. I didn’t know whether to believe her or not. Why the fuck would she even tell me that? What was her game here?

“You expect me to believe your friend hurt you?”

Her eyes widened and more tears fell. There were more fucking tears. The sight of them made my chest constrict. Were they real tears or ones she was putting on? This morning in my bed they’d been very real, but after everything else, I couldn’t tell what was up or down any longer.

When she didn’t respond to my question, it pissed me off. This woman was a fucking menace to my damn emotions. I couldn’t take this conflict inside me. It

was driving me crazy.

“Answer me, Scarlett.” I took hold of her arm and tugged her closer. “You expect me to believe that?”

She let out a pained yelp and winced. I looked down at her arm, a suspicion rising inside me. She didn't stop me when I laid her arm in my lap and gently pulled up her sleeve. On her forearm, there were finger marks. Fucking faint bruises. I knew for a fact they were not there earlier. Nor did I believe West had been that rough with her. The man might be unhinged, but even he had restraint. He was deliberate about the pain he caused.

Scarlett stared at me, her tear-streaked face evidence of her misery. Betrayal was written all over her face. Her friend... fucking Mason had betrayed her trust and hurt her.

“He did this to you? This is how he hurt you?”

“He was so forceful with me. He's never been like that, but he was so enraged and I couldn't stop him. I'm... I'm scared he'll do it again. I can't stay with him. I can't...”

I couldn't take her words or the way she looked at me. The cunt had hurt her. He'd bruised her skin. And for what? It wasn't part of a fucking game like when me or the others did it. No, he'd lashed out at her in anger.

“Come here, little lamb.”

Scarlett hesitated, but I opened my arms to her and she crawled into my lap. I let her rest her head on my shoulder.

“I'm sorry,” she whispered on a sob.

“Shh, don't apologise.” I stroked her hair, trying to soothe my girl.

“I can't stay with him. He wants me to quit. He doesn't want me to be here with any of you.” Her hand curled around the back of my neck. “I don't want to leave you.”

“No one is taking you away from me, you hear me? No one. You're mine and I won't let anyone else have you.”

She shifted, burying her face in my neck and let out a shuddering breath as if my words brought her some relief. I shouldn't have said those things. Scarlett was my weakness. The one damn person in this world who could pierce through my armour and render me unable to do anything but give in to her. And yet I had no idea what the fuck to do about this situation.

I couldn't make Scarlett any promises. Not when we had a plan to stick to, but if she was going to get ripped away from us again, I couldn't have that. None of us could. If Mason was hurting her, I didn't want him anywhere near our girl. She wasn't safe with him. She wouldn't be safe with us either, but that was hardly the point.

"Do you trust me, Pres?" she murmured against my skin.

"Do you want my honest answer?"

"Yes."

I leant my head against hers.

"No, I don't."

There were already enough lies between us, this didn't need to be another one. I didn't trust her because I couldn't afford to.

"Does that mean you won't help me?"

"What exactly are you asking me to do, sweetness?"

She pulled away so she could meet my eyes. I couldn't help reaching up and wiping away her tears with my thumb.

"Protect me from Mason."

I searched her face, reading between the lines of her words. The implications of them. Was she doing this to get closer to us or did she want me to keep her safe? Was it both? I couldn't just invite her into our lives, our fucking sanctuary. Inviting the enemy in any further would prove disastrous. Having her working here was already precarious when we all knew she'd been sent to destroy us. It was impossible to give her that... wasn't it?

"Do you fully understand what you're asking of me, little lamb?"

"I know you don't trust me. I get that. And I'm willing to do whatever it is you need me to... anything, Prescott, I'll do anything you tell me to, just please, get me away from him... please."

You'll do anything, will you? Anything at all?

I wasn't sure I believed that. We had set out to test how far she'd go to settle their vendetta against us. It's not like we didn't know their plans. We knew. We had been two steps ahead of them this time. Laying the fucking trap and reeling them in. Forcing their hand. Making them use their greatest weapon against us.

Her.

Scarlett.

She was their weapon.

But they had no idea of the lengths we were willing to go to return her to us. To sever her connection to them. To have her back by our sides where she fucking well belonged.

“I’m not going to make you any promises... but I will speak to the others.”

“Pres—”

“No, little lamb, it’s that or nothing, do you understand? I cannot offer you anything else.”

For a second I thought she might argue with me, but she bowed her head.

“I understand.”

“Good. Now, go back to work before I have Drake in here giving me a hard time about keeping you from your duties, hmm?”

The only way I could resolve this was by speaking to Drake, Francis and West. She’d basically thrown herself at my mercy. Told me she’d do anything. If I put that to them, then maybe they’d do something about it. Perhaps we could use it to our advantage. Drake might have been adamant about sticking to the plan, but it didn’t account for this outcome.

“Okay,” she whispered.

She crawled out of my lap, stood and straightened out her clothes. I got to my feet with her and pulled the box of tissues on my desk towards me. Plucking one out, I took her face in my hand and dabbed away her tears. She would need to fix her face herself, but I wasn’t going to send her out there with tear tracks.

I threw the tissues in the bin but didn’t release her. Instead, I brought her arm up to my face, tugged up her sleeve and watched her as I pressed kisses to her bruises.

“No one is allowed to hurt you like this,” I murmured. “No one but us.”

She trembled, her eyes widening at my statement.

“You’re *mine*, little lamb. I protect what’s mine.”

The implication was there. I would do my best to protect her if I could.

“Yours,” she breathed.

And fuck if it didn’t make my heart hurt. We stared at each other for a long moment. There was no way in hell I could stop myself from feeling things for this woman no matter why she was here. I couldn’t stop myself from falling.

I dropped her arm and directed her towards the door before I said something

which would fucking damn me. She walked away, unlocking the door when she reached it and tugging it open. She paused there and looked back at me.

“Whatever happens, thank you for trying.”

I didn’t have time to say anything to it as she walked out of the room. My breath left me, the heaviness of it settling over my lungs. This was a fucked up situation, but when had our lives ever not been fucked up.

Grabbing my phone, I opened up the group chat between the four of us and typed out a message. One way or another I had to convince them doing something about her situation was in our best interests. I wasn’t going to let her stay with someone who had the potential to abuse her. I couldn’t allow it and if I knew anything about the three of them, they wouldn’t either.

Prescott: Meeting in Drake’s office. Right now. No excuses.

FORTY TWO

DRAKE

I stared down at Prescott's message with concern. After our argument earlier, I didn't think he'd be in the mood to talk to me, let alone call a meeting. He'd been seriously pissed off, and quite frankly, I didn't blame him. It's not like I wanted to rain on his parade, but we couldn't deviate from our plans. Not when there was no alternative.

Setting my phone back down on my desk, my eyes flicked to the door. Francis strolled in, waving his phone at me.

"Did you read Pres' message?"

"I did."

"What do you think he wants?"

I shrugged.

"Fuck knows. I just hope it has nothing to do with her."

Francis gave me a look as he folded himself into one of my armchairs, crossing his arms over his chest.

"You and me both."

West walked in next, looking around the room before he let out a huff of annoyance.

"Where is that narcissistic fuck then?"

"Don't start on him," I warned. "We've already had enough shit today without you two fighting again."

West rubbed his jaw.

"Wouldn't mind if he hit me again."

"I mind. Do not antagonise Pres, you hear me?"

He rolled his eyes but gave me a nod, seating himself on the sofa near

Francis, who gave him a sharp look. We didn't need to dissolve into punching each other's lights out. The four of us were supposed to be a fucking team, not fighting amongst ourselves.

A minute later, Prescott walked in. He shut the door, dug his hands in his pockets and leant up against it. He looked down at the floor for a long moment before he sighed.

"We have to do something about Scarlett."

Francis scoffed.

"Well, there's a fucking surprise. I knew this was about her."

I sent a glare his way, telling him to shut up without words. After I'd had to shut down his damn conscience earlier, the least we could do was to hear Prescott out.

"Go on, Pres," I said. "We're listening."

Prescott raised his head and met my eyes head-on.

"You're not going to like what I have to say."

I leant back in my chair.

"Do I ever like the ridiculous schemes you drag us into?"

He smiled, but it was a sad one.

"No, but you trust me to get results, which I always do."

I spread my hands. When it came to business, I trusted Prescott's judgement implicitly, even if I thought he was reckless as fuck at times. He didn't steer us wrong. When it came to Scarlett, it was another matter entirely.

"She isn't a game, Pres."

"Don't I fucking know it." He cracked his neck and shoved off the door, but didn't move away from it, his eyes flicking over to West and narrowing like he was concerned the guy would try to leave at any moment. "We need to bring her here... to stay with us."

"What the fuck?" West interjected, sending a death glare Prescott's way. "Why the hell would we do that? You don't invite the girl who wants to bring us all down into our fucking house to live with us."

Prescott put his hand up.

"Jesus, calm the fuck down, I'm getting to that."

"You better have a good fucking reason."

Prescott visibly steeled himself, his mouth thinning into a narrow line. And I

knew what he said next wouldn't be good.

"Mason hurt her."

"What?" Francis said, sitting up and dropping his arms from his chest.

"Mason fucking well hurt her. He left bruises on her arm."

For a moment, we were all silent, then West was out of his chair and stalking towards the door. Prescott pressed himself back up against it, giving West a warning look.

"Move out of my way."

Prescott shoved West back.

"No. You are not leaving right now."

"Move. Now. I'm not kidding."

"You cannot go after him, West."

West growled and clenched his fists.

"He put his fucking hands on her. He's a dead man walking."

"Trust me, I want to beat the crap out of him too, but we can't do that and you know it."

For a second, I thought West might pull Prescott away from the door, but he huffed and paced away.

"Fuck!"

I didn't want to point out that we'd all put hands on Scarlett nor how West had threatened her this morning. It was a double standard, but she was ours and we were the only ones who were allowed to do what we wanted to her. Another person doing it, man or fucking woman, I would be out for blood like West was right now. But I had to remain calm because there was more to what Prescott had told us.

"How do you know about this?" I asked, ignoring West's angry pacing a few feet away from me.

"She showed me," Prescott replied, eyeing West with a wary expression on his face. "And she asked me to protect her from him."

"You believe her?"

His eyes flicked to me.

"Of course I fucking believe her, Drake. There are finger marks on her arm. West didn't touch her like that this morning so who else could have done it? Huh?"

I drummed my fingers on the arm of my chair. While I didn't think Prescott was bullshitting us, I didn't trust Scarlett.

"She wants you to protect her."

"That's what she asked for."

"She must be desperate if she's asking you for help," Francis said with a snort.

Prescott turned his gaze onto Francis and I flinched at the venom there.

"Fuck off, Francis. If it wasn't for you, none of us would be in this situation in the first place."

His words caught West's attention. He glared at Francis as well.

"Pres has a point on that one."

Francis jumped up and clenched his fists, giving both of them a wounded look. This was getting out of hand way too fast.

"Oh well, yes, just blame me when it was you who fucking well—"

"Would you three stop it," I said, trying to keep my voice calm and level. "That's not fucking helpful."

All three heads turned to me. I almost sighed. This was getting us absolutely nowhere. Slowly, I rose from my seat and leant on my desk with both hands.

"We can't invite her into our home, Prescott, that's asking for trouble."

Prescott stepped away from the door and put his hand up.

"She said she'd do anything we ask in return. You should have heard her. She's desperate. I don't know what the fuck went on with her and Mason this morning. I can hazard a guess at him being pissed over her spending the night with me. They argued last night as well. It's another reason I brought her back here."

She told him she'd do anything we asked. It was... unexpected. Was she really that desperate to get into our fold? Were they putting pressure on her? I could well imagine they wanted results from Scarlett, but it'd only been just under a month since she'd joined Fortuity.

"I'm not leaving her with him," he continued. "I know it's fucking dangerous to have her here. Do you really think I would ask you three to allow her to stay with us after this morning if there wasn't a real threat to her safety?"

"As if she's *any* safer with us," West scoffed.

I sent a glare his way.

“We can’t trust her, Pres.”

“Test her. She said she’d do anything. I don’t really give a shit how you want her to prove herself, just fucking do it. I want her here where we can keep an eye on her and that cunt can’t hurt her again.”

The vehemence in Prescott’s voice had me pausing and actually taking stock of what he’d said, of what he was suggesting we do.

“How is testing her going to prove anything?” Francis asked. “She still answers to them.”

None of us spoke for a long minute. Francis was right, but Prescott was also right. We couldn’t leave her with Mason. Not if he’d hurt her the way Prescott said he had. Even I wasn’t willing to leave our girl with a man who was capable of that. And we couldn’t do anything about Mason, as much as I would love to take the cunt out. If we touched him, the house of cards would come tumbling down. They’d know we knew what they were up to. We would no longer have the upper hand after moving mountains to gain it in the first place. I was not willing to take the risk.

How could we test her though? We couldn’t outright tell her the truth. It would only end in tears. Scarlett needed to remember what happened herself. It was the only way she’d ever take what we said as real and true. But I didn’t know where to even start with another suggestion.

I had to find a way out of this but didn’t change the facts.

Scarlett wasn’t trustworthy.

She answered to our enemies.

And she could be telling us this to worm her way into our inner circle further. To find out our secrets. But she wouldn’t fake bruises, would she? I could believe a lot of things about Scarlett. That wasn’t one of them.

“I know how we can kill two birds with one stone,” West said, giving all of us one of his manic grins.

West’s ideas and suggestions were usually batshit crazy. You never knew what you were in for when it came to him.

“How?” I asked.

“Pres said she will do anything. I say we push her boundaries far beyond anything she could ever imagine, and in turn, it will give us something we can hold over her in case she tries to run back to them.”

I raised an eyebrow. If we had something we could hold over her, it would make it safer for us to have her here.

“Go on then, tell us what crazy idea you have in that fucked up brain of yours.”

West’s smile turned deviant. I knew whatever he suggested, Scarlett would hate every moment of it. And perhaps... it was exactly what we needed.

FORTY THREE

SCARLETT

I'd seen neither hide nor hair of the Horsemen yesterday after I'd left Prescott's office. It made me nervous as fuck. Having basically thrown myself at Prescott's mercy, I'd spent last night and today on edge. Sharing a rather tense meal with Mason hadn't been easy either. He didn't ask me what happened when I went into work, but I knew he was still unhappy with me over what I'd done with them.

I lay back on my bed, staring up at the ceiling. Mason had left for the evening an hour ago. I didn't ask him where he was going. To be honest, I didn't want to be around him. He hadn't apologised for hurting me, but I hadn't shown him what he'd done either. It was a conversation I didn't want to have. Not when it would remind me of how Prescott had kissed the bruises on my arm and told me he would protect what was his.

I didn't trust Prescott, nor any of the others, but the way he'd reacted to the knowledge Mason had hurt me made my heart ache. It brought out his possessive instincts. While he wasn't overt with them in the same way West was, it was clear Prescott viewed me as his woman. And he'd fuck up anyone who tried to muscle in on his territory.

The doorbell rang. I sat up and frowned. Few people knew we lived here and we rarely got visitors. Climbing off my bed, I trudged out into the hallway and checked the intercom camera. My stomach dropped out from underneath me when I saw both Prescott and Francis standing at the front door of the building. What were they doing here?

I pressed down on the intercom.

"Hello?"

Prescott looked up at the camera and gave me a smile.

“You going to let us in, sweetness?”

I swallowed. Had he convinced them to help me? His voice gave nothing away. I pressed down on the button to open the front door and watched them walk in. Then I went over to my door, pacing the hallway until they knocked on it. Pulling it open, I stared at Prescott and Francis. I thought it was odd they were both dressed head to toe in black, but I didn't comment on it. It was the first time I'd seen them in something other than suits.

“Evening, little lamb.”

They didn't so much as wait for me to invite them in, both stepping through the open doorway and forcing me to take a step back.

“What are you doing here?”

Francis took the door out of my hand and shut it behind him. His grey eyes roamed over me, but his expression gave nothing away.

“We're here to get your things.”

“Which way to her room?” Prescott asked Francis.

“Third door on the left.”

The two of them walked past me. I stood there for a full minute, not understanding what was going on. Then I chased after them. When I stepped into my bedroom, Francis had my chest of drawers open and Prescott was sliding my wardrobe door to the side. I realised they had brought bags, which they'd set out on my bed.

“What... what are you doing?”

“If you're coming home with us, you need your things,” Prescott said like it was obvious.

He tugged my clothes out with their hangers attached.

“Hold on, what do you mean I'm coming home with you?”

Francis looked over at me with a smirk.

“Exactly what you think it means. Now, if you have toiletries, I suggest you retrieve them unless you want to steal Pres' shower gel for the rest of the weekend.”

I didn't know what to think or say. They hadn't given me any warning or indication they were coming over. Now they were here, packing up my clothes to take me away from my flat.

“How... how did you know Mason wouldn't be here? He wouldn't let you do this, you know.”

The two of them exchanged a glance and Francis shrugged.

“Lucky coincidence.”

I put my hands up.

“Is this not up for discussion?”

“No, little lamb, it's not. You asked me to protect you. This is the deal. You can stand there or you can help us. Either way, you're coming home with us to Fortuity,” Prescott said, shoving more of my clothes into one of the bags.

This wasn't what I had expected, but knowing the Horsemen, they wouldn't take no for an answer. They would drag me kicking and screaming if they had to. And Prescott was right. I had asked him for protection.

I turned around and went into the bathroom, collecting up my toiletries.

What is Mason going to say when he finds out I've left?

Why was I even thinking about that? He was threatening to send me back to my parents. I shouldn't give a shit what he thought. But I kind of did. I still cared about him, even if he was acting like a dick right now, not to mention how he'd hurt me. I stroked my fingers along the bruises on my arm, wincing at the sight of them. They made me sick. It wasn't like the bruise Prescott had left on my shoulder. That one made me tremble at the memory of the way he'd fucked me. How when he bit down on my skin, I'd come violently. No, the bruise he'd left was a symbol of passion, not violence.

I stuffed my toiletries in their bag and took them out into the bedroom. They were still going through my things, and Prescott had got my suitcase down from in the wardrobe. They weren't playing around. My whole life was basically in those bags. I didn't exactly have much to start with so it all fit into three large bags and my suitcase. I handed Francis my toiletries bag. He stuffed it into the last bag and zipped it up. Then he turned to me, a storm brewing in his grey eyes. He took my arm and brought it closer to his face. I winced when he ran his fingers over the bruises Mason had left on it.

“No one hurts what's ours,” he murmured before he dropped my arm and leant closer to me. I didn't have a chance to stop him from pressing his mouth to mine. His kiss wasn't soft. It was all-consuming. My blood pumped wildly around my body, making me grow hot and achy with need. Only when he pulled

back and gave me a smile did my knees almost buckle. He caught me around the waist and his smile widened. “Don’t fall now.”

I didn’t know what the fuck to say to him. And I hadn’t forgotten Prescott was right there. When Francis let me go and picked up two of the bags they’d packed, I glanced at Prescott. His eyes were dark, but not with irritation. No, I recognised his expression all too well. The deviant had surfaced having watched Francis kiss me. If I wasn’t sure of his voyeuristic tendencies before, I was in no doubt now.

“Do you want to check we’ve got everything whilst I take these down to the car?” Francis said, raising an eyebrow at me. “I’m sure you and Pres can manage the rest.” He waved at the other bag and my suitcase.

“Um, okay.”

He gave me a nod before disappearing. Prescott stalked towards me. I was caught up against his chest the next moment and his face was buried in my neck. He inhaled me like he was starving for oxygen.

“Mmm, if we didn’t have places to be, I’d bend you over this bed and fuck you right now, little lamb,” he murmured, nibbling my skin as his hand cupped my arse and pressed me into him. “I should tell Francis off for kissing you and getting me hard.”

I could feel him pressing into my stomach. My body responded to his touch without me wanting it to. I melted into him, wanting him to do exactly what he’d threatened. However, I didn’t think it was part of the plan. He said we had places to be. What had he meant? I thought we would be going back to Fortuity. Back to their home.

“Maybe I should get you to suck his dick in the car for me.”

“What?” I squeaked.

“Fuck, it would be hot.”

He ground into me, his teeth grazing across my neck. I tried to escape his hold, but he only held onto me tighter.

“Pres!”

“I can’t stop thinking about your pretty lips around his cock. Mmm, I want him to make you gag so fucking hard.”

I shoved harder and Prescott let me go. The predatory glint in his eyes made me tremble.

“I’m not going to suck Francis’ dick in the car, Pres. What the hell? That’s... no. I can’t do that in front of you.”

He licked his bottom lip and gave me a grin.

“I’ve watched you get fucked by Drake and Francis. What’s different about this?”

I looked away, shuffling my feet and wringing my hands.

“I couldn’t see when you did that.”

He tucked a finger under my chin, forcing it up towards him.

“I’ll reward you if you do.”

“What kind of reward?”

I don’t know why I was even entertaining this shit. They’d turned up to take me away. Should we really be talking about sex right now?

“My lips, sweetness. I’ll kiss you until you’re breathless with need.”

When Prescott kissed me after he’d fucked me on Thursday, I’d almost died and gone to heaven. His reward for me being a good girl and doing what he told me to. For begging him. Somehow it made it so much hotter.

“You’ll kiss me if I give Francis head?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll think about it.”

I moved away from him, going through the room to check they’d got everything I needed. Prescott said nothing, merely watched me while I gathered up a few more bits and put them in the last bag. The two of us took the rest of the bags and my suitcase out of the flat. I stared at the door, wondering what Mason would do when he found me gone. Who the fuck knew?

They’d parked on the road and Francis was leaning up against the car when we got there. Prescott had a whispered conversation with Francis as I got in the back seat. Then he walked around to the driver’s side and got in. Francis dumped the last bag in the front seat as there wasn’t any more room in the boot, before he got in the back with me. He was in the middle seat which made me highly suspicious of what Prescott had said to him.

Prescott set off, eyeing me in the rearview mirror and winked. I glared at him and looked out the window. Then I felt fingers brushing over my hair and running down my arm. Glancing over, I found Francis watching me as he touched me. Those grey eyes of his were so damn intense. And for the first

time, I noticed he'd not gelled his dark brown hair today. It was a little wilder than normal. I wondered what it would be like to run my fingers through it.

He wrapped a hand around the back of my neck, drawing me closer to him and eyed me for a long moment.

"You don't have to do anything you don't want to."

My eyes went to Prescott who was half paying attention to the road and half paying attention to us. My hand went to Francis' chest. It wouldn't be the first time his dick had been in my mouth.

"It's what he wants."

Francis' eyes darkened significantly. I shivered and swallowed, rubbing his chest with my fingers. He closed the distance between us and kissed me again. His mouth was so soft as his tongue explored every inch of mine. I couldn't help moaning. I'd only kissed two men in my life, but damn if they didn't know how to dissolve me into a puddle at their feet with their mouths.

My hand left his chest, running down his stomach until it landed in his lap. He let out a grunt when I rubbed it against his cock. Lust flooded my veins from feeling how hard he was for me. I didn't want to think about what Prescott was doing in the front. All I could feel was Francis' body, the warmth of it and his demanding mouth on mine.

Francis wrapped my hair in his fist and dragged my head back. The wildness of his silvery-grey eyes had me parting my mouth in response, but nothing left my lips.

"Your mouth is only good for one thing right now," he murmured. "A fuck-hole for my cock."

The harshness of his words had my eyes widening. Them coming from his rather prim and proper mouth made my pussy throb in response. I fumbled with his clothes and somehow managed to free him. Before I could even take a peek at what I'd revealed, his hand was shoving me down towards his crotch. Since my mouth was already open, his cock slid straight in. I tried to wrap my hand around the base, but Francis grabbed it with his free one and held it down on the seat next to us.

"No," he growled. "You stay still unless it's to use your tongue."

He used my hair as his anchor to force me into taking more. I gagged when he hit the back of my mouth, but it didn't stop him. If anything, it made him

press deeper, forcing me to open my throat.

“Fuck,” came Prescott’s voice.

“Pay attention to the fucking road, Pres.”

I couldn’t respond as my throat was full of Francis’ dick. It wasn’t easy for me to take, but somehow I managed. After all, it wasn’t the first time I’d done this. Francis pulled me up and forced me back down, building a steady rhythm. I could do nothing but let him use my mouth for his pleasure. The only noise I could hear was the wet sucking sounds of my lips around his dick. Everything else was muted. Maybe I was so focused on trying to breathe, I couldn’t pay attention to anything else.

“You expect me to not watch you face-fucking our woman?”

I heard Francis chuckle.

“No... just don’t crash, yeah? I’d rather not explain to the police why my dick is out and lodged down Scarlett’s throat, thanks.”

Prescott laughed. I didn’t know what was so fucking funny, but what could I even do? My mouth was currently very full. Francis’ hand tightened in my hair, making me aware of how much he was enjoying this.

“That’s it, Scarlett, take my dick.”

“Mmm, dirty girls get all the dick,” Prescott chimed in. “You’re being such a good girl, sweetness. Make him come for me.”

His words made Francis increase his pace as he fucked my mouth, his hips shifting up to meet my lips. I gagged and choked around his length again, but I was stuck taking it. Being used by him. And hell, if my pussy wasn’t drenching my knickers with my arousal. I couldn’t touch myself, with the way he had my hand pinned and our position. My legs rubbed together, trying to get some friction between them. It wasn’t nearly enough. I let out a frustrated squeak around Francis’ dick, which was completely ignored. It must be obvious to him what I was doing, but this wasn’t about me. It was entirely about Francis getting off. My reward would come from Prescott.

The only warning I got when he was about to come was a low groan, then an explosion of hot liquid spurted in my mouth. There was nothing left to do but take what he gave me. He let go of my hair and rubbed my scalp in a soothing motion as his cock throbbed inside me. Only when he released my hand did I pull back and sit up. His eyes met mine. I swallowed hard at the way his pupils

were blown and his wicked smile.

For a moment I stared at him until I realised we were no longer moving. I looked around out the window, finding we were parked next to some large dark buildings. They appeared to be warehouses. I frowned then met Prescott's eyes through the rearview mirror.

“Where are we?”

FORTY FOUR

SCARLETT

Prescott didn't answer me, merely gave me a wink and got out of the car. Francis was busy tucking himself away next to me. I looked at him, wondering if I should say something. He unbuckled our seatbelts and leant over me to open my door.

“Get out, Scarlett.”

His tone brokered absolutely no arguments. I slid out and shivered at the cool air, wrapping my arms around my chest. Francis got out behind me and closed the door. There was another car sitting in front of ours. I frowned but didn't get a chance to ask what was happening. Francis wrapped an arm around me and led me around the vehicle. We met Prescott by the door to a big warehouse. He tugged me away from Francis and waved him inside.

“Two mins,” he said when Francis gave him a look.

Francis rolled his eyes and shoved open the door. He disappeared into the building, leaving me alone with the man I'd become enamoured with, despite the fact he was dangerous and I shouldn't trust him. Prescott dug his hands in my hair and pulled me closer. He leant down, rubbing his nose against mine.

“Time for your reward, little lamb.”

I didn't have a chance to object to the fact he was kissing me right after I'd had Francis' cum in my mouth. His lips were on mine, stealing my breath and making me dizzy. He parted my lips with his tongue, tasting me with unrestrained passion. I gripped his clothes to steady myself, allowing him to take me away on a sea of bliss.

When he released my mouth, he smiled and his eyes softened a fraction. My heart lurched and I wasn't sure I could hold myself up. I was glad he still had a

grip on me.

“Where are we, Pres?”

“You’ll see.”

“I thought we were going back to Fortuity.”

“We will, sweetness.”

He dropped his hands from my hair and took my hand. I was dragged through the door to the warehouse the next moment. It was dark, dank and cold. I shivered, feeling incredibly uneasy about why they’d brought me here. In front of us, a light glowed and three figures stood bathed in it. My fingers tightened in Prescott’s as he drew me over to the men waiting for us.

“Hello, Scar,” West said, drawing my attention to the fact it was him, Drake and Francis.

I glanced up at Prescott as we came to a standstill, but his expression was entirely blank.

“What’s going on?” I asked, turning my attention back to West.

His smile was sinister. I swallowed, my palms turning sweaty despite the cold air enveloping us in the dark warehouse.

“Well, you asked our boy here for protection.” West indicated Prescott with his hand. “You didn’t think it wouldn’t come at a price, did you?”

I’d been fully prepared for them to want something from me in exchange, but this situation made me suspicious and wary at the same time.

“I did.”

“And is it right you told him you’d do anything to prove you’re worthy of our trust?”

“Yes.”

It was then I realised the three of them were standing in front of something. This couldn’t be good. Not at all. They wouldn’t bring me all the way out to a warehouse for something normal and nice. My hand shook in Prescott’s, my fear bleeding through even though I was trying not to show it.

West cocked his head to the side.

“Well, Scar, it’s your lucky day. We’re happy to protect you... on one condition.”

Prescott let go of my hand and pushed me closer to West, Francis and Drake.

“W-w-what’s that?”

I couldn't help the way my voice shook on the words.

"We need you to do something for us."

West stepped towards me, took my chin between his fingers and stroked my jaw. The gesture was entirely at odds with the manic look in his eyes. With his other hand, he slid something from his pocket and licked his lip.

"Put your hand out."

I did as he asked. He placed something hard and cold into it before curling my fingers around the handle of whatever it was.

"You'll need this."

Then he dropped his hand from my face and stepped away from me. I hadn't noticed Francis and Drake had moved out of the way too. It took a moment for me to register what was in front of me. A man with a hood on his head was sitting on a chair. His hands were behind his back and his legs tied to the chair. My eyes fell down to the object in my hand. It was a knife. And not just any knife. It was West's knife. The one I'd kissed and licked yesterday. Of all the scenarios I imagined playing out, this wasn't even on my radar. My mind screamed in protest of what it thought they were asking for. They couldn't be serious. They weren't asking me to do... that... were they?

"Why... why is he tied up?"

"I think that's rather obvious, Scar, don't you?"

My eyes went to West. He was smiling at me, his amber eyes glinting in the low light. They were full of violence and glee.

"What do you want me to do with this?" I asked even though it was fucking clear.

West snorted, while the others remained silent as statues, waiting for things to kick up a notch.

"We want you to kill him."

I stared hard at West before a wild, choking laugh erupted from my lips. I took a step back, putting a hand to my chest.

"You... you can't... you can't be serious. This is some kind of joke, right?"

West shook his head very slowly.

"No joke, Scar. You want to prove yourself to us. Prove we can trust you. This is the price." He waved at the man. "His life in exchange for our protection."

I took another step back, but I was prevented from going anywhere by Prescott, who pushed me towards West and the man in the chair. I daren't look back at him, worried what the hell I'd see in his expression.

Sucking in a breath, I clutched the knife tighter in my hand. The one they expected me to use.

"Why would you make me do this? What the hell is wrong with you?"

West didn't respond, merely kept smiling at me as if this was perfectly normal. Nothing about this situation was fucking normal. Who asks someone to kill another person in exchange for protection? Then again, what else did I expect coming from the men with a reputation such as theirs? They hadn't been branded the Four Horsemen for nothing. I'd been warned so many times they were ruthless and fucking with them would end up in a death sentence. Only I hadn't realised it wouldn't be my own life at stake here.

"What did he even do?" I pointed at the man. "Who is he?"

West dragged his finger across his bottom lip.

"Oh well, that's the best part now, isn't it, boys?"

I looked around at the other three, but they were all expressionless. As if this didn't bother them at all. Maybe killing people was commonplace to them, but it wasn't for me.

"Why?"

"I warned you about allowing another man to touch you, Scar. I told you there would be consequences you wouldn't like." He stepped closer to the man. "Consider this your punishment... and his."

I swallowed as the cogs turned in my head and spat out an explanation. One that made me absolutely sick to my stomach.

"Who is it?"

I needed to hear the damn name with my own ears. West strode towards me, took my arm and forced it up to my face. My eyes went to the bruises shaped like finger marks. He stared at them for a long moment before meeting my eyes over the top of my arm.

"The man who had the audacity to put hands on you."

"M-M-Mason... that's Mason?"

West's grin only confirmed it. I shook my head before I ripped my arm from his, backing away as my hand went to my mouth.

Mason. They wanted me to kill Mason for them. What the actual fuck was wrong with the four of them? This was insane. Absolutely fucking insane.

“No,” I moaned. “No... you can’t make me do that.”

I backed up right into Prescott, who steadied me with both hands on my shoulders. My head snapped up to his, finding none of the softness in his eyes I’d experienced after he’d kissed me. There was a hard edge to his expression. I dropped my hand from my mouth and turned around.

“Pres, please tell me this isn’t real.”

He didn’t answer me.

“You can’t make me do this. You can’t make me kill him.”

The lack of reaction from him broke something inside me. Tears burnt in the corners of my eyes. They couldn’t make me kill Mason. They just couldn’t.

“Prescott, please.”

“As West said, this is the price, Scarlett. Either pay it or you’ll never see any of us again.”

I froze despite the way my heart was pounding in my ears. Not only could I not afford to never see any of them again, the thought of being separated from Prescott felt like I’d taken the knife in my hand and stabbed it into my own chest. I cared about him, even though he was being cold and unfeeling right now. Even though he was showing me his worst side.

“You really want me to kill someone for you? To kill Mason? My only friend?”

He gave me a sharp nod, his eyes darkening with what could only be described as irritation. My hands dropped to my sides. I wasn’t going to get any fucking sympathy from Prescott. And I didn’t imagine I’d get any from Drake and Francis either. They’d remained silent this entire time. To think, Francis and Prescott knew they were bringing me here. They fucking knew what they were about to ask me to do and they’d not given a shit about it. Instead, they’d asked me for a fucking sexual favour like I was their toy to use and abuse. I shouldn’t be surprised, but I was.

I didn’t stop the tear from falling out of my eye as I stared up at Prescott, my heart fucking breaking with its path down my cheek.

“I hate you,” I whispered, then I turned away, unwilling to see his reaction.

Making my way over to the man in the chair... to Mason, I let the tears fall. I

looked down at the man I'd known for ten years of my life. The one who'd picked me up when I was broken. Who'd nursed my battered and bruised body from the day I'd woken up from my coma at sixteen years old. No matter how much I hated him for hurting me yesterday, the thought of killing him forced a wave of pain to rush through me.

West came up behind me and stood at my back. I could feel his breath against my ear.

"Don't worry, he can't hear you nor can he speak. We didn't think you'd want to hear his screams."

I choked out a sob. I had no choice but to go through with this no matter how much it hurt me. No matter how much I was dying on the inside. If I was ever going to fulfil my parent's desires and be free of them, I had to prove myself to the Horsemen. I had to show them they could trust me.

West's hand slid along my arm and he gripped my hand holding the knife. He surrounded me with his body, sheltering me from everything else. It shouldn't fill me with comfort, but it did. It was the only shred of fucking sanity I had left to hold on to. He forced me closer to Mason. Then he brought our joined hands up and pointed them at Mason's chest.

"You hit him here if you want a quick, clean death. Right between these two ribs, you stab him right in the heart," West murmured in my ear. "But if you want to make him pay, if you want to hurt him like he hurt you, then you hit wherever you can."

"West," I whimpered, more tears spilling down my face. "I can't do this."

He pressed a kiss to my neck.

"Shh, you can, Scar. I know you can. You're strong as fuck, you know that?" He ran his tongue along my skin. "Be a good girl for us. Show us the woman I know you are inside. Show me you're one of us."

My heart burnt in my chest. A flood of images crossed my mind, but they were too hazy for me to make out properly. The only thing I could focus on was the words ringing in my ears.

"You're one of us, Scar. Always and forever."

I raised my hand with the knife in it. The one West was still holding on to.

"Kill him."

And with that, I brought my hand down, sealing my fate once and for all.

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CHAOS

FOUR HORSEMEN
BOOK TWO

SARAH BAILEY

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Please note the spelling throughout is British English.

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PLAYLIST

Spotify Playlist

Blood On Your Hands – Veda, Adam Arcadia
Aura – Dennis Lloyd
Crazy in Love – Sofia Karlberg
Darkside – Sam Tinnesz
How Dare You Make Me Love You – Kyan
Your Love (Déjà Vu) – Glass Animals
Golden Throne – The Tech Thieves
Poison – Taylor Grey
Hourglass – Hex Cougar, AWAY, josh pan
Evil Like Me – Hex Cougar
Chemical – KRANE, Lemay, Ahsha, Hex Cougar
Burn – Hex Cougar, Pauline Herr
BLACKOUT - AViVA
HYPNOTIZED – AViVA
Suffer – Hurts
Wicked Thoughts – Annaca
Secrets – Tribe Society
Sick of It – Vanic, Bryce Fox
My Mind – Mickey Valen, Emily Vaughn
Please – Saro
Outta My System – Tribe Society
Twisted – The People's Thieves
Now That We're Alone – The People's Thieves
Sweat – ZAYN
STFD – TeZATalks
Trouble – Adam Jensen

Coming Undone – Korn
Choke – Royal & the Serpent
Inside My Head – Tribe Society
SCORPIO – DREAMDNVR
Popular Monster – Falling In Reverse
Why Are You So Cold? – The Haunt
Fuck You – Silent Child
Freak – UNDream, Silent Child, Hannabelle
IDGAF – Besomorph, Silent Child
I'll Make You Love Me – Kat Leon
Cage – Phantom Head
Animal In Me – Solence
Truth Comes Out – Willyecho
VILLIAN – MePemuro
Slow Down – Chase Atlantic
Bad Drugs – King Kavalier, ChrisLee
Issues – Lund
Paranoia on Main Street – Demi the Daredevils
Can't Let You Go – Ali Gatie
Killing Me – State of Mine
Animal – EMELINE
Speak of the Devil – Magic Whatever, The Score
Can't Forget You – NEVR KNØW
I Don't Mind – FNKHouser
Violent Ends – TRACES
Coquette – Kuoga., Ivy
Can't Lie – Ali Gatie
Wrong – MAX, Lil Uzi Vert
Red Tide – Lund
Unsaid – Chris Lanzon
This Present Darkness – The New Shining
Bad Things – The Phantoms
Playing with Flames – Rose Gould
Method – Big X

idfc – blackbear
Dancing with the Devil – Alter.
Do Me – Kim Petras
Who’s the Bad Guy Now? – Hamser, Lee
Tear You Apart – She Wants Revenge
Change (In the House of Flies) – Deftones
Siren – Josiah Bassey, Zach Golden
Double Life – Marina Kaye
Scream – Marina Kaye
Fragile Violence – Blanke, Nevve
Talk – Salvatore Ganacci
Malevolent – Social Repose
Begging To Bleed – 8 Graves
Heartache – Sky
Pain Killer – Sickick
Monster – 2Strangers, Silent Child
Shake the Glass – elegant slims
Push – Royal Deluxe
You’re Mine – Disturbed

*To all my queens who dance in the darkness,
This one's for you!*

ONE

SCARLETT

TEN YEARS AGO

It felt like I'd been drowning forever. My mind was a swamp filled with vegetation and things tangling around my legs, preventing me from surfacing. All I wanted was to come up for air. To find my way back to whatever I'd left behind. Only... I had no clue what it was I was fighting for. Everything was jumbled up. Nothing made sense. It was all a blur, a haze of images I didn't recognise.

There was a beeping sound next to me. It was incessant. I tried to focus on it. On the pattern of it. The way it drummed in my ears, echoing the beat in my chest.

My heart. My heart was beating. And the noise was connected to it.

Awareness of my surroundings bled back into my consciousness. I wanted to move. I wanted to open my eyes, but my lids were heavy and uncooperative. A whooshing sound joined the beeping. It took me a long minute to realise I wasn't breathing on my own. The rise and fall of my chest was too clinical, too perfectly paced.

I wanted to wake up. Wanted to come back to the world even though I couldn't remember why or what it held for me. The only thing I knew was that I needed it. My eyes needed to open. My fingers needed to move. My lips needed to make sounds. Whoever was out there needed to know I was awake but trapped in my own body.

However long it took, I didn't know, but my fingers twitched. They moved a

fraction, stroking across the soft material below me. A sound carried towards my ears. It was alien to me in so many ways, but somehow, I recognised it as words... a voice.

“She’s moving.”

I hung onto those two words. They propelled me forward. Someone else was here. Another person. My eyes flew open and remained unblinking for a long moment, staring up at the white ceiling. A face appeared above me. It wasn’t one I recognised. Soft brown eyes stared into my own ones. He had a heart-shaped face and a lopsided smile along with a head of light brown hair.

“Scarlett, can you hear me?”

I blinked. It was the only movement I could make. There was something in my mouth preventing me from talking. A tube helping me breathe. My lungs didn’t like that any longer. I choked, trying to breathe on my own. I couldn’t. This thing needed to come out. It needed to disappear. The beeping sound increased with my heart rate spiking as panic constricted my chest.

“Shit.”

The face disappeared. My hand twitched again. I needed to breathe. Desperately needed to breathe.

Let me out. Someone let me out, please. Help me. Let me breathe.

A hand landed on my head, stroking my hair back.

“It’s okay, Scarlett. Everything is going to be okay. Just go back to sleep now,” a different voice told me, soothing me from the inside out.

There was a minute more where I wanted to talk, wanted to tell them to let me out, but then I drifted off again into oblivion. Only there was nothing for me there but the swamp and vines holding me down in the water. I hated it. Every moment of it. I wanted to come back to the surface. There were people there. People who could tell me what was going on and why I was stuck in my body, unable to get out.

How long I drifted, I had no clue. The sudden rush to an alert state had my eyes flicking open. This time, there was no whooshing sound. And nothing was holding my mouth open. My chest rose and fell at a steady, more natural pace. I was breathing on my own. The beeping remained, reminding me my heart was beating. I was alive and awake.

Turning my head, I could see I was in a room surrounded by machines, but it

wasn't a hospital. It was a regular bedroom. Looking down, I found myself practically immobilised in the bed. One of my arms was encased in a plaster cast and I couldn't see under the covers placed over me, hiding my legs from view. I tried to move them and found it hurt too much. At that point, I didn't think it would be the best idea to attempt to get out of bed.

“Whash hapshen?”

I had meant to say *what happened*, but my speech came out slurred and stilted.

Why couldn't I talk properly?

Why couldn't I remember what happened to me?

I had too many questions and there was no one there to answer them for me.

I lay there, trying to keep my breathing steady and even while inside, I was panicking. When I tried to focus on the hazy images in my head, I couldn't remember anything.

What was my name?

I didn't know my own name.

A tear fell down my cheek. This was too much for me to handle. My mind was a riot of images I couldn't place or see clearly. And I didn't even know who I was.

A door opened to my right. I turned my head and found the man with the soft brown eyes and light brown hair walking towards me. When he saw I was awake, he smiled at me.

“Hello, Scarlett, welcome back to the land of the living.”

He took a seat in the chair next to me.

“Haaa.”

I was trying to say hello, but I couldn't form words properly. Why wasn't my mouth working? I had no idea why I could understand him or words when I couldn't remember anything.

He reached out and took my hand, stroking a thumb down the back of it.

“Shh, it's okay. They said you may have trouble speaking.”

I wanted to burst into tears. How could I explain to this person that I didn't recognise him? I didn't know who he was.

“I should get the nurse for you, she'll be able to explain what happened.”

I shook my head and gripped onto his fingers the best I could. I didn't want him to leave now he was here.

“Paaapaaa.”

If I couldn't talk, then I could attempt to communicate in another way. The man seemed to understand what I was asking for.

“You want something to write on?”

I nodded. He let go of my hand and pulled out his phone from his pocket. Fiddling with it for a moment, he then set it near my hand.

“You can write with your finger, okay?”

Using one finger, I wrote down what I could manage.

Who are you?

He frowned.

“I'm Mason.”

I don't know who I am.

His eyes turned sad.

“You're Scarlett.”

Scarlett. He'd called me that. And whoever had been here before had called me Scarlett as well. I sounded out the name in my head. I didn't recognise it, but if it's what this Mason was telling me, then maybe it was my name.

Where am I?

“At home.”

What happened?

He shook his head.

“I think it's better if I get the nurse for you. She can answer your questions.”

Please tell me.

He paused and then sighed as he looked over at the door.

“You were in an accident and you've been in a coma for four weeks.”

I swallowed and tears spilt down my cheeks. An accident? Four weeks in a coma? Was that why my arm was in a cast and why my legs hurt when I moved them?

An accident?

“Yes. Look, let me get the nurse, okay? I promise I won't be gone for long.”

I nodded at him. If this nurse was going to tell me what happened, then I might as well let him get the person. Mason didn't immediately leave. He stared down at me with sad eyes before he reached over and wiped away my tears with his fingers.

“I’m sorry, Scarlett, I really am. This must be confusing for you, but just know I’m here for you, okay? We’ll get through this together. I’ll keep you safe.”

He dropped his hand back to mine again and gave it a squeeze. I smiled at him. If he was telling the truth, then perhaps I could trust this man, even though I had no memory of him. I had no memories at all. And it was the very worst part about waking up after four weeks of drowning in the murky waters of my mind.

TWO

SCARLETT

The knife pierced through flesh, sinking deep into Mason's chest. I let out a wail of pain as his body jolted. It decimated me, seeing it sticking out of him with my hand and West's wrapped around the handle. West had done nothing other than hold on to me. He hadn't pushed me to stab the knife into the man's chest with his hand, only with his words. Only the command to kill the man in the chair. To kill Mason.

When I pulled out the knife, I would spill his blood. The idea of it made me sick, but I had to do this. It was the only way to make it quick and painless like West had told me to.

I jerked the knife out of Mason's chest, watching the blood pool on the white t-shirt he was wearing. Something about it shattered a piece of my sanity. This man hadn't protected me from my parents. No matter how much Mason had done for me, he'd failed to keep me safe. He'd fucking well failed.

I let out a scream, and then the knife was sailing through the air again. It landed in a different spot this time, but I was already ripping it out of Mason's chest. West let go of my hand when he realised I wasn't stopping, but he didn't move away from me. He stayed at my back, watching me as my hand came down repeatedly, stabbing over and over again. There was blood everywhere, but I couldn't stop. I couldn't fucking well stop.

"Fuck you," I screamed. "You didn't fucking keep me safe. You're a liar!"

It was as if I'd lost my mind. All I could do was keep stabbing him. Taking out all of my anger and frustration at the past ten years of my life. At the abuse I'd suffered. The heartache over not knowing who the hell I was before my accident. Being trapped in a prison and never allowed my freedom. All of it

came pouring out of me until I was sobbing and my movements slowed. Then my arm hung limply at my side.

I panted, tears still flowing and mixing with the blood splattered all over my face and arms. I was pretty sure it had got on my clothes too. The thought of it made my knees give out.

West wrapped his arms around my waist, holding me so I wouldn't collapse in a heap on the floor.

"That's a good girl," he whispered. "You did so good."

I stared down at the man in the chair. Who knew how many times I'd stabbed him. His t-shirt was an absolute mess of slashes and cuts. There was blood everywhere. It looked like a damn massacre had occurred.

I'd killed my only friend. My only fucking friend. He was a bloody mess in front of me. A torn, bloody mess.

"What did I do?" I cried out. "Oh my god, what did I do?"

"You did what we asked you to."

I rested my head against West's shoulder, feeling my energy leave me in a rush. The man behind me had forced me to kill my friend, but I didn't have the strength to give him shit for it.

"I killed him."

"Yeah, you really fucking did, Scar. Just like I knew you could."

I wanted to laugh, but none of this was funny. My mind was broken. I was a murderer. I'd fucking murdered someone. And for what reason? To make them trust me and to get an in with these men who were actual psychopaths or, at the very least, sociopaths. There was nothing normal about Prescott, West, Francis, and Drake. They stood there and watched me kill someone.

I looked down at myself. My arms were blood-spattered, as were my clothes. The knife was still in my hand. I stared at it. The implement I'd used to massacre Mason's chest. This was too fucked up, all of it horrifying, and yet I'd done it. I'd fucking well done it. More tears fell down my cheeks. I thought I was done crying, but clearly not.

"Is this enough?" I whispered. "Have I paid your price?"

"Mmm, yes and then some."

West nuzzled my neck again. I shivered, the coldness of the warehouse hitting me after my stabbing frenzy. West was warm, but shock and horror were

rushing through me too.

“I won’t lie, Scar, watching you stab a guy to death is hot.”

It confirmed for me how psychopathic West was, if that kind of thing turned him on. I could feel him hard against my back. Even though his body heat was preventing me from shivering to death, I no longer wanted him near me. This man had encouraged me to kill someone for him.

I shoved him off me. West let go, but not before he plucked his knife from my fingers, as if he was concerned about me turning it on him. No matter how much I hated him, I didn’t think I had the energy to stab him as well.

A loud sound reverberated through the room. It took a second for me to recognise it for what it was. A slow clapping noise. I stared as the source of it appeared in front of us, walking into the light of the single bulb illuminating the room. I took him in, wondering who the hell this was. And fearing the fact he knew I’d killed someone too.

The newcomer had a black shirt on with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows and red braces attached to his dark trousers. The first few buttons of his shirt were undone, exposing his chest. He had light brown hair, grey eyes and his nails were painted black, but the thing that struck me the most about him was his tattoos. They were everywhere. All over his hands. Up his forearms. Across his chest and his neck. They even went up into his hairline. He was relatively slim, but it didn’t make him any less imposing.

“That was quite something,” he said with a smirk as he approached the man in the chair. “I wasn’t expecting your little waif of a woman to have such a temper on her. Guess looks can be very deceiving.”

He gave me a wink. Then he reached out and tugged at the hood on the man’s head. I was about to tell him to stop, as I didn’t want to see Mason’s face, when he pulled it off completely. My mouth dropped open. And my entire world came crashing down around me.

The man in the chair wasn’t Mason. I didn’t even recognise him.

I backed away, my bloody hand going to my mouth.

What the fuck?

“That’s... that’s not...”

“Don’t worry, he got what was coming to him,” said the newcomer, staring down at the man in the chair with disdain.

“Who are you? Who... who is he?”

I waved at the dead man. The one I'd killed. The one who wasn't Mason.

“My apologies. I'm Penn Harlow. I... fix things.” He winked at me again. “And this guy? Well, let's just say he liked young girls a little too much if you catch my drift.”

I wanted to be sick. Turning away, I found the Horsemen standing together watching me and this Penn without any concern in their features.

“What the hell is this?” I waved my arms around. “What the fuck did you make me do?”

“I told you, Scar, a price had to be paid for our protection.”

I stabbed a finger at West, who'd answered me.

“Why the fuck would you tell me it was Mason?”

He grinned. It made me want to slap it off his face.

“To see if you would go through with it.”

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?”

West stepped towards me.

“Loyalty is very important to us, Scar. We wanted to see how far you would go, whether you'd kill the person who hurt you. The one you think is your only friend.”

He spat the last part as if the thought of Mason being my friend disgusted him. Right now, all four of them disgusted me. How could they do this to me? How could they make me think it was Mason I'd killed? They were insane. All of them.

“So what, you found some random guy for me to kill to prove a fucking point? You're sick. All of you are sick in the fucking head.”

“He wasn't a random guy, Scar. He was a kiddy-fiddler. You did the world a favour by getting rid of scum like him.”

I couldn't believe him. Any of them.

“If this is the kind of shit you get off on, then count me out. I'm done.”

West tutted.

“Now, now, do you think we're going to let you leave after this?”

I stared at him. He had to be kidding. There was no way I wanted to be anywhere near them. Not after the shit they'd pulled. Not after I'd lost my mind and killed a man they'd told me was Mason, but it turned out he was some

random sicko who liked kids.

“Fuck you. If you think I want to go anywhere with you lot, you’re delusional.”

I knew what I’d done was fucked up and wrong, but I couldn’t cope with thinking about it. My mind was shattered. They’d fucking ruined me.

“You’re coming home with us, little lamb,” Prescott said, taking a step towards me.

I couldn’t stand looking at him. While I was pissed off at West, I was enraged when it came to Prescott. He didn’t stop this from happening. He’d made me feel like I had no choice but to kill my friend for his protection. To prove to him I was trustworthy. And yet... I had a feeling Prescott still didn’t trust me, even after this. It was the way he stared at me. He shouldn’t trust me, but it didn’t stop it from hurting.

“How could you do this to me?” I pointed at West. “Him I can understand, but you... you... I thought...”

I didn’t know what I thought. That he cared? Had he ever cared about me? Or I was another fucking pawn in their games.

“I meant what I said,” I ground out. “I fucking meant it. I hate you.”

Prescott flinched, a wounded look flashing across his face. He took a step towards me, reaching out his hand, but it dropped when I stepped back. There was no way in hell I was allowing him to touch me. He could burn in fucking hell for all I cared.

Are you sure? Are you sure you’re not just saying that because he hurt you and you’re mad at him?

My brain could do one.

“Be that as it may,” Drake said. “It doesn’t change the fact you are coming with us.”

My eyes flicked up to his. He and Francis had remained silent this entire time.

“No, no I’m not. There is no way in hell I am going with you.”

Drake stared at me with those terrifyingly calm indigo eyes of his.

“Yes, Scarlett, you are.”

“You can go to hell along with these two.” I waved at Prescott and West. “And him too.” I waved at Francis. “All of you. Go to hell.”

He stepped towards me.

“Where do you think you’re going to go, hmm? You just killed someone.”

Drake’s words slapped me right in the damn face. Where *did* I think I was going to go? It’s not like I could run to Mason and tell him I’d killed a man who I thought was him. Then he really would send me back to my parents. I had no one else but the men in front of me. No one.

“Him... I’ll go with him.”

I turned and looked at Penn, who raised his eyebrow.

“No offence, but I don’t let waifs and strays tag along with me,” he said with a wink.

He’d been busy untying the man from the chair and placing him down on a plastic sheet, which I hadn’t noticed before. It had been under the chair the whole time. The man’s blood was all over it and not the floor.

“What are you doing with him?”

“Getting rid of him. After all, someone paid me handsomely to dispose of this fucker. Your friends over there asked if I could provide them with someone to kill. Lucky for them, I had just the man.”

Penn straightened. I noticed he’d put leather gloves on.

“Normally I’d send this one away to my friend who likes to rid the world of cunts, but Drake made me an offer I couldn’t refuse.”

I stared at him.

“What exactly do you do?”

Why I was even asking questions of this guy, I had no idea, but my mind was all over the place.

“I’m a Fixer.”

I’d clearly made a face because he continued.

“I fix problems like this guy amongst... other things.”

I didn’t know if I wanted to know what other things this guy ‘fixed’. In fact, I didn’t want to know anything any longer because everything right now was fucked. And yet my mouth asked another question anyway.

“What the hell did they offer you?”

Penn smirked. My eyes were drawn to the scar on the right side of his face that ran from his ear to his jaw. It only gave him a further air of danger.

“Why, what any man in my position requires, money and a favour to be collected at my convenience.”

He shrugged and went back to dealing with the dead guy. The guy I'd killed.
Stop thinking about it.

I turned back to the Horsemen.

"If you're thinking about running, I suggest you don't, Scarlett," Drake said. "You have five witnesses, not to mention the fact we have what you did on camera. We could quite easily turn you in."

I stiffened. While running hadn't crossed my mind, it could have. And after what Drake said, I had absolutely no choice but to go with them. I crossed my arms over my chest and glared at them. It drew my attention to the blood all over me again.

"You filmed it?"

"Yes. We need some collateral in case you decide to run from us at any point."

I had to hand it to them, they'd thought this through, even though it was messed up. Even though it meant I was trapped. My breath whooshed out of me as defeat sunk in.

"Fine, guess I have no other choice."

Drake gave me a sharp nod and stepped closer.

"First, we need to get you cleaned up. Come with me."

I didn't want to go anywhere with him, but what other choice did I have? Francis handed him a bag, and Drake strode off deeper into the warehouse. I hurried after him, not wanting to get stuck with the rest of them. He stopped outside a door and shoved it open. He waited while I walked in before following me, shutting the door behind us. The room was only illuminated by the light coming through from a window. There was a sink and a toilet, but not much else.

Drake kicked the lid closed and placed the bag on top of it. He looked at me.

"Take your clothes off."

I stepped back, banging my back against the sink counter.

"What?"

"They're covered in blood and we need to dispose of them, unless you want to leave evidence of what you did hanging around."

I gave him a look.

"Fine, I'll take them off and wash myself but you don't need to be here."

He stalked towards me. I had nowhere else to go when he placed his hands down on either side of the sink from me.

“I think you’ll find I do.”

His eyes darkened. It was the first time I’d ever seen his mask drop. There was a deadly glint to his expression. And I knew I wasn’t going to like what he said next.

“You’re covered in blood, Scarlett.” He inhaled, making me shiver. “I like blood.”

THREE

DRAKE

I'd always known Scarlett was a magnificent being, but today only proved it once and for all. The fury consuming her as she'd lost herself in killing the man Penn had provided for us was like watching a regal queen claiming her crown.

Here she was in front of me, her face splattered with blood, and fuck if the sight of it didn't make me lose my damn mind. She was stunning in her stained clothes and her skin marred by red liquid.

My little wisp. You're everything I'd hoped you'd be and more.

My hand left the sink and traced a line through the blood on her face. She stared at me as if she wasn't sure whether she should be afraid of me or not.

"Drake, what are you doing?"

"You know that's not what you say when we're alone."

"If you think I'm calling you sir after what you lot made me do—"

I used my finger to smear blood over her bottom lip, silencing her. As much as I'd love to suck it off her, I wasn't in the habit of licking blood from a source I didn't know was safe.

"I think you're going to close this bratty little mouth of yours and let me clean you up."

Her eyes widened, but she didn't open her mouth again. Probably too scared she'd get blood in it. Leaving her by the sink, I moved back over to the bag I'd placed on the toilet seat and extracted a cloth. We had planned for all eventualities this evening, hence why we had supplies to clean our girl up.

Scarlett didn't move from her spot, and when I approached her again, she stared at me with no small amount of defiance in her expression. If she tried anything, I would have no qualms about punishing her for it.

Reaching behind her, I ran the tap and soaked the washcloth with it. Then I brought it up to her face and wiped the blood from it, taking my time as the water ran in bloody rivulets down her cheeks and chin. Placing the washcloth in the sink, I set my hands at the bottom of her bloody t-shirt and tugged it up off her head. Her skin rose in goosebumps with the cool air. She didn't stop me from removing her bra. I threw the garments on the floor before popping the button on her jeans and unzipping them.

Scarlett's bare chest rose and fell with increasing heaviness. She gripped the sink counter behind her with both hands, watching me pull her jeans from her body. She kicked off her flip-flops and stood there, waiting for me to make my next move.

My fingers traced a line along the top of her underwear. I didn't strictly need to take these off, but I didn't give a shit. I wanted her bare for me.

"You're such a defiant little brat, aren't you?" I murmured as I snapped the waistband of her knickers. "You should know better than to try that with me."

I tore her underwear down her legs and set her on the counter. Scarlett's eyes were wide as I lowered myself to my knees. Her gasp echoed around the room when my mouth met her inner thigh. I held her legs open so she couldn't stop me from kissing my way up towards her pussy. The moment my tongue met the softness of her lips, she squeaked. I looked up at her. If I couldn't fucking well taste the blood from her body, this was the next best thing.

I spread her lips with my fingers and found my way to her clit, flicking my tongue over it and eliciting more gasps from her lips. Dipping lower, I tasted her essence. Fuck, my woman was so wet. Moving back to her clit, I slid two fingers inside her dripping heat.

"Drake," she whined, her fingers going to my head. The ones stained with the blood of the man she'd killed. My dick throbbed in response. The idea of my woman stabbing a man to death, and being covered in his blood, appealed to me on some primal level. I wanted to fuck her while she was bathed in blood, but right now, her being splattered with it was a fucking high in and of itself.

Scarlett might not be particularly happy with me. She wasn't happy with any of us, but I didn't care. She was *mine*. And I wanted her body close. I wanted to feel her clench and strain around me.

My fingers thrust inside her, making her buck and her fingers tighten in my

hair. She let out another whine and I was done. I tore her hand from me and stood. My fingers went to my trousers, tugging them open as I held her hand down on the counter with my other one. She panted, her pupils dilated and her body trembling. The moment I got my dick free, I stepped up between her legs and rubbed the tip over her wet little pussy.

Letting go of her hand, I gripped her chin, forcing her to look at me.

“Defiance won’t be tolerated going forward, Scarlett. If you talk back to me, I won’t hesitate to show you exactly why you need to keep your smart mouth shut.”

And with that, I thrust inside her. Her lips parted in a silent gasp. I didn’t give her a chance to adjust, pulling back and slamming inside her again. My hand wrapped around her hip, dragging her closer to the edge so I could have full access to her deliciously hot and wet pussy.

She gripped my wrist with her blood-stained hand, but she didn’t pull it away. She held it there as if she was taunting me. The redness of the life-sustaining liquid against her skin almost fucking mesmerised me.

It spoke of violence.

It spoke of passion.

It spoke of death.

“Did you like it? Huh? Did it give you a fucking high?”

She whimpered but didn’t reply.

“I think you did.” I punctuated my words with my hips thrusting into her. “The first time is always the worst, but it gets easier. It becomes beautiful... watching their life fade away.”

The way her eyes fixed on mine and her expression told me how conflicted she felt about the fact I was fucking her right now. How I’d told her I liked blood and death. The way I was taunting her.

“I require an answer, Scarlett. Did. You. Like. It?”

Her teeth dug into her lip. My hand around her chin tightened. The violence of my thrusts increased, punishing her for her unwillingness to give me what I wanted. This woman was sent to drive me to distraction. She was testing my patience and damn self-control. Every time she was near me, I wanted to do things to her little body. Paint her skin red. Bleed her. Make her cry.

Leaning down, I sucked her bottom lip in my mouth, pulling it from her

teeth. And I replaced them with my own, biting down almost hard enough to break the skin. Her high-pitched moan only made it worse. She was in need of a serious fucking lesson.

I let go of her lip but kept my face close to hers.

“Do you like to defy me, hmm? Are you trying to test how far you can push the limits of my patience?”

“No,” she whispered.

“Answer the question.”

“I didn’t like it.”

I smiled.

“Liar.”

Her nails dug into my wrist as if she hated the fact I could see right through her.

“No, I didn’t want to kill him. I didn’t like it. I had no other fucking choice but to do it. You didn’t give me one.”

We hadn’t, but it was hardly the point. She could have told us all to go fuck ourselves and left. She hadn’t. It meant she was more terrified of something other than getting stuck with us. And I intended to find out exactly what it was my woman was so damn afraid of. Not now, but soon.

I shouldn’t have stripped her off and sunk my dick in her, but fuck if I could control myself after witnessing her rage-filled stabbing fest. All that blood called to me. Her passion lit a fire under my skin. It burnt way too hot.

I let go of her chin, pulling her grasp from mine and dropped my hand into her lap. It landed on her thigh and my thumb found her clit, stroking her while I continued to pound into her pussy like I could never get enough. And I couldn’t. Just because I hadn’t taken her since the night we’d drugged our woman, didn’t mean I hadn’t thought about it.

Her hips bucked into me and her hands gripped the counter. She moaned and made it very clear she wanted me to drive her higher no matter how she felt about this situation.

“You want to come, hmm?” I whispered, my lips dragging across hers.

“Please.”

I chuckled.

“Please, what?”

Her eyes flashed with irritation. If she wasn't going to obey, she wouldn't get her pleasure.

"Please, sir."

My thumb worked harder on her clit and I kissed her, pressing her mouth hard against mine. Scarlett didn't hesitate in kissing me back even though her hands remained on the counter. Trying to convince herself she didn't really want what I was giving her, no doubt. But fuck, her mouth was sweet and the way she kissed me... so fucking raw. It's like she wanted to cry in my mouth over what she'd done, but she held her tears back.

When she came, it was violent and unforgiving. Her teeth latched onto my lip and her muffled cry echoed around the room. Her hands stayed on the counter, holding onto it while her body shook and trembled. I let her do what she wished. If she needed to hurt me with her teeth, then so be it. Seeing her overcome with pleasure was my only focus.

Releasing my lip, she slumped back against the wall, closing her eyes as her fists unclenched from the counter. I held her hips and continued to take her. Seeing the blood on her arms made my balls tighten. It was a one-way train and I couldn't get off. Grunting, I emptied myself inside her spent body, wanting nothing more than to stay locked together in ecstasy forever.

Her eyes snapped open when I slowed. She didn't look happy, but she didn't look unhappy either. More like resigned to her fate. Reaching behind her, I wet the cloth again and took her arms, wiping away the blood from them and her hands. She didn't stop me from cleaning her up the best I could. There was still blood in her hair, but there wasn't much I could do about it.

Pulling out of her, I zipped myself up and grabbed the bag, fishing out a towel to rub her down with. Scarlett didn't say a word while I helped her dress in a t-shirt, a warm jumper and jogging bottoms we'd bought for her. She slid her feet into her flip-flops after we'd rinsed them off. I stuffed the bloodied clothes in the bag along with everything else. We'd get rid of the evidence before returning home to Fortuity.

I opened the door, allowing Scarlett to stalk from the room, her flip-flops slapping along the concrete floor. I followed her, knowing she was about to unleash hell after what I'd done. It hadn't been my smartest idea to fuck her, but the sight of her overcame my common sense.

“Well, you took your time,” West said as she neared them.

Penn had already disappeared with the dead guy. Probably a good thing, given Scarlett’s current state of mind.

“Do you ever just shut the fuck up?” Scarlett spat at him, coming to a standstill on the fringes of the lit area.

West’s eyes narrowed, but he didn’t make a move towards her. He looked at me when I entered the fray.

“What did you do to her?”

“Nothing,” I replied. “It’s time to leave.”

Scarlett’s eyes blazed.

“I don’t recall shoving me up against the sink and fucking me as being nothing.”

I gave her a look. Clearly, someone had decided she wasn’t in the mood to be a good girl any longer.

“And if you think I’m going to get into a car with you after that, you’re fucking insane.” She stabbed a finger in West’s direction. “I’m not going with him either.” Then she turned her gaze on Prescott. The venom in her eyes made him flinch. “And I would rather jump off a fucking cliff than be near him.”

With that, she stalked over to Francis, who looked like a deer caught in headlights.

“You can take me back on the condition you do not fucking talk to me or touch me.” She turned her head, looking at all of us. “None of you are going to touch me, you hear me? I will fucking hurt you if you come near me.”

Francis gave me a helpless look, but I shrugged. I didn’t think anything the rest of us said or did would calm her temper right now.

“Just take her, we’ll deal with the rest of this.”

We had two cars, so it wasn’t an issue.

Francis let out a sigh and looked at Prescott, who dug the keys out of his pocket and tossed them. Francis caught them and put out a hand to Scarlett. She stalked away towards the door. He trudged after her.

When they left by the door, Prescott turned to me, his eyes full of conflict.

“Do you think she’ll forgive me?”

West scoffed. I gave him a dark look.

“With the mood she’s in right now, who knows.”

Prescott looked at his feet. Clearly, he wasn't happy with all this shit, but he had to deal. His crap with Scarlett was his own problem to work out. I didn't have time to pander to his feelings.

"Anyway, let's finish this and get out of here. Be thankful you're not Francis right now. I have a feeling he'll be getting an earful from her."

"Too fucking right," West agreed.

Prescott didn't acknowledge us, merely moved away towards the door.

"You think he'll be okay?" I asked West.

"Why the fuck do you care?"

"I'd rather not have him moping around the damn place like a lovesick puppy."

"He'll work it out. Just needs to fuck her stupid after grovelling at her feet for a bit."

If only it was the solution to Prescott's problems with Scarlett. Something about the way they were together told me both of them had feelings that ran deeper than either of them was willing to admit. And I hoped he did work it out. If he didn't, having her living with us might utterly derail all of our plans.

FOUR

FRANCIS

I moved Scarlett's bag into the back of the car, allowing her to sit in the passenger seat. She crossed her arms over her chest and stared out of the window. I stifled a sigh and set off, reversing out of the side road leading to the warehouse and turning around. When we got onto the main road, Scarlett let out a breath. I didn't want to make things worse for her, so I was going to keep my mouth shut and take her back to Fortuity. Back to our home. She'd have to remain with us for the foreseeable future.

Perhaps I shouldn't feel like shit for what we'd made her do, but I did. When West suggested it, I hadn't objected. To be honest, I couldn't. He wanted to punish her, sure, but it also gave us something to hold over her head. To keep her in line. It proved a fucking point too. The power we had over the girl we'd grown up with.

However, no matter our reasons, it didn't make me feel good about it. Not after the way she'd lost it. Seeing her attack the guy in such a violent manner was like watching West butcher someone. It reminded me of why Scarlett had always been one of us. Inside her soul, there was a darkness lurking. An ugliness we all shared. One we'd revelled in as kids. She might have been our guiding light, keeping us from descending into madness, but she'd always been borderline on the crazy scale. It didn't take much to tip her over the edge.

"Whose idea was it?"

I glanced at her but she wasn't looking at me. She had told me not to talk but asking me a direct question meant she wanted an answer.

"To get you to kill someone?"

"Yes."

“I think you already know.”

She traced her finger along the window.

“West. He wanted to hurt me.”

It had more to do with the fact he couldn't hurt Mason than Scarlett being in the wrong. He had an extremely fucked up sense of justice, but West knew what he was doing. He knew hurting Scarlett would hurt Mason too.

“Sort of.”

“What's that supposed to mean?”

I gripped the steering wheel tighter.

“West is complicated, Scarlett. You shouldn't try to rationalise his actions. It won't get you very far.”

She snorted.

“He's a psycho. An actual full-blown psychopath.”

I would have disputed her statement, but there would be no point. Psychopaths lack empathy. West might not show it, but he had a shred of it somewhere inside him. I'd seen it with my own fucking eyes. It had been reserved for the woman beside me. Only she couldn't remember the boy West had been. She only knew the man who could flip at the drop of a hat. If she regained those memories, she would see him differently. She'd see him like we did.

Yes, I'd come to blows with West many times, but it wasn't because I hated the guy. We were best friends. All four of us were. There just happened to be a very good reason for his animosity towards me. One I didn't want to think about.

“He's too fucked in the head to know how wrong this all is.”

I didn't try to refute it. She wouldn't listen. He knew all right, he just didn't care. Or maybe he did. West was a law unto himself.

“I hate him and I hate Drake and I fucking hate Prescott.”

It didn't escape my notice that she hadn't mentioned me. Perhaps I was the lesser of all the evils in her mind. At least, this evening. In mine, I wasn't any better, what with using her in the car on the way over here. It had been so fucking sweet to have her mouth wrapped around my dick, but now wasn't the time to be thinking of her in that way.

“I thought he actually gave a shit. He made me think he did. The way he

looks at me like I'm precious to him, but then he goes and does this. Goes along with all this shit you lot concocted up to test me... well, fuck him. If he thinks he can worm his way back into my fucking knickers after this, he's thoroughly mistaken. No way I'm letting him anywhere near me. He can get his kicks elsewhere."

Her diatribe against Prescott didn't exactly surprise me. However, I very much doubted Scarlett meant the last part. It was clear as day to me she had developed feelings. And I'm not sure she'd be very impressed if Prescott did indeed 'get his kicks elsewhere'. He wouldn't. He was too enamoured with her to contemplate seeing anyone else. None of us would stray from Scarlett now we had her back in our lives.

"And don't even get me started on Drake. What the fuck is wrong with him? He's got serious issues."

I had some idea of what she might be referring to. I'd seen the glint in his eyes. It was obvious Scarlett being covered in blood had him all hard and shit for her.

"Do you know what he said to me? He fucking told me he liked blood. Who says that? Like what the fuck? And he asked me if I liked what I'd done. I didn't think normal people actually enjoyed stabbing a man to death, but hey, apparently, I'm living in some alternate universe where this type of shit is perfectly okay."

I held back a snort. Those were things I could well imagine Drake saying to her. He had a thing about blood and death. None of us judged him for it, considering what we were into, but we did like to rib him on occasion. He was always the last one of us to lose his temper. In fact, I'd only seen it a handful of times. None of them had been pretty. Drake could be as vicious as West when it came to people who pushed him too hard.

"Also where the fuck does he get off calling me a brat?"

I raised an eyebrow.

"If he wanted an obedient woman who doesn't speak her own mind, then he should've picked another girl because that isn't me. I'll kick his stupid arse if he tries that shit with me again. Brat indeed."

I couldn't hold back my laughter this time. Scarlett glared at me.

"What's so funny?"

I rubbed my chin before placing my hand back on the steering wheel.

“The idea of Drake wanting you to be completely obedient.”

“What do you mean? You’re the one who told me to be careful around him.”

I shook my head and smiled at her.

“Yeah, when I thought you might not be able to handle his... quirks. But I can assure you, he likes the fact you’re feisty.”

She was quiet for a moment, her fingers still tracing lines across the glass window next to her.

“You think I’m feisty?”

“You’re certainly not shy and retiring.”

“Do you like that about me?”

I nibbled my lip, wondering if I should admit anything to her or not. This was not how I envisioned this car journey going, but if she was in a mind to talk, then I wouldn’t stifle her. Perhaps she needed normalcy after what happened.

“I do.”

“You barely know me though.”

I wish I could tell you how well we all used to know each other. How you were our rock... our anchor. The one thing holding us together.

“I’ve seen enough.”

“Hmm.”

My eyes drifted to her for a moment. She was looking out the front window now. There was an air of melancholy surrounding her. I wanted to reach out and touch her, to soothe her somehow, but I refrained. She’d made it very clear she didn’t want to be touched. And I wanted to respect her boundaries.

Turning my attention back to the road, I hoped the others weren’t too far behind us. Even if Scarlett didn’t want to see them, we all needed to talk about her. About what happened this evening.

A few minutes later, I pulled into the underground car park beneath our building and stopped in one of our reserved spaces right by the lift. Scarlett sat there, staring at the concrete wall in front of us. I left her to it, getting out of the car and going over to the lift to press the button. Then I collected all her bags from the car, placing them inside the lift when it arrived.

“Scarlett, you can’t stay in the car all night,” I called to her from the doors.

She got out and gave me a dark look. I locked the car as she trudged over to

me and walked into the lift. Stepping in, I entered the code for the penthouse and leant back against the mirrors. Scarlett didn't say a word the whole way up. When the doors opened, she strode out and looked around the place. I took her bags out one by one and left them near the lift door.

"I want a shower," she said when the doors closed behind me. "And where am I staying?"

I wished I didn't have to be the one to tell her.

"With one of us."

We didn't have a spare room and we certainly weren't going to put her in our play space. It wasn't exactly sleep-friendly. Besides, she needed to be kept an eye on. We weren't going to let her wander around our penthouse unsupervised.

"You cannot be serious!"

"Afraid so."

She threw her hands up and gave me a dirty look.

"Well, that's just fucking great."

I picked up her nearest bag and pointed towards the stairs. She let out a huff but walked up them with me following behind. I assumed, given our conversation in the car, I would be her choice this evening.

When we got to my bedroom, I opened the door and flipped the light switch. Scarlett looked around, all traces of annoyance fading when she took in her surroundings. I set her bag down by the door and watched her walk around my personal space, her eyes darting this way and that.

I had a rather rustic style with my huge wooden four-poster bed sitting against a faux wooden wall. It had large brass rings sitting above the headboard, screwed into the wall. There was a stone electric fireplace on the opposite side with a TV above it. My wardrobe doors were the same wood as the accent wall, and beside it lay the door to my bathroom. By the window, I had a large, soft cream sofa. My bedroom was pretty neutral colour wise.

"This isn't what I expected," she said, coming to a standstill by the window looking out across the city. "I like it." She turned back to me. "But I am not sleeping with you."

I gave her a nod.

"Take the bed. I can sleep there." I waved at the sofa. "It's not a problem."

It was comfortable enough to sleep on. It was also the least I could do after

what she'd been through this evening.

I walked over to the bathroom door and opened it.

“Take a shower, Scarlett. I’ll get the rest of your stuff. We can organise it tomorrow, okay?”

She gave me a slight smile to acknowledge what I’d said before she turned back to the window. I made my way over to the door. There wasn’t anything in here she could mess around with. I kept that stuff locked up.

One last glance at her before I left the room told me she was finally coming down from the adrenaline rush of murder and sex. And I was pretty sure she would crash sooner rather than later.

FIVE

SCARLETT

When Francis left the room, I walked over to the bathroom door and stepped in. My fingers found the light switch. The room was fully tiled in the same neutral colours as his bedroom. He had a separate bath from his shower. There were no windows, but it was bright enough.

I walked over behind the glass wall leading to the shower and flipped it on. I didn't care about having my own products. All I wanted was to get clean. Even though Drake had washed away most of the blood from my body, spots remained. And I felt dirty... marred by what I'd done.

Tearing the clothes they'd bought me off my body, I got under the hot stream of water. It soothed me, washing away all of the horrors of this evening.

I couldn't believe I had to sleep in one of their rooms. Despite having proven to them I would kill a man on their behalf, they didn't trust me to be alone in their penthouse. It had to be the reason. That, or they didn't have anywhere else to put me. Either way, it sucked. I wanted to be alone to process everything. Yet how could I even begin to process what I'd done?

Opening my eyes, I watched the water, slightly stained red running into the shower drain. The sight of it made my stomach roil. I put my hand to my mouth, trying to push down the sickening feeling encompassing me.

I'd killed someone. I'd stabbed a man to death in the most violent manner I could think of. My mind had gone to another place and my body had taken over. My instincts. My rage. They'd sent me over the edge. Now I had to deal with the consequences of my actions. And the guilt. The fucking guilt eating me alive.

A sob erupted from my lips, my other hand reaching out to slam against the

tilled wall in front of me. The floodgates opened. My knees buckled. I lowered myself to the floor, both my hands pressing to the large slab of slate covering the shower floor. Tears streamed down my face, mixing with the water from the shower. All I could hear was my horrific wails of agony and pain. I couldn't stop them. It was all too much. All of it.

They'd asked me to kill someone and told me it was Mason. All of my anger towards him had poured out of me as I stabbed him repeatedly. I thought I'd killed my only friend. And finding out it wasn't him was worse.

The Horsemen were fucked.

I was fucked.

The whole thing was fucked.

A solid body curled around mine and held me, strong arms caging me in as my hands slipped on the slate.

"It's okay, Scarlett," he murmured. "It's okay. Let it out. Just let it out."

My body shook with my sobs. My hands fell to his thighs, gripping the wet fabric below me as he sat back against the shower wall with me between his legs. Francis had got in the shower with me fully clothed. I knew it was him because I could smell cinnamon and apples on his skin. The scent reminded me of home and it made me cry harder.

"I killed him!" I wailed.

Francis held me tighter against his chest.

"I'm a killer. I... I can't believe I killed someone."

It decimated me... murdering a man I didn't know, even though they'd told me the guy had been scum. A child molester. I didn't believe in an eye for an eye or revenge. The only reason I'd even gone along with my parents and their stupid need for it was to gain my freedom. To get away from them and their abuse. I'd been trapped on their estate for so long, I thought I'd never get away. I'd never be free. And now I had a small sliver of it, I never wanted to let it go. I didn't want to go back.

It's why I'd killed a man for the Horsemen. It's why I'd paid their price. Being here with them was infinitely preferable to being at home with my parents, as fucked up as it sounded. These four men had taught me a lot about myself in the past month. Even though I couldn't remember solid details about the past before my accident, I was beginning to feel like the missing pieces of my

personality were slotting into place. The real Scarlett was there, buried under concrete, but I'd dig her out. I'd fight to find her. I had to. There was no other choice.

I didn't care I was naked, crying in the shower with one of the men who'd demanded I kill for them. All I could feel was Francis' warmth. The comfort of having someone hold me while I cried and purged my emotions was everything. He had no idea how much this meant to me. How much I needed him to be here for me.

"Why does it hurt so much?" I choked out, my sobbing abating. "I didn't even know him and it hurts."

"Killing isn't supposed to be easy," he murmured in my ear over the noise of the shower. "It's supposed to hurt and bruise your soul."

"Did... did it hurt you?"

His chest deflated against my back. It was obvious to me they were killers themselves. I wasn't sure anyone who hadn't could stand to watch what I did without it affecting them. It was almost as if it was commonplace to the four of them.

"You're asking the wrong person that question."

"Why?" I sniffled, hiccupping on the word.

"You won't like the answer."

I shifted, wanting to look at him. Wanting to see his face. Francis released me enough to allow me to turn around. I knelt there in the shower between his legs, staring at him. His hands closed around my biceps, rubbing up and down my wet skin.

"Tell me."

His grey eyes were cautious and his dark brown hair plastered to his head.

I had a flash of an image in my mind. A much younger and more boyish version of Francis in the rain, staring up at the sky as it beat down on his face. I don't know why it was so vivid like it was actually real, but it couldn't possibly be. I'd never met Francis before I'd come to work at Fortuity... or had I? My past was so jumbled up in my head, I couldn't distinguish between true memories and the ones I merely wanted to be real.

"I don't have any remorse for the lives I've taken, Scarlett. I dare say I like it... the thrill of it. If you asked the others, they would tell you the exact same

thing. We don't share the same morals society deems acceptable. We walk outside the lines of right and wrong. It's who we are. It's who we've always been."

Something about the brutal honesty of Francis' words had me swallowing. Coupled with the image of him as a teenager in my mind, I couldn't help but understand what he'd said, even if it was messed up. Morality was subjective. Everything in life was, on some level. And I couldn't honestly say his point of view surprised me given what I'd come to know about these four men.

"Does it scare you?" he asked when I didn't immediately respond.

"It should."

"That's not what I asked."

I leant closer to him, tugged by an invisible cord.

"No."

He cocked his head to the side and reached up, swiping his thumb under my eye. Our faces weren't under the stream of water, but we were both utterly soaked.

"The world isn't black and white," I continued. "I've always known that. If it was, then I'd know who I am inside." I pressed my hand to my chest. "I'd know the girl locked behind the wall in my mind."

"That's how you see it? Your amnesia?"

I nodded. For some reason, I felt safe to tell him these things. Safe to ask him the questions I had. There was no judgement here between us.

"Do you have any memories of the past at all?"

"I get these glimpses, snippets of old conversations, but like I told Prescott, I don't know if they're real or not."

Bringing up his name made my heart ache. I'd told Francis I hated Prescott, but I didn't. I was hurting because of him. Asking him to protect me hadn't been my smartest idea, but I never expected things would go this far. I never expected to have... feelings for him. It's as if my heart knew him inside out, but my mind struggled to keep up. My broken mind. It was split in two. The two halves needed reuniting.

His hand tangled in my wet hair and dragged me even closer until we were breathing the same air.

"You don't trust yourself."

“No.”

“What did they tell you, the doctors, about your condition?”

I shifted, wanting to press myself against him. He said nothing when I straddled his lap, forcing his legs closer together. He didn't stop me when my fingers went to the bottom of his t-shirt. Tugging it over his head, it dropped on the shower floor with a splat.

I stared at his muscular body. He was beautiful to look at. A fallen god. They all were in my eyes, but not in the sense they were all-powerful. It was the way they held themselves like they knew their own worth. But they were dark and deadly too. They'd cut you down if you got in their way. And it made me wonder why they'd kept me if I was an inconvenience to them. Was I? Or did they want to fuck me that much, they didn't care I was a problem?

“My memories may never return, but it's not all doom and gloom. They simply don't know. Maybe the trauma of the accident stops me from seeing them, or I need to jog my memory somehow. They told me people and things from my childhood might help, but I have neither.”

Francis' expression turned haunted for the briefest of moments.

“It's been ten years, so all I can do is hope.”

He stroked my arm.

“Hope is a dangerous thing.”

I smiled and shook my head.

“Guess it is.”

Having purged my emotions and feelings, I felt steadier. What I'd done still hurt, but the pain had lessened a fraction. Enough for me to push myself up off Francis and stand. I put my hand out to him. He let me pull him up to his feet. Then I noticed he'd set my products down by the edge of the shower next to the glass. He'd gone out of his way to get my toiletries and bring them to me. Something about it made my heart crack.

Before Francis could do a thing, I'd pulled him under the stream of the shower and curled my body around his, pressing my face into his bare chest.

“Thank you,” I whispered into his skin, unsure if he could hear me over the hammering of the water.

When I released him, he didn't leave me there alone. No, Francis picked up my shampoo and turned me around to face the wall. He lathered it up in my

hair, his fingers soothing across my scalp as he washed the strands. He repeated the steps for my conditioner then washed my entire body, his soft hands entirely gentle. The man rinsed away my guilt, my shame and my pain. Tonight, I'd been the wielding force of the executioner. And somehow, Francis made it better for me. Made it bearable.

When he was done, he turned the shower off and gave me a smile. My fingers went to his jeans, tugging open the button and pulling down the zip. His eyebrow shot up and he put his hands on mine when I tried to take them off him.

“Scarlett, I’m not looking for—”

“I just want to help you. Wet jeans are a pain to get off.”

It was the honest truth. I wasn't trying to get Francis as naked as me. He'd been kind to me and it was the least I could do for him.

He didn't stop me this time when I tugged the jeans from his hips, in fact, he helped. After we'd got them off him, he grabbed me a towel and wrapped me up in it, getting one of his own, which he slung around his hips before tugging his boxers off.

When I padded back out into his bedroom, I found he'd unpacked a pair of my pyjamas, hairbrush and hairdryer, leaving them on the bed for me. I hadn't realised Francis could be so considerate, but maybe I'd misjudged all of these men. Well, I hadn't misjudged West, he was crazy, plain and simple. But the others? Perhaps.

After I'd dried my hair and dressed, I curled up in Francis' bed. His covers were warm and soft. As I buried myself in them, my energy left me. All I wanted to do was fall into a deep sleep and never resurface.

Francis walked around the bedroom, but I barely heard him. The lights went out and I could have sworn he walked over to me, leant down and pressed a kiss to my temple, but I was drawn into the dream world before it had a chance to fully register with my brain.

SIX

SCARLETT

Someone was screaming. The noise rang in my ears, making me wonder who on earth was that terrified. And it took me several minutes to come to the realisation the sound was emitting from my mouth.

“Scarlett!”

I shot up in bed, my body trembling all over and snapped my mouth shut. Staring down at my shaky fingers, I tried not to whimper. Why had I been screaming? I’d taught myself not to alert other people when I was having a nightmare. It had only led to pain. To beatings if I woke up my parents in the middle of the night. I wasn’t at home though. Not any longer.

“Scarlett, are you okay?”

Turning my head, I found Francis sat on the bed next to me, his grey eyes full of concern. It was still dark outside. The light of the city and the moon streamed in illuminated him. He was only wearing a pair of shorts, his bare chest on display. Every part of me wanted to press myself against him all over again like I had done in the shower.

“No.”

He hesitated before reaching out and taking one of my trembling hands. It wasn’t enough. I needed more contact. More of him. I wanted the false pretence of safety he provided.

Although I didn’t have full control over my panicked body, I tugged my fingers from his and pulled back the covers, a blatant invitation to join me. When he didn’t immediately move, I got desperate. Why was he so reluctant this time? He hadn’t been in the shower. He’d held me and comforted me.

“Please... I need you to hold me.”

I almost let out a sob of relief when he climbed into the bed next to me, pulling the covers over himself and tugging me against his warm body. My fingers clutched him, sliding down his back and keeping him pinned to my shaky body. He stroked my hair and put his chin to the top of my head.

“What’s wrong?” he whispered, as if talking any louder would break the cocoon we’d found ourselves in.

I breathed him in. The scent of cinnamon and apples filled my senses. Why did he always smell so damn good? It made him feel like home. Like a part of me belonged with Francis. Only it was crazy to think that. Crazy to feel it when I barely knew him. Why did he feel so real and familiar? I wanted to ask him, but something kept me from doing so. Self-preservation. If I asked, it could trigger a catalyst of bad events for me. After tonight, and the boys forcing me to kill for them, I didn’t think rocking the boat any further would be a good idea.

“I have nightmares almost every night. Like my memories are trying to bleed back into my consciousness, but they’re all jumbled up. I can’t remember them clearly when I wake up either.”

The only night I hadn’t dreamt was when I slept in Prescott’s arms. My heart burnt, feeling lost without the man who’d shown his true colours to me. Why the fuck did I care so much? I wanted to go give him a piece of my mind, but it would be pointless. He wasn’t going to change his stance on what he’d done. And at this point, I had no idea if he really gave a shit about me or not. Was I only sex to him? Was I a warm body for all of them?

If that was true, then why would Francis have comforted me? He had no reason to hold me in the shower. And he had absolutely no reason to be doing so now other than I’d asked him to.

Even though he had me clutched tight to his chest, my body wouldn’t stop trembling. My rioting mind was too full. I couldn’t stop thinking and processing, going over in my head all of these questions I had. I couldn’t ask any of them. The answers were ones I feared, as were the repercussions of probing too much.

This wasn’t normal. After a nightmare, I’d calm down within minutes. Not this time. Not even with him keeping me safe. My body felt under threat. The shock of the evening and the nightmare had set off a chain reaction inside me.

“I can’t... I can’t stop shaking,” I whispered, my fingers digging into his back. He rubbed my back but even that didn’t help. I didn’t know what to do.

“Has this happened before?” he asked, his voice full of concern.

“Not... not like this.”

He was silent for a beat, then he pulled back and took my chin between his fingers.

“Will you let me try something?”

I nodded. I was willing to do anything to calm my warring thoughts. To stop my senses from overloading. When his fingers went to the bottom of my t-shirt, I didn't question it. Nor when he pulled it off me. He leant over to his bedside table, tugged open the bottom drawer and took something out. Francis made me sit up, and he situated himself behind me, pulling my back to his chest.

“I've been told this can bring a person comfort, like being wrapped up helps them, contains the panic they're feeling,” he told me as he took my wrists, pushed them together and knotted a length of soft rope up my arms, binding them together. He slid the rope behind my back, binding my arms to my chest. “I know it sounds rather counterproductive, but you wanted me to hold you. It wasn't working so maybe you need something tighter.”

“What is this?”

“Japanese bondage,” he murmured. “Shibari, also known as Kinbaku.”

I stared down at his hands working their intricate knots with the rope. He watched his hands over my shoulder, making sure he tied everything just right. When he was done, he let me rest against his chest, his hands laying on his thighs on either side of me.

The sensation of being tied up was odd, to say the least. My body had begun to settle down as he tied the knots, as if having something to concentrate on focused my mind. I let out a breath. My chest was constricted by the knots and my arms against it, but in a lot of ways, Francis was right. It comforted me. Made me feel safer than ever.

“Is it okay?” he asked. “I didn't want to make them too tight as it's your first time.”

I nodded, relaxing into him.

“Is this what you like?” I asked after a long minute.

“What?”

“Tying people up.”

He chuckled and stroked his fingers along my hip.

“Yes, but what I’ve done to you now is nothing like what I would do if it was a sexual situation.”

I looked at him over my shoulder. He had a smirk on his face like he was imagining it. Imagining doing it to me, whatever *it* was. I sure as shit didn’t know exactly what he’d do if he was tying me up during sex.

“Are you going to do it to me?”

The way his silvery-grey eyes darkened at my words made me think asking him wasn’t such a good idea.

“Eventually.”

“Is that why you held me down in the car?”

His fingers moved from my hip, stroking along the rope on my wrist.

“I want to restrain you, Scarlett, either with my hands or bindings.” He curled a hand around my bare thigh, resting right where my shorts ended. “You can struggle and strain against them, but I won’t let you out.”

I let out a breath, shivering as his fingers stroked my inner thigh. His face dropped to my neck.

“But right now, I’m going to sit here with you until you feel better, then I’ll untie you and you can go back to sleep.”

“Will you stay with me whilst I sleep?”

He didn’t answer me straight away, merely continued to drive my nerve-endings crazy with his stroking fingers.

“If it’s what you want.”

“The only night I haven’t had a nightmare recently is the one I spent with...”

I didn’t want to say his name. To even think it. I’d already done that and it made my heart ache. It ached now, burning in my chest with the force of a thousand suns. A tear leaked from my eye. Why did it hurt so much? Why did I yearn for him even after he’d made me feel like he didn’t care about my feelings? Like he didn’t care how his actions hurt me. Why did I miss the way his blue eyes darkened and how he called me his little lamb?

I had to stop dwelling on it, but by fuck did I want to hurt him for the way he’d hurt me. To cut his damn black heart out of his chest and squeeze it tight in my fist. To show him he wasn’t fucking well immune to me. And to prove I had as much power over him as he did me.

“Do you want to talk about him more?”

“No!”

“Scarlett—”

“Stop calling me that, Frankie. I’m Scar to you, remember?”

His stroking faltered for the merest of seconds. I don’t know why. It’s not like I’d said anything odd, had I?

“It’s okay to admit you have feelings for him, Scar.”

I swallowed, shifting in my bindings.

“I don’t want to have them. I don’t want to feel anything for any of you.”

He kissed the side of my neck, giving his answer without words. Telling me he understood and wasn’t going to press the issue further.

“Are you feeling better?” he whispered, his tongue tracing a line across my skin. “Seeing you like this is giving me ideas. Dirty ideas about all the ways I want to wring pleasure from your body.”

My breath caught in my throat. A throbbing started below at the thought of him doing things to me while I was bound and unable to escape. I’d given up working out why I was so attracted to their darker sides. To the kinkier side of sex. Perhaps their natures called to mine.

“You can untie me.”

Francis hesitated, his fingers still stroking. Then he shifted, making me sit up so he could loosen all the knots. He was so methodical about it, making sure he undid them in the order he’d knotted them.

“How did you learn to do this?”

“I had classes. It interested me and I wanted to do it safely... so I could break the rules later on.”

I didn’t comment on it. They all were the type to break rules and do whatever the hell they wanted.

When he was done, he carefully folded up the rope and tucked it back away in his bedside drawer. He pulled my t-shirt back over my head and encouraged me to curl up next to him. Francis pressed a kiss to my temple, stroking a hand down my arm before he lay back. It didn’t take me long to fall asleep again, listening to the sound of his breathing lull me back into the void.

SEVEN

PRESCOTT

Misery. Abject fucking misery. It's all this damn shit had brought me. West's ideas had only ever led to trouble. And now I'd lost the most precious thing I'd ever had.

Her.

Not that Scarlett was a thing, but she'd been mine. She still was on some level, just not the one I wanted. No, I got stuck with her saying she hated me. I didn't believe her, but it still cut me hearing those words out of her mouth not once but twice.

I spent the entire night tossing and turning, trying to understand how one woman had me so tangled up inside. How did my little lamb make me feel so fucking much? I'd always cared for Scarlett, but seeing her again after all these years, the strong but fractured woman she'd grown into, was something else. She made me vulnerable. And I hated it. Hated how I felt so weakened by her. Like I couldn't do what I had to because she wouldn't like it. Because it would hurt her. That's all my actions had done. Caused her pain.

Remorse was an alien feeling to me. I didn't regret what we'd done, but I felt the guilt of hurting her wash over me in waves of excruciating agony. For putting her in that situation. The thing Scarlett didn't know was how fucking strong she was. How powerful she'd been last night. She hadn't been afraid to tell us all to go fuck ourselves after it happened. Maybe she didn't fear the repercussions. After all, what was worse than being forced to kill a man?

Well, in my mind, a lot of things, but I enjoyed killing. We all did. Scarlett didn't think like us, but maybe she would... in time.

"Would you stop brooding? I can hear you thinking from over here."

I looked up from where I was staring out the window of our living space. West stood in the kitchen scowling at me.

“Fuck off,” I muttered.

“She’s not going to stay mad at you forever.”

I glared at him.

“She should be mad at you.”

He scoffed.

“She knows what she’s getting when it comes to me.” He pointed at his chest. “Violence is in my fucking nature, I showed her from the start... but you... well, she saw something else and she hates you for destroying the illusion.”

Fuck did I want to throw something at his head. Why did he have to start on me? It was too fucking early for his shit, especially after the night we’d all had.

“What illusion?”

“I saw the way she looked at you, Pres, like you’re her fucking saviour. Too bad she didn’t see beneath the damn mask and find the self-involved narcissist living inside that well-turned-out exterior of yours.”

“I’m not a fucking narcissist.”

I was sick to death of the three of them accusing me of it.

“No? Don’t you love it when people worship you? When they appeal to your fucking ego, huh? You play up to it. The world revolves around Prescott Ellis, his wants and needs.”

My fists clenched at my sides, but I didn’t rise to his bait. I could feel Drake’s eyes boring holes into the back of my head. He was sitting having coffee at the table. If I went after West, Drake would only tell me to calm the fuck down.

“Whatever, West, at least I’m not a psychopath.”

Drake snorted.

“What did you just say to me?”

“You heard me.”

West took a step towards me.

“West. Enough,” came Drake’s voice.

“He called me a psychopath.”

“Well, he’s not exactly wrong.”

“Fuck you.”

I turned and glanced at Drake who was giving West one of his ‘quit being a

cunt' looks. If he was going to give me shit, I'd give it right back. It's how we did things around here.

"Why am I not surprised you're already at each other's throats and it's barely nine in the morning?"

All of us looked at the stairs finding Francis strolling down them with his hands in his pockets.

"Why do you look so fucking cheerful, Frankie?" West said, giving him daggers.

"For the last fucking time, it's Francis."

"And there he is, I knew it wouldn't last long."

Francis flipped him the finger before he walked over to Drake. He sipped his coffee as he levelled his gaze on our friend.

"How is she?"

"Okay, I think. Still asleep, but given she woke me up in the middle of the night screaming, hardly surprising."

Drake's jaw ticked.

"Did you do something to her?"

Francis ran his fingers across the table.

"No, she has nightmares. I think when she feels safe, they don't disturb her. At least, her sleep wasn't further disturbed when I was next to her."

My heart cracked. The night she'd spent with me she'd not woken up once. Had she felt safe with me? I'd gone and fucked it all up.

What a fucking idiot.

"You made her feel safe?"

Francis raised an eyebrow.

"It's not hard to hold a girl and let her cry. She didn't need me being a dick to her after last night."

"She cried?"

"What the fuck, Drake? Of course she fucking cried. She killed someone. Just because it's easy for you and me, doesn't mean she isn't affected. I swear it's like you lot forget we aren't the norm, and most human beings would be wracked with guilt over taking another's life."

For once in his life, Drake looked contrite, but it didn't take long for his expression to clear.

“Are you sure leaving her alone in your room is a good idea?”

Francis rolled his eyes as he strolled away to the kitchen.

“Quit worrying, she’s sleeping. Even if she snoops, she won’t find anything other than my ropes, which she already knows about.”

“Do I even want to know how?”

Francis gave him a wink.

“Probably not.”

Our intercom by the lift started buzzing. Drake hauled himself up from his chair and went over to it, pressing down on the button.

“Yes?”

“Good morning, Mr Ackley, there’s someone who wants to see you at reception,” came the voice of Anton, the security guy who usually worked weekends.

We had twenty-four-seven security for our building. It was needed when we lived here. We didn’t get visitors on Sundays, so this was rather unusual.

“Who is it?”

“He says his name is Mason Jones.”

All of us froze. What the fuck was he doing here? Had he already worked out we’d taken Scarlett? Highly likely, since we’d come and taken her without a fucking by-your-leave while he wasn’t there.

“Send him up to our offices, I’ll meet him there.”

“Yes, Mr Ackley.”

Drake moved away from the intercom, rubbing his chin.

“Well, guess we have to deal with him sooner than expected.”

“If you’d let me kill the prick, we wouldn’t have to deal with him ever again,” West said.

“Wouldn’t you rather torture the poor fucker until he cries like a baby?” Francis asked, opening the fridge.

“I suppose breaking him would be sweeter.”

“No one is killing Mason,” Drake interjected. “Pres, you’re coming with me.”

I glared at Drake.

“Fuck off, I don’t want to see that cunt.”

Drake pressed the button for the lift.

“Considering Scarlett hates your guts right now, you can’t stay to keep an eye

on her. And you know what will happen if I take West. Francis is the only one she's talking to, so deal with it."

He didn't want to go alone. A wise move. Mason wouldn't do anything to him, but you could never be too careful.

"Fine," I grumbled, walking over to the lift and crossing my arms over my chest. "But I'm not talking to him.

"You don't have to. Keep your mouth shut and watch my back."

I wanted to stay and talk to Scarlett, even if she was pissed off at me. Perhaps I could later, if West didn't wind her up first. Scratch that, he was bound to. The fucker was like a dog with a bone. He enjoyed toying with her. I didn't trust Francis to keep West off her case. And Drake wouldn't be there to keep him in line either.

I hope you're still angry enough not to take his shit, sweetness.

Our girl was so brave and strong. She could take on the world if she wanted.

The lift arrived. Drake and I walked in, me still scowling and wanting to be anywhere else. As it descended, he turned to me.

"You need to pull your shit together, Pres. We all agreed to what happened last night."

It didn't matter if I agreed to it. It hurt Scarlett and we were all fucking well responsible for it.

"When are we going to talk to her about the past?"

"She needs to remember it on her own."

I threw my arms up.

"How is she going to remember if we don't help her, huh? We are the only connection she has to it left. Us. We are her family. Everything else has been destroyed, ruined by them."

Drake's expression fell.

"Don't you think I know that? Quit acting like this isn't difficult for me."

"You sure about that? From where I'm standing, you act like you don't give a shit when it comes to her."

The lift doors slid open.

"We don't have time for this right now," he hissed, giving me a dark look before striding out.

I wanted to pull him back in here and give him a piece of my mind, but even I

knew we couldn't afford to be divided in the face of Mason. Drake's apparent disregard for Scarlett's feelings had begun to grate on me. Crazy to think I'd been on board with everything... until she came back. Until she showed me glimpses of the girl I'd known before. Until she showed me her heart. And now I was fucking lost. All I wanted was her. To breathe her in. To feel her against me. To hear her laugh. To hear her moan and cry out my name.

You're falling for her, you know that, right? You're falling in love.

I told my brain to get fucked as I walked out of the lift. Drake was leaning against Tonya's empty desk, waiting for the other lift to arrive. The one containing a man we all hated with a passion. We had a very good reason for it. Hell, we had good reasons for everything we'd done. The world might not consider them right, just or moral, but we weren't mindless beasts who killed for sport. Not even West, though he acted like it sometimes.

I leant up against the window, staring down at the city below. The view always soothed me. Reminded me of how we ruled over it from high above. I'd never stopped viewing humanity as ants toiling day in, day out, for their scraps. Controlled by the rich who liked to keep them under their feet. Subservient. Capitalism was a cruel, unforgiving ruler. One that benefited the few and kept the masses from rising up. It gave us a landing pad upon which we formed our company. We rose because we knew the system. We played it to our advantage. We fucking cheated it. Now we could sit back and watch it all burn.

The second lift's doors opened. I turned in time to see Mason walking out, his face like thunder.

"Where the fuck is she?" he ground out, his fists clenching at his sides as he came to a standstill in the middle of the lobby.

Drake merely regarded him with a neutral expression.

"Where is who?"

"Don't fuck with me, Drake, where is Scarlett!"

Drake gave a semi-nonchalant shrug.

"Where do you think she is, Mason?"

Little did Scarlett know, but we had already encountered her friend many times over the years. It was simple. He hated us. We hated him. And the fact we all knew he clearly had feelings for Scarlett made it worse. She was ours first. She would always be ours. No matter what he did, he couldn't compete with the

four of us. Scarlett would never see him the way she did us. Never. And he was fucking sour about it no doubt. Likely why he taunted all of us at the awards event when he'd danced with her. He wanted us to think he had a fucking chance with our girl. He had none. Zero.

One day, she'd find out the truth of what he'd done to her. What he'd done to all of us. Then she'd hate him. She'd really want him dead. Our woman would have no qualms about digging the knife into his chest like she did last night when she thought it was Mason. No, Scarlett would wield the fucking axe to cut him down. And we'd all watch him burn with no remorse or guilt for tearing the cunt down.

EIGHT

DRAKE

I stared Mason Jones down because I sure as shit wasn't going to let the guy intimidate me. He didn't deserve our time nor attention, but he'd left us with little choice. I didn't want him making a scene in our building. It was better to deal with him here on our turf.

"She's here. You took her."

I shoved off Tonya's desk, digging my hands in my pockets to prevent him from seeing my clenched fists. Prescott had accused me of not caring about Scarlett's feelings. I cared. The fact this cunt had physically hurt her pissed me off, but I didn't show it. I couldn't afford to allow those feelings of rage and resentment out. People often thought West had one hell of a temper on him. They hadn't seen me lose it. I could be calm and controlled, but push me too hard and you would live to regret it.

"Did you expect anything less? She's ours."

He took a step towards me, the anger in his brown eyes trying to burn a hole in me, but I remained unaffected. He could glare at me all he wanted, it wouldn't change facts. We had taken back what belonged to us. It might not have been our plan, but circumstances had changed. And now we had something to hold over her, we could keep our woman in line. We could keep her here with us where she should be.

"She's not a piece of property."

"Oh really now? Funny you say that when your employers have spent the past ten years brainwashing her into thinking we're monsters and using her for their petty and pointless revenge. Tell me how she's not a piece of property to them, because I'd love to know."

Mason let out a stuttered fake laugh.

“You are monsters.”

I smiled very, very slowly, taking my hands from my pockets and spreading them.

“Are we? Pray tell me what makes us so.”

He stabbed a finger in my direction.

“You fucking know why.”

I tutted and rubbed my chin. If he wanted to throw around accusations, he could. Didn't mean we had to listen to them.

“Theories and conspiracies don't make up hard facts, Mason. If you're going to accuse us of something, you better have proof.”

The fire in his eyes would have made a lesser man flinch but Mason didn't intimidate me. If anything, I saw him as a fuckwit who hid behind lies and deceit. I might be a master manipulator, and I was fucking proud of it, but this guy, he pretended to be nice. That's where I drew the line. Being nice was a fucking act. And one I despised.

“You know what you did. You can stand there and act like you're innocent, but I know. We know.”

I wanted to laugh. Yeah, I knew what he was talking about, but I wouldn't let him know. Had too much self-preservation to ever reveal those secrets. The last thing I'd ever describe myself as was innocent, so he was barking up the wrong tree with that statement.

“You make *such* a compelling case for your suspicions. How could anyone *not* believe you.”

Prescott snorted. Mason glared at him as if he'd only just noticed Prescott standing by the window.

“Fuck you. Tell me where she is.”

Prescott stepped towards him, his blue eyes turning dark.

“As if you really give two shits about where she is. You're just trying to save your precious hide.”

“I care about Scarlett far more than you lot ever did.”

Prescott had been slightly hunched, but he straightened to his full height. He towered over Mason like he did most people.

“You care about her, do you? Is that why you hurt her, huh? I saw the bruises

and I wasn't fucking impressed."

Mason took a step back, his brow furrowing.

"What bruises?"

Prescott scoffed.

"As if you don't know."

The confusion on Mason's face was evident. Did Scarlett not show him what he'd done to her on Friday morning? We'd seen them last night at the warehouse when West had held up her arm. Seen the evidence with our own damn eyes. Prescott wouldn't lie about it, but the image was branded in my retinas. Mason had inflicted those bruises in anger. And I wasn't inclined to give the fucker the benefit of the doubt.

"I don't know what the fuck you're talking about."

"The bruises on her arm," I said. "You call us monsters, but we're not the ones abusing her. She wanted to get away from you."

Mason took another step back. Pain flashed in his eyes. Good, he should feel fucking pain for what he'd done. I wished I could gut the man where he stood. I'd take full pleasure in destroying him. Ripping the man apart piece by piece. I'd take his damn life, because we were fucking owed it for all the shit he'd caused.

"That's what she told you?"

"She doesn't need you," Prescott spat at him. "Stay away from her."

"As if I'm going to believe anything coming out of your mouths. You lot are a bunch of lying, cheating, murderous scum. You belong in the gutter you grew up in."

Prescott ground his teeth. Mason was getting to him. I gave him a look and he backed off towards the window again. My gaze turned back to Mason. We might have been born in the damn gutter to working-class families, but we were wealthy now. Worked our way up from nothing. And we did it to get our girl back.

"You can think whatever you want, Mason," I told him, my voice low. "Doesn't change the facts. You stole her from us. And when she finds out, she will never forgive you."

Mason looked between the two of us as if contemplating my words.

"Why haven't you told her who you are?"

"What does it matter to you, huh?"

He didn't deserve to know anything about us. He would only report back to the fucking Carvers. We weren't stupid enough to reveal anything to him, nor Scarlett for that matter.

"If you want her back so badly, why not tell her the truth? Why play all these games and toy with her?"

I almost laughed. She was an agent of his employers. Until she remembered on her own, we wouldn't interfere. There would be no point. Scarlett wouldn't believe us. She had no reason to. Not when those fuckers had taught her we were her enemies. The people she needed to take down. And if he couldn't see it, then he was an idiot.

"We don't answer to you. Our reasons are our own."

"So that's it? You're just keeping her?"

"Unless you want us to destroy her image of you completely, then I suggest you turn around and walk away."

He was right up against the lift doors, having backed off from both of us completely.

"Don't tell her."

I smiled at him.

"Stay the fuck away from her and we'll keep your sordid little secret."

Mason pressed the button to call the lift. The doors opened straight away as it hadn't gone anywhere. He stepped in, watching me with hatred in his eyes. He could hate me all he wanted. What he'd done to Scarlett was far worse than anything me or the others could ever do.

"This isn't over, Drake."

Those were his last words as the doors shut. I rolled my eyes and glanced at Prescott.

"He's going to be a problem."

Prescott gave me a scathing look.

"And? He and the whole fucking world could be a problem right now. I care more about her than that prick."

No fucking surprises there. He hadn't calmed down. Mason's words had probably made everything worse.

"We're going to do this now?"

"We sure as fuck are."

I sighed and looked away.

“How can we help her remember, Pres? If she didn’t recognise us back when she first walked in here, then how is anything we do now going to change matters?”

We weren’t medical professionals. Reminding Scarlett of who she was wouldn’t be an easy or simple task. And it could backfire. Prescott was the one who liked to take risks. I needed to know all the possible outcomes, and work out how to mitigate them if things went sour. In a lot of ways, I admired Prescott for his ability to throw caution to the wind. He was a big part of our success. But Scarlett wasn’t Fortuity. She was human. We were complicated beings. I was more cautious when it came to dealing with her.

“It’s already started, Drake. She needs to be pushed in the right direction. To trust the things she’s seeing. Right now, she can’t tell if they’re real.”

My eyes flicked back to him.

“Has she told you exactly what she’s remembered?”

“Well, no and now I’ve fucked it all up, she won’t trust me with it. We’re better off getting Francis to try.”

He said the last part with no small amount of resentment bleeding through his words. He was clearly sore over the fact Scarlett had chosen Francis to spend the night with. Wasn’t exactly Francis’ fault. He was the lesser of all evils in her eyes. West had forced her to kill, I’d pissed her off by fucking her afterwards and Prescott had betrayed her trust in him. Francis was a fucking saint compared to us.

“I’ll talk to him.”

“You need to start acting like you give a shit about her too. I’m beginning to wonder if you even want her back.”

I didn’t answer to him or have to prove a single damn thing.

“If you choose to think I don’t care, it’s on you.”

He scoffed.

“Francis makes it clear, so do I. Hell, even West in his own fucked up way shows the entire world how in love with her he is, but you... you sit there and do nothing. Own your fucking emotions for once in your life, Drake, because fuck knows bottling all that shit up has only ever brought you pain. You think we don’t know how little you sleep at night, huh? We all know.”

And with that, he walked over to the lift and slammed his hand down on the button. He might have said them in anger, but those words hit the nail on the head. I did bottle shit up. It plagued me at night, keeping me awake with what-ifs and what could have beens. Talking about my feelings wasn't something I did. Not since... her. And right now, I didn't trust Scarlett. Not when she couldn't remember me.

Perhaps Prescott was right. Maybe we needed to push harder. Help her recall the memories she'd lost. But if we did, would she hate the four of us for what happened that night? Would she blame us for setting off a chain of horrific events and ruining her life?

I guess the real question I had to answer was... *am I willing to risk everything to return Scarlett to the person she was before?*

NINE

WEST

Francis had set about making breakfast while I lounged against the counter in the kitchen with a cup of coffee. I hadn't spiked it but judging by the way he kept looking at me, he suspected I was drinking. Wouldn't be the first time I'd started on the whisky well before ten, but I didn't need to bury my feelings in booze or drugs right now. Not after last night. Not when I'd smelt blood and fear. And watched the woman I wanted for life stab a man to death with reckless fury and rage.

Scarlett had been a queen. A ruler in her own right. There was nothing sweeter than watching her give into her baser nature. To destroy a man she thought had wronged her. The rest of them might not have realised what she'd screamed at the guy, but I did. She'd called Mason a liar and told him he hadn't saved her. It made me suspicious of what had gone on in the Carver household for the past ten years. I wasn't going to ask her outright. She wouldn't be inclined to reveal her secrets to me, but it didn't make me any less curious. Somehow, I'd get to the bottom of it... eventually.

"Are you planning on pissing Scarlett off when she comes down?"

I angled my head towards Francis, giving him a grin.

"I hadn't thought about it."

He rolled his eyes, flipping the kettle on and moving back over to the stove.

"Well, I would prefer it if you cut her some slack given what we did to her last night."

"You'd prefer it, would you? Now, now, Frankie, that just makes me want to do quite the opposite."

That earned me a scowl.

“Why do you always have to be so fucking combative? Not everything needs to result in violence.”

I shrugged. It was my default. And he was wrong. Violence was the best damn part of my day. It fed my warring soul and made me whole.

“Also, quit calling me that.”

“What crawled up your arse?”

He turned on me, a haunted look crossing his face.

“She said it last night.”

“Said what?”

He looked down at his hands and his voice turned soft.

“She called me Frankie and she didn’t even realise it. She snapped at me just like she used to. For a few seconds, I saw the real Scarlett. It was amazing and soul-destroying at the same time.”

Francis didn’t usually have any sort of heart-to-heart shit with me, but I understood what he was talking about. The fact she’d called him Frankie was significant to him. Scarlett was the only one he’d ever allowed it from. And perhaps she was beginning to remember us.

“Did you say anything to her about it?”

“No. She was already freaked out over her nightmare, didn’t want to make it worse.”

Wouldn’t have been the way I’d have handled it, but maybe it was for the best he didn’t comment on it. I tended to take a sledgehammer to shit, but Francis had always been more subtle in his approach to anything in life. He was unassuming and it made him dangerous as fuck. Even I could admit that.

From across the room, I spied her walking down the stairs. She had a t-shirt and shorts on. Her long, wavy hair flowed down her back and her eyes fixed themselves on me. Her expression turned sour, her mouth thinning. I grinned. She’d already baited me and she hadn’t said a damn word.

Scarlett walked across the room, her eyes darting away from me and going to Francis instead. He turned his head at her footsteps and gave her a smile. I clenched my fist when she went straight up to him and tucked herself under his arm, wrapping her arm around his waist.

“Morning,” she murmured.

“Morning, you okay?”

She nodded and pressed her face into his chest while eyeing me. It almost felt like a fucking taunt. Her way of showing me I wasn't going to get her attention. I nearly shook my head. If Scarlett wanted to play that game, so be it. She would soon regret it.

“Hungry?”

“Mmm.” She nuzzled his chest. “Yes.”

Francis looked at her with a raised eyebrow but didn't ask her why she was being overly affectionate towards him.

“I'll make you something.”

He carefully extracted himself from her grasp to walk over to the fridge. She leant against the counter and stared at her feet.

“Are you trying to make me jealous?” I asked.

Her head whipped up and she narrowed her eyes.

“No. I don't give a shit about your feelings.”

“Mmm, I don't believe you.”

And there she was, my feisty woman who wasn't going to take my shit. The way she scowled and stepped towards me had me licking my bottom lip.

“What is your problem with me?”

“You're the one out here getting all overly friendly with Frankie, whilst staring at me as if I'm going to do something about it. I merely stated the obvious.”

She spluttered, clearly unprepared for my bluntness. Scarlett should know by now I wasn't one for beating around the bush.

I caught Francis giving me a look. As if I was ever not going to wind Scarlett up. It was too much fun to watch her explode.

“If I wanted to make you jealous, I'd go drape myself over some random guy who isn't on your list of approved males who can touch me.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah, it fucking is.”

I shrugged.

“Go ahead... I guarantee you wouldn't like the consequences, but whatever, it's your choice.”

I almost reached out and touched her when she closed the distance between us and stared up at me, the fire in those hazel-green eyes burning a hole in my head.

“You’re acting like you don’t give a shit, but I know you do.”

“You’ve already had a warning, Scar, or did you forget how I made you come in front of all those people, hmm?”

The way her cheeks went red had me running my finger down her arm. Such a soft, little delicate thing she was. Inside lay my warrior. The woman who would go to war with me. Who’d come at me with everything she had.

“Shut. Up.”

“You liked it and here you are angling for more of my magic fingers. All you have to do is ask... unless you want something else, hmm? Perhaps your pussy is craving cock, is that it?”

“I’d rather walk over broken glass than ask you for anything.”

I shook my head, dropping my hand back down to my side.

“Liar.”

She took another step towards me, her body almost pressing against mine.

“I just think you’re fucking sour because I told you not to touch me last night and you wanted me.”

I looked her over.

“If I wanted you, I could have you, Scar. You’re mine.”

There was a second’s pause before her hand whipped up and wrapped around my neck. Her tiny fingers squeezed and the glare on her face had me wondering what the hell she thought she was doing.

“You want to own me, huh? You want me to be yours?” she ground out. “Well, how about I fucking well own you too? This right here, it’s mine.”

Dear fuck, what have I created? A fucking monster... and I love it.

I wasn’t going to tell her I was proud of her for standing up to me. Nor how I liked this aggressive and territorial Scarlett. Her assertiveness turned me on. Made me want to pin her down on the kitchen island and fuck her senseless. But I wasn’t going to reward her for any of this shit.

It started slowly, bubbling up inside me, until my laughter echoed through the room. She only glared at me harder while I stood there amused as fuck by her little display, not even trying to bat her hand away.

“It’s not funny! This is the exact shit you pulled on me.”

I set my hands on the counter behind me and continued chuckling.

“I beg to differ.”

The lift doors opened revealing Drake and Prescott who walked out and faltered when they came across the scene in front of them.

“Do I want to know what’s happening here?” Drake asked, sticking his hands in his pockets as he wandered over to the sofa.

“Scar’s getting a little... possessive, aren’t you?”

The only response from her I got was another glare and a squeak of frustration. Reaching up, I stroked my fingers down her neck, making her let out a breath.

“It’s okay, Scar, I won’t punish you for your little outburst,” I murmured. “It’s cute really, you worrying I might stray.”

Her mouth dropped open.

“Excuse me?” she hissed a moment later.

My hand went to her cheek, brushing her jaw with gentle care I never usually used.

“My interests are with you and you alone, so you don’t need to be afraid.”

“If you think I care—”

I pressed my thumb over her mouth, stopping her words.

“I know you care.” I leant closer. “None of us are going anywhere, Scar. We don’t want anyone else.”

She blinked. Then she pulled herself out of my grasp and cradled her hand to her chest, staring up at me with confusion.

“Why... why are you being nice?” she whispered.

I didn’t answer her, merely winked. I don’t think she knew what to do. Probably expected me to fly off the handle and threaten her, but this was far more fun, watching her attempt to work out what the hell my game was and failing.

Scarlett backed away from me and went over to Francis instead. He rolled his eyes at me while taking her over to the dining table, sitting her down at it and placing a plate in front of her. Scarlett dug into her food, but she continued to watch me, her brow furrowed as if everything I’d done had thrown her for a loop.

It wasn’t until she’d finished eating when she looked up and found Prescott staring at her. He’d remained by the lift, watching her with this sad puppy dog expression on his face. Hurt flashed in her eyes. The two of them kept staring at

each other as Francis took her plate away and brought it over to the kitchen, placing it in the dishwasher. When he went back over to her, she turned to him with a determined look on her face.

“You know what we were talking about last night?”

Francis frowned.

“We talked about a lot of things.”

She reached out and put a hand on his arm.

“The tying up thing.”

He rubbed the back of his neck as if it was the last thing he thought she’d bring up in front of the rest of us.

“What about it?”

She stood up and placed her hand on his chest, smiling at him with a wicked look in her eyes.

“Do you want to show me more... like right now?”

“Are you asking what I think you are?”

Scarlett leant into him.

“I want you to tie me up and do everything you were imagining last night.”

Somehow I didn’t think Francis had ever had a girl act so brazen towards him as he shifted on his feet and looked around the room. Scarlett was still staring up at him when he levelled his gaze back on her.

“I can do that.”

“Good.”

Then she took his hand and tugged him towards the stairs, not even throwing a look anyone else’s way. She’d made her statement. It was a big fuck you to me, Drake and Prescott. I couldn’t exactly fault her for it either.

It wasn’t until they’d disappeared when Prescott moved away from the lift and walked over to Drake, taking a seat next to him. He crossed his arms over his chest and scowled.

“Jealous much?” I asked.

“Fuck off, West. She can do what she wants with him.”

“I think she did that on purpose,” Drake said.

Prescott gave him daggers, leading me to believe the two of them had exchanged words beyond speaking to Mason.

“Oh yeah?” I waved a hand at Drake. “You going to tell us why?”

I already knew but wanted to know if he'd noticed too.

"Well, she's pissed at you two..."

Prescott raised his eyebrow.

"And me. She wants us to see what we're missing out on."

"I already know what I'm missing," Prescott muttered.

Having already pressed his buttons earlier, I decided to leave him be. Prescott clearly wasn't in the mood to deal with any of us.

"I say let Frankie enjoy himself whilst he can, fuck knows he needs it after all the shit with Chelsea."

Drake turned to Prescott, ignoring me entirely.

"I'll think about what you said, okay?"

Prescott didn't respond, which made Drake sigh and rub his face. I had no idea what those two had argued about, but I could guess. And it was the woman we'd sacrificed everything for.

I wondered how long it would take before our household got completely turned upside down now Scarlett had become a permanent member of it. No matter what she and the others thought, I wasn't about to let her leave again. She belonged here with us no matter if she couldn't remember who we were. And I would damn well make her remember if I had to.

A life without Scarlett was no life worth living at all.

I should know.

TEN

FRANCIS

As Scarlett dragged me upstairs, I was sceptical about what she actually wanted. I'd seen the look passing between her and Prescott. The hurt in their expressions. While I thought they should have it out, it hadn't even been a day yet. She needed time. I was pretty sure Prescott would do anything to fix things between them. He'd changed since she came back into our lives. Not towards other people, but with her, he was softer. The last thing I'd have ever described Prescott as is soft, more like self-involved. Regardless, I couldn't help feeling as though she wanted to get back at him.

“Scar.”

She paused halfway down the hall on the way to my room, looking back at me with curiosity. She'd told me to call her Scar. Maybe if I did, she might call me Frankie again. My heart pounded at the thought.

“Yeah?”

“Is this what you want? You didn't just say that to piss them off?”

Why I was asking was a mystery to me, but a huge part of me actually gave a shit about her true feelings. Knowing what I now did about her. What she'd revealed to me last night. Scarlett clearly hadn't had much agency in her life in the past ten years. We'd taken even more away from her. Guess I also didn't want her to sleep with me out of spite. Was it fucking crazy I wanted her to want me for me?

She turned around, gripping my hand tighter and pulled me closer.

“Would you be asking if we'd been alone?”

“No.”

Scarlett cocked her head to the side.

“You know what I thought the first time I saw you?”

I shook my head.

“I felt a weird sense of familiarity, like I knew you somehow, which is stupid... then I thought you were hot and wondered what it would be like to kiss you. And you reminded me of home because you smell like apples and cinnamon.” She got a faraway look in her eyes for a long moment. “So, the answer is yes, I do want this, but I also asked in front of them to piss them off. It doesn’t change how I feel about you... especially after last night when you took care of me even though you didn’t have to. You could have left me to cry in the shower and you didn’t. You made me feel safe, Francis. I didn’t feel stupid about being upset over what I did. I know you were complicit in it, but the fact you didn’t let me drown in my own misery made me feel... closer to you.”

I stepped towards her, my body brushing against hers. While I might not fully trust her, I didn’t detect a trace of dishonesty in her voice or expression. And I couldn’t help feeling pleased that something inside her had recognised me immediately.

“Did kissing me live up to your fantasy?”

“More than I could have ever imagined.”

Reaching up with my free hand, I curled a lock of her wavy hair around my finger.

“Do you want me to kiss you again?”

She nodded, those beautiful eyes of hers darkening. My eyes went to her mouth.

“What if these weren’t the only lips I kissed?”

She shuddered, clearly on board with the idea. Many times I’d envisioned having her bound so I could feast on her until she was crying and begging for the pleasure to end. Now I could make it a reality. I wouldn’t use chains. After everything with Chelsea, I didn’t exactly trust myself. But there were other methods to put a strain on her body. Other ways I could tie her up. The thought of it almost made me groan.

“Come then.”

Scarlett allowed me to pull her further down the hall and into my bedroom. I shut the door and turned to her.

“Strip. I need you naked.”

She swallowed but started to obey, pulling her t-shirt off. I walked over to my wardrobe and opened one of the doors. A whole section of it was devoted to my ropes and chains. I pulled out several sets of rope I’d need to play with, and took them over to the bed, laying them out on the covers.

Scarlett moved over to the bed having taken off her clothes and placed them on a set of drawers I had where I was intending to put some of her things. I made her kneel on the bed with her back to me.

“Do you have a hair tie?” I asked, stroking my fingers down her arms.

“Um, yeah, there’s one in my purse.”

She’d left it on my bedside table, so I went and rooted around for it. Coming back over, I put her hair up in a messy bun. It would make my work easier if it wasn’t in the way.

“If at any point it’s too tight or you want me to stop, you need to tell me, okay?”

She turned to look at me.

“What if I tell you to stop but I don’t really want you to?”

I swallowed back my pooling saliva at the thought of her begging me for it to end.

“A safe word then. Say ‘red’ and I’ll stop. Also, move towards the centre of the bed.”

She gave me a nod before she shifted into the middle of the bed. I picked up one of the ropes and got up on the bed. There was a long metal bar I had bolted to the ceiling. Over that, I looped the rope, creating a series of knots to secure it. The rope hung down on two ends.

I knelt behind Scarlett and picked up the next length of rope. I wrapped it around her several times both above and below her breasts, while securing it to the rope hanging down from the pole. Then I crossed her arms behind her back and secured those to the rope like a harness. The knots were intricate and in an orderly fashion, not only because it was pleasing to the eye, but to make sure she was secure. I leant over her shoulder to check the ropes were in place around her breasts. I tried not to think too hard about how perfectly they were on show. And especially not the way her nipples had pebbled.

Even seeing her like this without having finished had me gritting my teeth.

The ropes dug into her skin to create indents and it was fucking beautiful. I had to adjust myself as my cock dug into my zipper.

“You have no idea how much I want to fuck you,” I murmured in her ear. “But I’m not finished yet.”

I gripped her chin and turned her face towards me. Her eyes were wide as I kissed her, pressing myself into her back. She moaned when she felt me. If I wasn’t so fucking patient, I’d bend her over right now and slam inside her. Pulling back, I smiled.

“I need you to stand up, okay?”

I got to my feet and helped her up to hers, then I properly tightened up the rope connecting her to the bar. Now came the difficult part, hoisting her up and securing her legs. Kneeling down, I wrapped a length of rope around each of her thighs so I could secure them to the rope around the bar.

“I’m going to need you to bend your legs for me, okay. The rope will take your weight so don’t worry about that.”

She did as I asked, while I pulled her up by the ropes until she was horizontal with the floor. Then I fastened her in place with her legs bent and raised above her back. Her pussy was perfectly on display for me. I wanted to devour her whole.

“Is this okay?” I asked, taking a step back and admiring my handiwork.

She turned her head to look at me.

“Yes, the rope is digging into my skin, but it doesn’t really hurt.”

“You look perfect.”

And she did. I couldn’t have asked for more. It’d taken a lot of practice for me to be able to tie the knots this well and to make sure the woman I played with was safe. Chains were different and it was why shit with Chelsea had gone so wrong. Now wasn’t the time to be thinking about her. Not when I had my Scarlett bound in front of me.

Dropping to my knees, I smiled. I’d set her at the perfect height. My fingers ran along her inner thighs, making her tremble. I replaced my fingers with my lips, pressing kisses to her delicate skin. My tongue came next, eliciting a gasp from her pretty little mouth. I couldn’t wait any longer. I wanted to taste her so fucking badly.

Scarlett whimpered when my tongue delved between her lips. I groaned,

holding her thighs as I dipped my tongue inside her pussy, wanting her essence all over it. All I could think about was how delicious she was and how I wanted her to scream my name when she came. This was the moment I wanted to hold onto forever because I didn't know how long this peace between me and her would last. Not when I could see her past was unlocking slowly, but surely. She'd remember that night eventually. Remember us. And it might turn into a fucking disaster, but we owed the truth to her. She didn't deserve to be kept in the dark forever.

My tongue sought out her clit while my fingers plunged inside her. Scarlett shifted and moaned, but I kept her steady with one hand while the other thrust in and out of her sweet little pussy which was growing wetter by the second.

"Oh fuck," she whimpered. "Don't stop."

I focused on what she liked, judging it from the way she moaned louder when my tongue moved in a certain way. Her shifting became more frantic as if she was close to the edge. That's when I backed off slightly, not wanting her to come yet. She let out a cry of frustration.

Soon, Scar, I'll let you come soon and you'll be happy I made you wait.

I kept teasing her closer to the edge before pulling away until she was rocking in the ropes and outright begging. It was exactly the way I wanted her. All needy and unable to control herself.

"Francis, please," she whined. "Please, I can't take it, please. Let me come. I need it."

"Do you?" I murmured before burying my face back in her pussy.

"Yes! Fuck, it's too much, please let me come."

The abject misery in her voice made me chuckle. Delayed gratification was my thing, but she'd not had to experience it before. I wanted her starving and desperate for a release.

"I'm not sure you deserve it," I told her, thrusting my fingers deeper inside her. "You don't sound needy enough for me."

The low whine emitting from her lips fed me.

"Please."

My tongue moved faster on her clit, forcing her closer to the edge, but this time I didn't take it away. No, I allowed it to build inside her but kept her from falling. Her pants and cries echoed around the room like she couldn't talk any

longer and had descended into an animalistic state of needing to get off. And I let her. Watching her come apart and fall under my fucking touch was magic.

The way her body shifted and trembled in the ropes. Her moans. The way she said my name in the throes of her passion. All of it was beautiful. And it didn't stop at one. No, I made her come over and over in quick succession until she was a mess. Tears ran down her cheeks and the ropes had made marks all over her skin. I let her go then, watching her hang there in her bindings as she panted and her chest heaved.

"Francis," she choked out a few minutes later. "Please let me down."

I hadn't planned on fucking her while she was hanging in the ropes, so I allowed her request. Carefully, I let her legs down first before lowering her body down on the bed. She lay there, her arms still bound behind her back for a long minute before she stared up at me. I reached out and ran my finger along one of her tear tracks. Then I leant closer and pressed my lips to her cheek.

"I'm going to fuck you now, Scar," I whispered. "And I won't stop until you come all over me again."

ELEVEN

FRANCIS

Scarlett didn't say a word as I moved off the bed and stripped out of my clothes. If anything, her eyes darkened as she watched me, leading me to assume she liked what she saw. When I got back on the bed, I gripped the rope at her back and pulled her up onto her knees before encouraging her closer to the headboard.

There was nothing like seeing a woman bound and unable to do anything. Something about her helplessness got me going. I would be the only hand who fed her. Who gave her sexual gratification and pleasure. The only thing she could do was beg me for mercy, to give her what she wanted because she couldn't do it herself.

I sat up against the headboard and pulled her over onto my lap to straddle me. Scarlett was unsteady and off-balance without the use of her arms, but I gripped the rope to keep her upright. My other hand went to my cock so I could position myself.

“Sit.”

Scarlett lowered herself on my cock with my help. I wouldn't let her fall. Her pussy was soaking after I'd made her come over and over, allowing me to slide inside with ease. Using the rope as an anchor, I let go of my cock, only to wrap my hand around her throat. She swallowed against my palm, making me smile.

“You like this too?” she whispered, indicating my hand.

It took a second for me to realise she meant the throat grabbing and how West was obsessed with necks. I stroked my thumb down her pulse point. It was a power thing, not to mention it helped me with leverage. She gasped when I held onto her tighter and thrust upwards, using the grip on her rope to put

some weight behind it.

“I like having you at my mercy,” I told her, thrusting into her small body again and feeling so fucking high off the thrill of the experience. “You can’t stop me from using you... from making you mine.”

“I want you to use me.”

Her eyes were on mine, the wildness in them making me give it to her harder. Her inner strength shone out of her. This woman had let me tie her up. She’d submitted. And it was a damn honour to know she’d given up a part of herself to me in the process.

“Do you want to be mine, Scar?”

She bit her lip and didn’t answer. I squeezed her throat, showing her who was in control, even though we both knew if she said the safe word, I’d stop. I cared about her enjoyment. I fucking cared about her wanting this with me.

“No? Is it because you want to be my whore instead?”

The way she shuddered at my harsh words had me gripping the rope tighter as I pulled her closer, our bodies brushing together. My mouth drifted over hers, not quite touching her lips.

“I think that’s it. You want me to treat you like you’re nothing but my little plaything. My *whore*.”

Her lips parted on mine, but no sound came out. The hazel-green of her eyes was barely visible with her dilated pupils. I rocked her hips on my cock, using the rope to move her body with mine.

“Say it, Scar, tell me what you are.”

“A... a whore,” she whispered, her lip trembling with her words.

“Whose whore?”

“Yours. Your whore.”

“That’s right. In this room, that’s what you are. Mine.”

I kissed her then, maintaining a tight grip on the rope and her throat to keep her pressed to me. There was no hesitation on her part to kiss me back and allow me access to her sweet mouth. She could probably taste herself on me. It made me throb inside her. I’d never wanted a woman more than Scarlett. Never desired to have anyone as much as I did her. She was my connection to the past and the person I wanted the future with. Nothing else mattered to me right then as we rocked against each other, devouring one another like we never wanted it

to end. She was the only thought I had.

I sucked her tongue into my mouth, making her eyes fly open. My teeth gripped it and scraped along the length of her tongue. She moaned, shifting in her bindings. When I released her tongue, her head fell back, but my firm grip on her kept her from slipping further.

“Please,” she whimpered. “Please put me on my knees and fuck me. Please make me your whore.”

“Do you want me to press you down in the covers and fuck you until you’re crying? Is that it? Fuck your pussy so hard it hurts?” My hand squeezed around her throat again. “You going to scream for me, Scar? Scream and show them what they’re missing?”

“Please.”

How could I deny her when she asked so nicely?

Letting go of her throat, I hoisted her off of me and set her down. No way in hell I was untying her. She could stay like this until I was done. There were rope indents on her thighs. Fuck, the beauty of them made me pause. I couldn’t help wanting to stare. Scarlett was stunning. The scars on her body were too. They showed she’d survived through hell and came back from it. She’d fought. I was proud of her for it, even though I hadn’t been there to see it.

Grabbing her ropes again, I shoved her face down, pressing it into the covers while pulling her up by her hips. She bent her knees and held herself there for me, offering her pussy up like she wanted me to ruin it. To ruin her.

“Please,” she whimpered, her voice muffled by the covers. “Fuck me, Francis.”

I leant over her, my fingers spearing into her messy bun and gripping it in my fist.

“What’s that, whore? You want me to give you my cock?”

“Yes, give it to me, please. Give me your cock.”

It was right then I knew she wasn’t playing a game. She didn’t care how wanton she sounded. No, Scarlett wanted me. She couldn’t fake it. Her body trembled with the force of her need, her pussy dripping and clenching around nothing.

Deciding to tease her, I rubbed my cock along her lips before dipping the tip inside her. She shivered and whined but didn’t move to try to hurry me along.

Slowly, I impaled her on it, inch by fucking inch, disappearing inside her. I watched her take it, her pussy stretching around my girth and taking me so damn well.

“Such a needy whore.”

When I shifted back and plunged inside her again, all my gentleness was gone. I fucked Scarlett with punishing strokes, listening to the harsh sound of our skin slapping together and her cries of pleasure.

“So fucking desperate for dick, aren’t you?”

“Harder, Francis, please.”

While I was slightly frustrated by the fact she hadn’t called me Frankie again, I didn’t say a word about it. Maybe if I made her lose herself, she would. I needed to make Scarlett forget who she was. My fingers tightened in her hair, tugging at it. I gripped her hip and gave it to her harder, making her whimper from the sheer force of my thrusts.

“Does it hurt yet, Scar? Are you going to cry?”

Her strangled moan was all I needed to hear. She couldn’t escape me. All she could do was let me fuck her, punishing her pussy because it was mine.

“Please.”

Nothing could prepare me for having Scarlett like this. It’d been so long, I’d built up this image of who she’d become in my mind, but the woman in front of me was nothing like the way I’d expected. She was so much more. So strong. So fierce. She’d dealt with so much from the four of us so far and, to be quite honest, it would only get worse when she remembered the past. When she remembered who we were. There was no doubt in my mind she would. She’d told me I’d felt familiar to her the moment she saw me. It was only a matter of time until her past bled into her present. We would either be the ones to catch her when she fell, or she’d want nothing to do with us. I had no idea which way it would go.

“You going to come for me, whore?”

My hand left her hip, snaking underneath her to stroke her clit. She bucked, pressing herself back against me the best she could. With how sensitive she was from my edging, it didn’t take long until she screamed with her climax. I released her hair, gripping the rope to give me more leverage, fucking her ruthlessly through it while she clenched around me. Her screams turned to

hoarse cries, and those cries turned to whimpers.

When her body sagged, I put both my hands on the ropes and gave it to her even harder. Her body was so wrung out, she didn't protest my brutality. It didn't take much to have me grunting and spurting inside her, the wildness and pleasure of it skating up my spine. It was a moment of complete ecstasy. The culmination of an experience I wasn't sure I'd have with this woman who'd completely stolen every part of me and the others when we'd been kids.

It took several minutes for me to catch my breath before I pulled out of her and gently lowered her down on the bed. She let out a soft sigh when I unbound her. I laid the ropes next to her and stared down at the indents all over her skin. Then I stroked them with my fingers, tracing the lines of rope.

"I'm going to run you a bath, Scar," I told her. "It'll help your muscles."

She nodded and stretched her arms before resting them at her sides.

I got off the bed and went into the bathroom, turning on the taps for the bath. When it was full, I picked Scarlett up off the bed and carried her in. I got in the bath and set her down in the water with me. She curled up on my chest, pressing her face into my neck.

"That was intense," she whispered.

"In a good way?"

"In the best way."

I smiled and stroked my fingers along her shoulder.

"Is it okay if I fall asleep?" she asked a moment later. "You won't let me drown in the water or anything?"

I laughed.

"No, Scar, I won't let you drown."

She wrapped her hand around my neck, holding me to her like she didn't want me to go anywhere. As it was Sunday, I had nothing pressing. I'd stay here with her until the water got cold if she wanted.

"Thank you for keeping me safe, Frankie."

My heart squeezed. I pressed a kiss to her hair, trying not to react to her words outwardly. My patience had paid off. Hearing her say it again was everything to me, especially after the sex we'd shared. I'd shown Scarlett a side of me few got to see, and she hadn't run. She'd embraced it.

Even as I inwardly celebrated this little win, I had a feeling it would only last a

short while. If I knew anything about the others, peacefulness in our household wasn't the norm. Having Scarlett here with us was asking for trouble. And trouble had a way of finding us no matter what we did.

TWELVE

SCARLETT

I successfully avoided the others by staying in Francis' room all day and refusing to go downstairs. After I'd fallen asleep on him in the bath, he'd dried and dressed me. Then he'd given me space to put my things away. Not all of them, but at least my dresses and blouses for work were hung up.

I sighed as I carried a mug from the kitchen down the hallway towards Drake's office. Monday had rolled around far too quickly. By the time I'd got up, the only person left in the penthouse was Francis, who showed me where everything was in the kitchen. He'd left me alone with a warning not to go snooping. I'd listened to his words. The idea of getting caught somewhere I shouldn't, knowing who I was dealing with, left me with a sour taste in my mouth. I was here to get information, but at this point, I questioned if it was even worth it any longer.

I'd come here intending to bring them down. Things hadn't turned out that way. They had their own plan and agenda when it came to me. And my feelings only grew ever more conflicted by the day. They'd only been made worse by the intimacy I'd shared with these men, particularly yesterday with Francis. I had no idea he was hiding such a dirty mouth under that rather well-turned-out exterior of his. He appeared to be the most civil out of the four of them, but fuck had I been so very wrong. It had taken hours for the indents from the ropes to fade from my skin. And the way his eyes burnt with a possessive heat whenever he looked at them had me trembling at the memory of what he'd done. How hard he'd made me come. The things he'd said to me. The way he'd cared for me afterwards.

My cheeks heated at the thought as I continued down the hall. I'd almost

reached Drake's office when I heard my name. My body tensed, but I didn't stop.

"Scarlett, please."

I had zero intention of talking to, let alone acknowledging Prescott. He didn't deserve my time or attention. The man had tricked me into believing he gave a shit about me. How could he when he'd forced me to kill? He hadn't stopped it when I'd begged him to.

"I just want to talk to you."

My traitorous heart yearned to hear his terms of endearment from his lips. My head told my heart to stop being stupid, but it didn't want to listen. It merely pounded against my ribcage in protest at my refusal to stop and look at him. To hear him out. Fuck did it long for him in ways I wasn't ready to admit.

Why do I feel this way about you, Pres? Is that why it hurts so much? Are you hurting as much as me? Do you feel the same way?

I reached Drake's door, rushed in and shut it behind me, hating myself and Prescott for this fucked up situation. My head rested itself on the frame. I wanted to knock some sense into myself but realised I couldn't, as I had an audience. The way his gaze burnt a hole in my back had me straightening and taking a breath.

I'd decided when I came down to the office earlier I was going to behave like a professional. It meant doing my job regardless of my feelings towards my boss. Regardless of what was going on between me and the boys. Regardless of everything. I wouldn't let them get to me.

Turning around, I strode right over to Drake's desk, avoiding his eyes entirely, and set the mug on his coaster. Then I spun around, intending to leave but remembering I'd probably get ambushed by Prescott again.

Well, fuck.

"Scarlett."

My back stiffened and my hands curled into fists.

"Yes, Drake?"

"Mason came to see us yesterday."

I turned abruptly and stared at Drake with no small amount of shock running through me. Drake remained entirely impassive. I took in his appearance, hating the way my body responded to his proximity. The images of the way his indigo

eyes had come alive when he fucked me after I'd killed had my cheeks feeling hot. It was the first time I'd ever seen Drake display any sort of real emotion. It had been downright terrifying. In a way, I was more scared of Drake than I was of West, but at least with Drake, I knew what to expect. He was emotionless, stern, and always in control, except when he wasn't. West was a whole other level of scary. The way he could flip from one mood to another in the blink of an eye left me reeling. No, he was definitely the most terrifying of the bunch, but Drake came a very close second.

"M-Mason?"

"Yes, your... *friend*, Mason."

In all the drama of the weekend, I'd entirely forgotten about what Mason would do when he found me gone. Now I felt guilty. Horrible waves of it made my stomach twist. My nails dug into my palms, trying to quell the sickness.

"Oh. I suppose he wanted to know where I am."

I didn't know what Drake wanted me to say. My feelings towards Mason were very conflicted. I thought I'd killed him. I'd shouted and screamed at the man while stabbing him repeatedly, my entire mind breaking from the strain of the past ten years and the pain I'd endured. How Mason hadn't stopped it, even though he professed to care about me. And then he'd hurt me. All I could feel was betrayal. He'd promised to protect me and keep me safe. He'd done neither of those things.

"Why didn't you tell him he hurt you?"

My eyes went to my arm, where the finger marks were fading fast. It no longer hurt. To be honest, I was more concerned with the way my muscles ached after Francis suspended me from his ceiling with ropes. Perhaps I wasn't as limber as I first thought. If I was going to keep up with this lot, I would need to remedy that.

"Why do you care what I told him?"

His jaw ticked.

"Answer the question, Scarlett."

"How about I don't want to answer your questions, huh? Do you think I want to talk to you outside of work matters? The answer is no. Not after what you did to me."

He leant forward, eyeing me with the same intensity he'd used when the man

had fucked me on the sink counter in the warehouse. I raised my chin, not caring if I was being defiant. My anger at his uncaring attitude and the way he'd used me had made me reckless.

"This is not up for debate. You are going to give me an answer."

"Go. Fuck. Your. Self."

Drake sat back and steepled his fingers.

"You want to do this the hard way?"

"I don't want to do this any way."

I wanted to leave but knowing I might run into Prescott again had me faltering. I didn't know if I could keep my resolve if he looked at me with those beautiful blue eyes of his. If he told me he was sorry and he cared about me. My heart was desperate for him. And I hated the traitorous piece of flesh beating in my chest.

"Come here."

I didn't want to be anywhere near Drake. No way in hell I trusted him, nor what he would do to me. He'd kept threatening punishment and hadn't yet delivered on it. I was in no doubt if I went over to him, I would be on the receiving end of his version of discipline. He had warned me he wouldn't tolerate any further disobedience. And what was I doing? Telling him to go fuck himself and refusing to answer his questions.

"No."

"Scarlett."

"No. I'm not coming anywhere near you."

For a long moment, the two of us were at a stalemate. Then Drake put his hand on the arm of his chair and rose from it. I swallowed when he walked out from behind his desk and stood before me. The way he towered over me had my hands trembling at my sides. Even more so when he reached up, gripping my chin between his thumb and forefinger to keep me in place. The other was dug in his pocket as if he knew I wouldn't go anywhere.

"So defiant. I'm going to enjoy breaking that fiery little spirit of yours."

You should have run the moment he stood up.

He leant closer to me, his breath dusting across my cheek as his lips landed close to my ear.

"You're seeing how far you can test the boundaries and that's okay, Scarlett, I

understand. It doesn't mean, however, that I'll tolerate it."

His hand dropped from my chin and his long fingers wrapped around my arm. He spun me and pushed me up against his desk, folding my arm behind my back as he pressed me down on it.

"Stay."

Everything inside me protested at his manhandling and the thought of what he was going to do next, but I obeyed. I stayed in place when he released my arm. I didn't dare move. My whole body was rigid with fear. Drake wouldn't grant me any mercy this time.

The sound of clinking and a whooshing noise made me flinch. Then he cracked something against his hand. I looked at him and saw he'd taken his belt off, folding in a loop. He gripped it in his hand and stared at me.

"Drake..."

"Palms flat on the desk and don't move them."

"Are you going to hit me with that?"

"What do you think?"

I didn't know what to do. The thought of him slapping me with a belt sent a shiver down my spine.

"Yes."

"Palms on the desk."

I laid them down on the glass, wondering why I'd been so insistent on refusing to do what he asked. Perhaps I hadn't believed him when he told me I'd be punished. Or maybe I wanted to know what would happen if I continued to push him. Clearly, I had no self-preservation when it came to these men. I ran headlong into dangerous situations without a thought for my own safety.

"You're a danger to yourself."

"It wouldn't be fun if I wasn't."

He shook his head, his indigo eyes darkening.

"Reckless, always so fucking reckless."

"You wouldn't have me any other way."

The vivid image of a younger version of Drake flashed before my eyes. There were no harsh lines to him. Those indigo eyes of his held so much expression, so many emotions. Like he was amused by me, even though I also frustrated the

hell out of him.

Where had that come from? It was so at odds with the man behind me right now, I didn't know whether to believe in it or not. I couldn't trust the things in my head.

The first strike of the belt came down hard on my behind, making me flinch again. It was dampened by my clothes, but it didn't stop it from hurting.

"Jesus," I choked out.

He ignored me and struck my other cheek, making me shift on the desk, the pain burning its way up my spine. It worsened with each strike. Tears pricked at the corner of my eyes, but I took it without telling him to stop. Why I was even being so bloody compliant was a mystery to me? Or maybe my sense of self-preservation had finally kicked in and I knew if I pushed Drake, he would only punish me harder. This was bad enough.

There were ten strikes across my cheeks and six across my thighs. I stayed where I was when they stopped, worried he'd continue. Concerned this hadn't satisfied him. My skin was on fire. I didn't think I could take any more.

"Let this serve as your final warning, Scarlett. If you continue down this path, I will make this punishment feel like child's play. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

If this was child's play, then I didn't want to find out what he considered adult playtime. I was going to feel this for hours and sitting down would hurt. A lot.

"Now, answer my question. Why didn't you tell Mason he hurt you?"

"If I told him, he might not have let me come to work... then I wouldn't have been able to tell Prescott what Mason did. He didn't want me to come back here when he found out I'd slept with all of you."

I had left that part out when I told Prescott about it.

"Is that the real reason he was angry with you?"

"Yes."

"I see."

I looked at Drake, who was putting his belt back in the loops of his trousers and not paying attention to me.

"Can I get up now or do you want to ask me something else?"

"You can go back to work."

I pushed myself off his desk. My behind and thighs hurt like the devil, but I ignored the pain and walked around Drake, wanting to be as far away from him as possible. With each step, I wished fervently I had listened to his warnings. I wished I hadn't pushed him.

I'd put my hand on the door handle when his voice brought me up short.

"I warned Mason if he comes near you, he will have us to deal with. You have our protection... for now. If you do anything to jeopardise it, make no mistake, it will be withdrawn. Don't do anything stupid."

His unsaid words hung between us. *Do not contact Mason.* Right then, I didn't want to deal with him. My mind was too fucking full of all the other shit going on around me as a result of asking Prescott to save me from Mason.

I didn't respond to Drake, opening the door and hurrying out of his office. Thankfully, no one else was in the corridor. I didn't think I could deal with Prescott again. Not after Drake had punished me with his belt.

"Some fucking protection," I muttered under my breath on the way back to my office. "Totally fine for you to hurt me, but when someone else does it, that's not okay? Fucking psychos. All of you are."

I didn't understand their logic, nor did I want to. All I could think about was how much my arse hurt and how I hated Drake even more for causing me pain.

Fuck him. Fuck everything. I'm so done.

Maybe I should be more shocked and appalled by Drake's behaviour, but after you've been made to murder a man, everything else pales in comparison. I needed a thick skin to deal with these men. I was pretty sure no matter what he'd said, Drake and the others wouldn't be letting me go... ever.

THIRTEEN

SCARLETT

The rest of the week passed slowly and with no incidents. Not that I expected it to, but you never knew with these men and their mood swings.

I wasn't sure how Francis felt about me taking up residence in his bedroom. He hadn't complained or anything. It's not like I kicked him out of his own bed, but we hadn't been intimate with each other. After Drake had thoroughly reddened my arse and thighs, I was not in the mood for sex. Francis had eyed it with some amusement and asked me what I'd done to earn Drake's ire. I had to be honest and tell him I'd brought it on myself. He'd been nice about it, but I'm sure he found the whole thing hilarious.

I'd tried to forget about what I'd done on Saturday. Every time I thought about the killing, it made my chest cave in. Talking about it to Francis helped. While it wasn't the same for him, he understood my guilty conscience. Sleeping next to him had kept my nightmares at bay. He was my safe space in this messed-up situation I was in. And it kind of helped that he was way too attractive for his own good. I could get lost in his silver gaze and pretend he wasn't as fucked up as the rest of them. Francis was dangerous. I couldn't afford to forget it, even when he made me feel at home by his side.

Friday arrived with me hoping for an uneventful weekend. I'd just left my office to procure Drake's lunch and wasn't looking where I was going when I ran headlong into a very solid body. Taking a step back, I rubbed my forehead before looking up at who I'd walked into.

"Hello, Scar."

My stomach dropped. West stood there with a smirk on his face and those amber eyes of his, full of violence. After he'd been nice to me on Monday, I'd

been wary of him and what he might do next. The man gave me whiplash every time I was near him.

“Sorry,” I mumbled, not wanting to get into it with him.

I should have known better than to expect him to drop it. He reached up and wrapped his hand around my throat before pushing me up against the wall next to us. I let out a breath as my hands shook.

“You’ve been avoiding me.”

“Doesn’t everyone?”

He grinned.

“Yes, but you’re different, Scar. You’re not scared of me.”

I was scared shitless of him, but I stood up to him anyway. As evidenced by what happened with Drake on Monday, self-preservation wasn’t high on my list of priorities.

“I am.”

My words only made him smile wider. His thumb ran down my neck in a soothing motion.

“Fear makes you stronger... and makes this pussy wet.”

I let out a squeak as he cupped my pussy with his other hand. What the hell was wrong with him? We were in the corridor where anyone could see us, and here he was making sexual advances on me. This man knew no bounds. I don’t know why I was surprised considering he’d made me come in a public place without a care in the world.

“I’ve left you alone, Scar,” he murmured, leaning closer. “Rest assured, I’ll be taking what’s mine very soon. I’m going to fuck all your little holes.”

The hand around my throat squeezed. I hated the way I responded to him. How my body arched into his as if it wanted him to carry out his threat, especially when he rubbed my pussy.

“I’ll make you cry so I can taste your tears again. They’re so sweet.”

There was a cough nearby. West turned his head slowly towards the source of the noise. His eyes darkened significantly when he spied Tonya standing there looking at the both of us with a raised eyebrow. When she saw West’s expression, her face dropped.

“Ahem, Mr Greer, Andrew is waiting for you in the meeting room.”

West grunted and released me before straightening his suit. His gaze went to

me again.

“Remember what I said.”

I swallowed, watching him walk off down the hallway and open the door to the meeting room. My eyes went to Tonya, who hadn't moved. There was contempt in her eyes. She glared at me like I was some kind of wanton bitch for allowing West to feel me up at work. It was hardly my fault he'd done it. The man didn't exactly take no for an answer. He did whatever he wanted. Surely she knew that, considering she'd been here for years. I only knew because Francis had told me. I barely interacted with her on a personal basis. It had mostly been via email and only ever related to work.

She let out a rather judgemental sounding “hmm,” and looked me over once more. I pushed off the wall and adjusted my clothes, trying not to think too hard about how my knickers were damp with arousal from West's words and touch.

“What?” I asked, not giving a shit if I sounded peeved.

Who the hell was she to judge me? She didn't know me.

“I'd be careful with that one.”

“Who, West?”

“Mr Greer doesn't suffer fools lightly.”

I narrowed my eyes.

“Are you saying I'm a fool?”

She gave me a rather fake smile and laughed.

“Oh no, of course not. I'm just warning you, he's rather temperamental. Though, I suppose you didn't look like you were upset by his... attention.”

I crossed my arms over my chest and didn't respond. Her attitude was pissing me off.

“Is that how you got hired?”

I frowned.

“Excuse me?”

She flicked her hand up in the air.

“I'm not judging. Us women have to get ahead by any means possible.”

Had she actually insinuated I'd slept with the Horsemen to get a job here? Who the fuck did this woman think she was? I dropped my arms and took a step towards her.

“I don’t know what type of woman you think I am, but I did not spread my legs to get hired.”

The way she smiled at me had my skin crawling. And only proved why I’d got a bad vibe from her from the moment I laid eyes on the woman.

“Oh, honey, you expect me to believe that? The walls aren’t soundproof. Besides, I know what they’re like. They have rather insatiable appetites.” She winked. “Especially Mr Ellis.”

I stiffened. Did she just make out like Prescott had slept with her?

“He’s been rather lonely this week. I suppose it’s why he invited me into his office yesterday.”

I didn’t want to hear another fucking word out of her mouth. Jealousy and irritation flared inside me. Prescott was *mine*. I might be angry at him, but there was no way in hell I was tolerating this shit. I might have told Francis I didn’t care if Prescott slept with someone else, but I hadn’t meant it. I cared all right. Far too much.

Even if Tonya was lying and saying shit to piss me off, it didn’t stop the pain from driving through my chest. It didn’t stop the anger flooding my veins at the very thought of him being with another woman.

Not giving her a chance to say another word, I stormed off, shoving by her without a fucking care for her shocked expression. No, I was going to give the man a piece of my mind and make sure he understood if he ever wanted to earn my forgiveness, this type of behaviour was not the way to go about it.

You’re mine, Pres, you’re fucking well mine.

I marched down to his office, threw the door open and slammed it shut behind me. Prescott looked up from his desk, his eyebrows shooting up at the sight of me. He rose out of his chair.

“Scarlett—”

“Have you been fucking other women?”

A frown appeared between his brows.

“What?”

“Have you fucked someone else since me?”

He came around his desk, approaching me with confusion in those blue eyes.

“No, of course not. Why would you ask me that?”

I walked right up to him, meeting his gaze head-on. My heart went into

overdrive being so close to him. The man it wanted me to press myself against and breathe in. It hurt so fucking much, crippling me with its intensity. I dug my nails into my palms to stay upright, my knees threatening to buckle and give me away.

“Do not lie to me.”

He raised his hand. It hovered over my arm as if he wanted to touch me but was hesitant to.

“I’m not. I wouldn’t do that to you.” Then he touched me. His hand rested on my shoulder, preventing me from backing away. “All I’ve wanted to do is talk, but you haven’t given me a chance.”

The calmness of his voice didn’t exactly take the wind out of my sails, but it did make me falter. And his touch? Fuck, it was the worst part. I wanted more of it. I wanted him. But forgiveness didn’t come easily. Not when he’d hurt me. Not when he’d made me feel as though I didn’t matter to him.

“I don’t know how to trust you or believe anything you say to me. Not after what you did. But I do know one thing. One fucking thing. If you’ve touched anyone else, we’re done. It doesn’t matter if I’m angry with you, Pres, you’re still mine.” I pointed at my chest. “Mine.”

A part of me almost melted at the way his expression softened. And when he lifted his hand from my shoulder and cupped my cheek.

“My little lamb,” he whispered. “There is no one else for me but you. I thought you knew.”

I wanted to fucking well cry, but I didn’t. He called me little lamb. His little lamb.

Fuck, I can’t hide it from myself any longer. I can’t... Pres, I’m falling for you in the worst way.

“Then why would she say that?” I choked out.

“Who said what?”

Now it seemed so stupid, but my emotions were all over the place. One minute I had West working me up, then Tonya saying shit to me and now Prescott making me want to hold and hurt him at the same time.

“Tonya said you invited her into your office yesterday after she insinuated I’d slept my way into a job.”

For a second Prescott didn’t react, then he dropped his hand from my face

and gritted his teeth, his expression turning deadly.

“She did what?”

The rage in his voice made me take a step back.

“She made it sound like you had sex with her.”

Prescott’s fists clenched at his sides and his lip curled up in disgust.

“What the fuck? I swear the woman is delusional. You couldn’t pay me enough money to touch her. In fact, nothing in this fucking universe would be worth it.” He looked at me once more. “I promise you, I have never slept with nor do I have any intention of sleeping with her. You are all I need, sweetness, only you.”

There were a lot of things I didn’t know if Prescott was telling me the truth about or not, but this... well, this I did know. He couldn’t fake his revulsion.

“I can’t believe she said that to you. What exactly happened?”

Despite everything that had gone on between me and Prescott, the sorry story came out anyway. I told him about West and Tonya interrupting us. By the time I was finished, Prescott looked incensed, like he couldn’t believe she had the audacity to speak to me in the way she had.

“That’s it. That’s fucking it. This bitch really needs to learn her place. I don’t give a shit who she is. There is no way in hell I am letting her talk to you that way. She has no right.”

Prescott walked around me and strode towards the door.

“Where are you going? We’re not done talking,” I called after him.

He paused as he opened the door.

“To sort this out, little lamb. No one gets away with giving you shit. Not whilst I’m still breathing.”

And with that, he walked out, leaving me staring after him.

FOURTEEN

PRESCOTT

Of all the fucking things Tonya could say to my woman, she'd had to go make up some bullshit about me sleeping with her. Of course, of fucking course. Tonya had been after me for years. I had never once given her the impression I would ever sleep with her or that I was even interested. Couldn't help it if I was naturally charming and friendly. It was a part of the act I put on for the rest of the world. Why I was the face of our company.

Being polite to Tonya was easier than giving her shit when I had to work with her. Maybe I used it to my advantage because she did more for me than she ever did for Francis because of her crush. While she technically also worked for West, he held her in so much contempt, he rarely ever asked her to do anything for him.

I strode down the hallway towards Tonya's desk but was interrupted on the way by West walking out of the meeting room. I paused when he raised his eyebrows at me.

"Why do you look murderous?" he asked, digging his hands in his pockets.

"Tonya."

His eyes narrowed.

"What did the bitch do now? You know, she saw me with Scar not that long ago."

"What did she do? She told Scarlett I fucked her yesterday, that's what she did."

West's expression grew cold and downright scary.

"Are you serious?"

"Yes. I just had Scarlett storming into my office and accusing me of fucking

other people.”

And she'd told me I was hers. I wasn't going to lie, it gave me so much damn hope knowing her feelings towards me remained. Maybe if I apologised for hurting her, she could forgive me. If I showed her how much I cared and she was my everything. I didn't care what the hell the others said or did any longer. Scarlett was more important than anything else. I needed her to remember me. I needed her to... love me.

“What else did she say?”

“Tonya accused Scarlett of sleeping with us to get a job.”

I swear a vein popped in West's temple.

“She did, did she? Well, the bitch has crossed a line for the last fucking time.”

The moment the last word left his mouth, he walked off toward reception. I followed him, watching West flex his hands at his sides. The moment we both rounded the corner and I spied Tonya sitting there without a care in the world, I wanted to rip her to shreds. However, I was relatively sure I didn't need to when West strode right up to her desk and leant on it. His expression cleared of all annoyance as he stared at her. A sure sign he was going to do something incredibly fucked up.

Tonya looked up, her eyes going wide. I hung back by the entrance to the lobby, waiting for the shitstorm to happen.

“Can... can I do something for you, Mr Greer?”

West smiled at her that maniacal way of his.

“Why, yes, Tonya, you can.”

“And what's that?”

He leant closer and ran his fingers over the wood.

“Explain something to me.”

“Yes?”

He dug his other hand in his pocket, flicked open the blade of his pocketknife and without a second thought, stabbed it into the desk right by her keyboard. Tonya jumped, her eyes going wide as she spied the knife.

“Why you think it's acceptable to tell Scarlett you're fucking one of your bosses.”

She paled and shifted back in her chair.

“I—”

“I’m not done, Tonya. Not by a long fucking shot.”

He ripped the knife out of the desk and strode around to her side.

Scarlett appeared next to me.

“What’s going on?” she asked as she took in the scene in front of us.

I glanced at her, noting she was about to move closer to West and Tonya. Reaching out, I tucked Scarlett against my side and put my hand over her mouth.

“Shh, just watch,” I murmured.

West put his hand on one arm of Tonya’s chair and leant closer, placing the flat side of the knife against her cheek.

“Do you really think Prescott would ever consider your pathetic pussy to be worthy of his dick? You aren’t even worth a pity fuck.”

She flinched and I wanted to laugh. Scarlett let out a muffled squeak by my side, but I kept a tighter hold on her. I wasn’t about to let her interrupt West when he was on a roll.

Tonya looked like she was about to shit herself as West pressed the knife harder into her face.

“This crush of yours needs to end. He doesn’t give a shit about you. Look, he’s standing right there staring at you like you’re fucking nothing.” West removed the knife and pointed it at me. “Because that’s what you are. Nothing.”

Tonya’s eyes went to mine. The abject horror on her face when she saw I had Scarlett next to me made this all so worthwhile. I didn’t care if I wasn’t the one giving her hell. West was annihilating the woman. I was happy to let him.

West ran the back of the blade along her chin, turning her attention back to him.

“You think you’re safe because of who your daddy is... but you forget, I don’t give a shit whose daughter you are. I will hurt you and I will enjoy every moment of it.”

“But... but Drake,” she whimpered.

“But Drake what? You think he’s going to save you because you’re his fucking step-cousin, huh?” He grinned. “Don’t make me laugh. If he knew what you’d said to Scarlett... well, there’s no telling what he would do, because in case you hadn’t realised, that woman over there is ours. If you try to humiliate and hurt what’s ours, you don’t live very long, you hear me?”

A tear ran down Tonya's cheek. I didn't feel sorry for her. Ever since she'd come to work here, she'd been a nosey bitch who couldn't keep herself out of our personal business. West and I had wanted her gone for a long time. We didn't owe her anything. She was only working here because Drake had given her a job as a favour to her father, his step-uncle, Fletcher. While I respected Fletch Sinclair to an extent, as he'd given Drake the money for us to start Fortuity, didn't mean I liked his daughter. We'd paid him back his investment years ago. We didn't want Fletch in our business for any longer than he had to be.

"I've gutted people with this knife before, Tonya," West told her as he ran it down her neck and pressed the tip into her skin. "I will do it to you. I will turn your fucking insides out and leave you to bleed to death in the most painful way possible. Let this be your last fucking warning. You say another fucking word to Scarlett, I will end you. That's not a threat, it's a promise."

West straightened, flipped the knife closed and tucked it back in his pocket.

"I see we've come to an understanding, so I'll leave you to get back to work now."

He walked away from the woman he'd terrorised and stopped in front of Scarlett. I dropped my hand from her mouth but didn't let her go completely. West leant down and put his mouth to her ear.

"I will end the world for you, Scar. All you have to do is ask."

Then he pressed his lips to her cheek before he shoved his hands in his pockets and strolled away. Scarlett's eyes followed him, her expression one of complete disbelief.

"What the fuck?" she whispered.

Her eyes met mine when West disappeared into his office.

"Prescott, what was that?"

"That was West, little lamb."

Her body was trembling, but I didn't think it was quite as hard as Tonya was shaking right now. I didn't give a fuck about her. Reaching up, I stroked Scarlett's cheek, trying to soothe her because she was clearly in shock. For a second she stayed right where she was, then she wrenched herself out of my grasp and backed away.

"He's psychotic," she said, waving down the corridor. "Actually psychotic."

And you? You think that's normal? What the hell is wrong with you?"

I walked after her as she kept moving away down the hallway.

"I thought you understood. This is who we are."

She shook her head.

"He threatened to gut her."

"And? She upset you."

"That is not an appropriate response. I don't want him to kill her, Pres!"

"You can tell him."

"I am not talking to him. He's insane."

This was not how I wanted a conversation with her to go.

"Stop walking away from me."

Scarlett only backed away further, shaking her head.

"No! Jesus, you're all fucking crazy, you know that? All of you!"

"Scarlett—"

"No!"

She looked back and found herself outside Drake's office, which meant she didn't have anywhere else to go. Then she stabbed a finger in my direction.

"If you think I want to talk to you after that, you're mistaken." Her voice had got all high pitched and loud. "You haven't even apologised for all the shit you've put me through and now this? I don't even know why I'm fucking well here any longer."

I caught up to her and took her by the arm, keeping her in place so she could damn well listen to my apology.

"I'm sorry, little lamb. I never wanted to hurt you."

Tears welled in those beautiful eyes and it cut me.

"But you're not sorry for making me... kill someone." She whispered the last part, thankfully. I didn't need her shouting about it for the entire world to hear.

"No, I'm not."

I couldn't lie to her. I didn't regret what we'd done. It was necessary. Everything we did was. Scarlett had proven herself to us. Even if she was still under their control to an extent, we'd started the process of bringing her over to our side. Sure, it was immoral and fucked up, but the four of us didn't play by society's rules.

"What is going on out here?" came Drake's voice as he opened his office

door.

Scarlett gave me a wounded look.

“You expect me to understand why when I don’t understand a single thing about any of you. I hate what you made me do. I hate it so much, Pres. You stained my fucking soul and you don’t even care.”

“I do care, sweetness. I care a great fucking deal about you.”

Fuck, little lamb, I love you. I’m fucking well in love with you.

She shook her head, tears slipping down her cheeks.

“You only care about how you can use me.”

She ripped herself out of my grasp and ran away to her office, slamming the door shut behind her. I was left staring at the place she’d been, hating myself for breaking her trust and making her think she didn’t mean the world to me.

“What the hell was that, Pres?” Drake asked.

“That was the result of West threatening to gut Tonya in front of Scarlett after Tonya insinuated she was sleeping with me and accused Scarlett of sleeping with us to get a job.”

My tone was flat and void of emotion. Something inside me was so fucking broken right now, I couldn’t bring myself to sound any other way.

“Jesus fucking Christ. Can I not leave any of you alone for two fucking minutes?”

“I can’t do this anymore, Drake. I fucking can’t.” I buried my fingers in my hair. “This is fucking killing me.” I turned to him. “She hates me.”

He gave me a sympathetic look.

“She doesn’t hate you, Pres.”

I couldn’t believe it. Even though she’d given me hope earlier, I was still worried there was nothing I could do to make this up to her. How could I when she kept running away from me?

“You don’t understand,” I told him, my voice quiet, “I love her.”

Then I walked away from him. I’d just confessed the truth to Drake rather than Scarlett. And I was a fucking idiot for it.

FIFTEEN

SCARLETT

I sat at my desk staring at the wall with tears slipping down my face. My mind was a riot of too many emotions. Nothing felt right or good. It was all so very wrong.

I didn't have a handle on anything. On my life. On the expectations placed upon me. On the feelings my traitorous heart was throwing at me. It was all too much. I didn't know what to do with myself. How to even keep breathing any longer. To keep everything together.

And then my phone started ringing, jolting me out of my misery and regrets.

I dug it out of my bag and looked at the screen. My stomach sunk to my feet. Grabbing the box of tissues on my desk, I tugged some out and dabbed my face before answering.

"Hi, Dad," I said in my best fake happy voice.

"Scarlett, I hear from Mason you have moved out."

I didn't like the tone of his voice. The judgement in it. This conversation wasn't one I wanted to have after all the shit I'd dealt with.

I stood up, knowing I still had to go sort out my stupid boss's lunch. Grabbing my handbag, I walked over to the door. Thankfully, no one was in the hallway when I walked out.

"I have."

"For what purpose?"

I almost faltered in my steps. What exactly had Mason told him? And why had it taken almost a week for him to do it?

"I felt like I could work faster if I was closer to them."

The lie wasn't hard for me to tell. I'd been lying to my parents for years. It

was safer for me. Got me in less trouble. I didn't have to be scared he might hit me and leave bruises all over my body. The body that had been broken far too much already after my accident. The doctors had said I'd been very lucky the damage hadn't been worse. Not sure what's worse than having a broken pelvis that had to be bolted together with metal rods. Not to mention the fact it had left me with internal scarring. I was still sore over the fact they'd destroyed my ability to have children even though it meant I could walk again. One day, I would have to deal with those emotions, but not today. Not when my life was all fucked up beyond belief.

"I see. And what progress have you made?"

I walked by the reception lobby towards the lifts. The desk was empty but after what happened between West and Tonya, it hardly surprised me.

"I think they're starting to trust me."

Hitting the button for the lift, the doors opened almost straight away. I trotted in and pressed the button for the ground floor. Then I looked myself over in the mirrored walls, finding my face an absolute mess. Hooking my phone between my shoulder and my ear, I dug a makeup wipe from my bag to clean myself up.

"Do you have anything useful yet? Something we can use?"

"I don't exactly have access to their confidential data, Dad."

"What good is you living with them then?"

The quiet irritation in his voice set me on edge. Even though I was miles away from him, safe from his fists, it didn't stop my instincts from flaring up and telling me I was in danger.

"I've been supervised at all times in their penthouse." It wasn't strictly the truth, but he didn't need to know that. "What do you want me to do?"

"Use your brain, Scarlett. Look around when they're asleep."

While it had occurred to me, my issue was I slept next to Francis who would notice if I left the room at night. He wasn't exactly a heavy sleeper. And I sure as hell wasn't going to sleep in one of the other's rooms. Drake and West terrified me. The less said about the current state of my relationship with Prescott, the better. With my dad's phone call, there'd been no time for me to process anything Prescott had said to me.

"I'll try. That's all I can do."

“Get me results or you know what will happen.”

I swallowed, balling the used makeup wipe in my fist. He would drag me back to the estate and lock me up again. He'd keep me there for the rest of my life if he could. And all I would face was more abuse. My only option was to stay with the Horsemen and try to do as my father said even though I no longer wanted to.

It was absolutely insane, but I had no desire to hurt the men I was with no matter what they'd done to me. No matter what my parents said they'd done to them. It was something they couldn't prove anyway. It's why they need me. And I hated them for it.

“Yes, Dad.”

“Good. I expect a full report in a week.”

He hung up without saying goodbye. I sighed, dumping my phone back in my bag. What did it matter if I no longer had any makeup on? It was better than it running all down my face. And now I had to work out how to get my parents something by next week. What a fucking joke.

The lift doors opened. I walked out onto the ground floor, dumping the wipe in a bin on my way and waving at the receptionist. When I got out onto the street, I made my way to the local sandwich shop Drake liked and put in an order. After five minutes, they handed me over a bag and I paid using the company expenses card Drake had given me. As I was leaving, someone put their hand on my arm. I almost jumped out of my skin at the touch. Looking to my left, I found the last person I expected to see. A flood of conflicting emotions raged through me like wildfire.

“Mason?”

The sight of him brought back last weekend when the Horsemen had made me think I was killing my only friend. When I'd screamed at him and let out my long-buried feelings towards the only person I'd ever felt close to in the past ten years. And here he was, standing there very much alive. Relief flooded me, but it was warring with my other feelings of disappointment, regret and pain.

“I thought I would miss you.”

I pulled away from him and moved out of the way of the door so we wouldn't block anyone trying to come in.

“You shouldn't be here.”

Drake's words from earlier in the week had stuck with me. He'd warned Mason to stay away from me. If they found out Mason was here and I'd seen him, there would be hell to pay.

"I needed to see you."

"How did you know I'd be here?"

"I've been watching you all week, making sure no one ever came here with you."

I rubbed my face, hitching my handbag strap higher on my shoulder. The whole idea of him keeping tabs on me gave me a rather sick feeling in my stomach.

"What do you want?"

His brown eyes were full of concern and sorrow.

"Did I really hurt you?"

My eyes went to the shop window.

"Yes, you did. I had bruises on my arm."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

Meeting his eyes felt impossible right then.

"You scared me, Mase... and I never thought there would come a day where you would do the same thing *he* does to me."

To his credit, he didn't touch me. I would've flinched back away if he had.

"I'm so sorry, Scar. I didn't mean to."

"But you did. You threatened to take me back there," I hissed, finally looking at him again. "Did you think I would trust you after that?"

"Is that why you went to them? Told them you were scared of me?"

I took a step back, not liking the way he was looking at me nor how he'd spat the word 'them'. The Horsemen might be dangerous and twisted, but they weren't out here trying to actively hurt me in the way Mason had, and the way my parents would do if I went back. At least, I didn't think they'd made me kill a man to hurt me. They did it to prove a point.

When Prescott told me he hadn't wanted to hurt me, he'd meant it. No matter how angry I was at him, it didn't change the fact he hadn't lied to me about their reasoning. He hadn't sugar-coated it for my benefit. And it was one of the only reasons I hadn't outright told him I didn't want to be with him any longer. Well... and the fact I'd fallen head over heels for the man. My stupid

heart wouldn't allow me to lie to myself any longer or pretend it didn't belong to Prescott. I wasn't even going to question how I could feel this way about him and want Francis at the same time. Not to mention my conflicted feelings towards West and Drake.

"What else did you expect me to do? You gave me a fucking ultimatum. I had to make sure you didn't take me back."

"That's not fair, Scar."

Was he seriously trying to act like I was the one being unfair right now?

The fucking cheek.

"Not fair? What's not fair is everything you and my parents have forced on me, that's what's not fair, Mason." I tried to keep my voice low as people were staring. "I never thought I'd say this, but I'm safer with them than I am with you. And trust me, I wish that wasn't the case."

Mason flinched. It served him fucking right. He should know the truth. I feared him now. I was terrified he would take me away from the Horsemen. They had no reason to come after me if he did. Or did they? I'd been sure Prescott had wanted to say more to me before I ran away. I could see it in his blue eyes. The pain and agony in them reflected in my own.

"You're not safer with them at all. Why can't you see that?"

I stepped closer and lowered my voice to an almost whisper.

"They might be fucked up, but they don't lock me in a room, bloody, bruised and beaten to the point where I pass out because I said the wrong thing to them. They aren't cruel for no reason. And you enable it by not doing a single thing about it. Don't come here again, Mason. They will hurt you if you come near me. You're lucky I'm not going to tell them about this."

I didn't give him a chance to respond, walking around him and out the door onto the street. Nothing about what I'd said to him felt good, but I wasn't going to stick around and listen to him rail against the Horsemen. While I knew my rationale for staying with the boys was probably way off, I was more scared of my father than I was of them. Yes, they'd made me kill, but I wasn't fearing for my life when I was with them. I wasn't scared it might be the last time I took a breath because my father took it too far. I'd already almost died once on the night of my accident, I wasn't about to let it happen again. No, I would do everything in my power to stay away from him.

I should tell Drake I'd seen Mason, but it wouldn't be worth it for either of us. Besides, I did not want a repeat of the belt incident any time soon. Maybe his punishment should have reminded me of what my father had done to me, but it didn't. Everything between me and Drake was about a battle of wills and had a sexual undertone to it. Deep down, I knew I played up on purpose to see what he would do. A part of me couldn't help but want to push his buttons. For some reason, I trusted him not to go too far when I shouldn't trust the man at all.

As I made my way back to Fortuity, all I wanted was to curl up in a ball and escape for a few hours, but I had to work for the rest of the afternoon.

Today had been absolute shit so far.

Could it get any worse?

Knowing the Horsemen, the answer to that was... yes, yes it definitely could.

SIXTEEN

WEST

I fully expected to get a lecture from Drake over what I'd said to Tonya earlier, but all he'd done was ask me what exactly happened. After I told him, he shrugged, said she deserved it and walked off towards the kitchen to start on dinner. When he waved me over a few minutes later, I'd been confused until he told me what he had planned for later. I didn't know what the fuck had got into him, but if he wanted to screw with Scarlett some more, I wasn't going to complain. It meant I had to make a phone call to Gary for a drop-off, but he came through for me as always.

The five of us shared a rather stilted dinner. Drake told Scarlett in no uncertain terms she was going to sit with us. The woman looked resigned to her fate, but it didn't stop her from giving him a mutinous look when he wasn't paying attention. Prescott spent the entire time sulking while Francis was clearly wondering what the fuck had gone on today. I wasn't in the mood to rehash the Tonya shit all over again. She was on her last fucking chance. I hadn't been joking about gutting her. I would do it in a heartbeat. Didn't care if she was Fletcher's daughter. She was Drake's family, not mine. Though mine could go fuck themselves after they decided I was too 'crazy' for them to deal with. The less said about them, the better.

When Scarlett tried to escape after dinner, Francis stopped her. Considering he was the only one she was being civil with, Drake had clearly told him to keep her down here with us.

"Come here," he murmured, taking her hand and pulling her over to the sofas.

She followed him but her face was full of confusion. He sat down and

encouraged her to sit in his lap. Scarlett curled herself up in it and pressed her face into his neck as he stroked her back. Prescott watched the two of them from the kitchen where he was filling the dishwasher. There was a definite hint of jealousy in his eyes, but not because he didn't want her close to Francis. His relationship with Scarlett was all kinds of fucked up and he wished she would hold him like that again. It was so fucking obvious he'd gone and fallen for her... not that I could say a word. The woman had dug her way inside me a long time ago. Made a permanent place for herself there. And I didn't hate her for it. If anything, her presence there was the only thing keeping me from imploding.

Drake got some beers from the fridge and dumped them out on the coffee table before taking a seat across from Francis and Scarlett. I wandered over and dumped out the contents of my pockets on the table, picking up a bottle of beer and popping the top off with the opener.

"Want one?" I asked Scarlett who was watching me. She always watched me as if she was nervous about what I might do next.

"I don't like beer," she muttered, pressing herself closer to Francis.

I popped the cap off a second bottle and placed it in his free hand before sitting at the other end of the sofa from them, leaning my arm across the back of it.

"Do you want a glass of wine then?"

Scarlett shook her head.

"Pres, get her some water, yeah?"

He gave me a dark look but did as I asked, bringing it over and setting it on the coffee table. Then he sat down by Drake. I swigged from my bottle before pointing at the baggy I'd dumped out on the table.

"Who wants to start?"

Scarlett's eyes followed the direction of my finger until they widened when they spied the drugs on the table.

"What are those?"

"They're not for you."

She sat up, her eyes narrowing as she looked at me.

"What do you mean?"

"He means you're not taking drugs with us, Scarlett," Drake said, leaning forward and pulling the baggy closer to him so it was out of her reach.

“Why not?”

I tried not to smile. Scarlett didn't like being told she couldn't do something.

“Do you want to?”

“I don't know. You haven't told me what they are, so how can I answer that?”

Francis remained silent, watching the girl in his lap intently. Prescott was ignoring all of us.

“E,” I said, answering her question. “And none of the cut with other drugs shit they sell on the streets. This is proper shit.”

If Gary tried to sell me Ecstasy cut with Ket or some other shit, I would throw his dead body in the fucking canal. He wouldn't fuck me over. The guy valued his life, not to mention he sold to the crime families. He wasn't a fool.

“I've never taken anything like that.”

“And that's exactly why you're not taking any tonight,” Drake said. “Too unpredictable.”

Scarlett sat back against Francis and glared at Drake.

“Don't treat me like a child. If I want to take a pill, I can.”

Like fucking putty in our hands, she was, falling for our game way too easily.

Drake took out one pill and set it on the table, giving Scarlett a hard stare.

“Really now? You want to get high?”

“Maybe I do.”

He waved his hand at the table and sat back.

“Have at it then if you want to be reckless.”

Scarlett stared at the pill on the table like it would hurt her somehow. I could see the war going on in her head playing out in her expression. She frowned, her eyes flicking to Drake and back to the pill.

“What will it do to me?”

“It's a happy drug, Scar,” I said with a shrug. “It'll make you feel good.”

Drake had decided he wanted to test Scarlett's boundaries tonight. He wanted to see what drugs might do to her state of mind and if she might remember more of the past. I'd suggested LSD or mushrooms, but he didn't want to send her on a trip. He wanted to see her free and happy tonight after witnessing her tears over Prescott earlier. He'd mentioned it when he was discussing the plan with me. Who'd have thought Drake actually cared? He certainly didn't show it

in his approach to Scarlett, but he always kept his emotions locked down. Maybe seeing her cry affected him more than he'd let on.

Scarlett gingerly reached out and picked up the pill. None of us said anything as she put it in her mouth and swallowed hard. Picking up the glass of water, she sipped at it before placing it back on the table. Then she curled herself around Francis again and ignored the rest of us. It would take time for the effects to kick in.

I watched her as Drake turned to Prescott and tried to talk to him, but the miserable fuck was being uncommunicative and clearly didn't want to be around any of us this evening. It started with Scarlett running her hand along Francis' chest with increased frequency as he sat sipping his beer. When she giggled and whispered something in his ear, his cheeks went red and he coughed.

"What?" he hissed.

She said something else and it made him shift in his seat. Then Scarlett sat up abruptly.

"Music. We need music!"

It had hit her system. I leant over to the coffee table and picked up one of the remotes, hitting play on it. The soft tinkle of guitar rang through the room.

"That's not upbeat."

"So?"

Scarlett crawled off Francis' lap towards me. I grinned when she got up in my face. For a moment she stared at me, then she reached out and ran her finger along my jaw.

"That tickles," she giggled.

Then she became fascinated with touching my face. Her fingers traced lines along my cheeks and then my bottom lip. I let her, amused by the fact she'd forgotten about the music and how she was so interested in my features.

"You're pretty," she told me, her voice taking on a dreamy note to it.

I laughed and gave her a wink.

"If you say so."

"You have pretty eyes. They're like amber gemstones." Her eyes fell to my mouth. "Can I kiss you?"

I did not expect her to ask me that, let alone lean closer to me. Placing a hand on her chest, I stopped her from closing the distance.

“I don’t kiss, Scar, but I’m sure the others would be happy to let you if you ask nicely.”

The pout and disappointment on her face made my heart tighten. Scarlett had been the only girl I’d ever kissed. The only one I wanted to, but I wasn’t ready to go there. Not when kissing her would only remind me of the girl I’d lost and how she couldn’t remember who we’d been to each other. Something I’d never come to terms with. Something I needed to. The feelings I had involving Scarlett and I were too raw even after ten years.

“Okay.”

She went to move away, but I caught her and hauled the woman into my lap. I didn’t want her to stop touching me, to stop looking at me with such ardent fascination. She might be high, but none of us were above taking advantage of it.

Scarlett stared at me, her tongue running over her bottom lip. I reached up and cupped her face. She leant into it, rubbing her face against my palm as if she needed to be touched. She craved it. And when she started rocking her hips against mine, I reacted, gripping her hip to encourage her.

“Someone’s getting a little frisky,” I murmured.

“I want to touch you.”

Her fingers went to my shirt, fumbling with the buttons to get them open. I’d long since discarded my blazer and now was just in a shirt with rolled-up sleeves so you could see my tattooed forearms. I dropped my hands from her body and leant them across the back of the sofa, letting her do what she wanted. When she got the buttons open, she spread my shirt and ran her hands down my bare chest. She smiled to herself as she did it as if touching me skin on skin made her happy.

“You feel good,” she whispered.

I turned to Francis.

“Pass me the weed and my lighter.”

He rolled his eyes but leant forward and grabbed the stuff off the table. Instead of giving it to me, he rolled a joint, lit it and passed it over. I took a drag before leaning my arm over the back of the sofa again. Breathing out the smoke, it coiled upwards from my mouth. Scarlett stared at it in wonder, then her attention was dragged back to the fact she was touching me. And her fingers

went to my belt, pulling at it.

“What you doing there, Scar?”

“I want to touch you,” she repeated.

“I thought that’s what you were doing already.”

She shook her head.

“No, I want to touch you here.”

Her hand splayed out over my cock. I leant closer to her, taking another drag.

“You do? Say it then.”

“I want your dick.”

“Then you better ask nicely for it.”

I looked over at the others. Drake was smirking, Francis was rolling his eyes while Prescott was still ignoring proceedings. The guy was big on watching, so this wasn’t normal. I indicated him with my head. Drake slapped Prescott around the shoulder. Prescott glared at him before his eyes fell on me and Scarlett.

“Please fuck me, West. I want it. Please give me your dick.”

“Do your needy little holes need filling?”

“Yes, please... I’m so wet.”

Her hands rubbed over my stomach as if she was waiting for my permission. I grabbed a handful of her arse, pushing her down on my hard cock.

“Are you sure you just want my dick, Scar? What if he fucks you too, hmm?”

I waved my joint at Francis. “You want that? You want us to double team you?”

She bit her lip, rocking on my cock like she couldn’t get enough.

“Please.”

Putting my joint to my lips, I took another drag before grabbing hold of her jaw and opening her mouth. Then I blew the smoke into it. Scarlett coughed as the sweet-smelling smoke filled her lungs.

“Take your clothes off if you want us to fuck you, Scar. Give us a little dance, hmm? Show us how much you want it.”

For a moment I thought she might disagree, but then she got off my lap and backed away, moving her body to the beat. The music had changed to something slow and sensual, just the right tone to set the mood. And fuck if I wasn’t ready to watch her dance for us before I could fuck the living shit out of her for being such a good girl.

SEVENTEEN

DRAKE

Watching her slowly unbutton her blouse while her body swayed to the heady beat had me shifting on the sofa. I don't think any of us could look away from Scarlett and her movements. And the fact she'd begged for dick, begged for more than one, had me hard in an instant.

Giving her Ecstasy was a risk, but the tears streaming down her cheeks earlier when I'd caught her and Prescott arguing in the hallway did something to me. They made me want to give her a night off from her thoughts and feelings. Prescott's accusation that I didn't care about her hit a nerve with me. This might be a fucked up way of showing I cared, but it was my way.

I hadn't, however, expected her to want sex. Not like I was complaining or anything, but shit, watching her strip for us was heaven.

"We going to do this here or upstairs?" Francis asked, waving at Scarlett.

"Not got lube down here," West said with a shrug.

It was easier to fuck her together on a bed. The one we'd had installed in our playroom was bigger than your standard king size for that very reason. Custom built for our need to share.

"Upstairs," I said before sipping from my beer bottle.

Glancing over at Prescott, I found him mesmerised by Scarlett. He rubbed his bottom lip with his finger as his eyes roamed over her body. He'd admitted he loved her earlier. I don't think he was capable of separating her from the girl we'd known as kids and the woman she was now. At least not his feelings towards Scarlett. It wasn't necessarily a bad thing, but we all knew she couldn't be trusted until she remembered us. And even then, I had no idea how she would feel about the four of us.

Scarlett had discarded her blouse and skirt. The underwear she was wearing was basically see-through. I hauled myself up off the sofa and approached her. She stared up at me with this bright smile on her face.

“Did I do okay, sir?”

Fuck did I want to smile. Instead, I nodded and wrapped a hand around her waist.

“Come, we’re taking this somewhere more... comfortable.” I turned back to the others. “Bring water, wouldn’t want her getting dehydrated, yeah?”

I got a nod from Francis. Scarlett came with me willingly as I made my way over to the stairs, knowing the others would follow along behind us. I took her upstairs and down to the end, opening the door and pushing her into our playroom. Her eyes went about the room when I turned on the lights. We’d had dimmers installed, so it wasn’t harsh.

“Get on the bed, Scarlett.”

She did as I told her. The woman looked so small on the big bed, sitting in the middle of it watching me with wide eyes. She reached out towards me. I walked over to her, hearing the others come in behind us. Leaning down, my hands went to her knickers. She let me pull them off her legs before allowing me to discard her bra too. I wrapped my hands around her ankles and tugged her towards the end of the bed, letting her legs dangle off the end. Lowering myself to my knees, I spread her legs and kissed my way up her inner thigh. She let out a whimper, her hands going to my hair. I smiled against her skin, knowing she couldn’t see it.

My tongue delved between her wet folds, tasting her essence and seeking out her hard little nub. She moaned in response, her hips bucking into my face. In my experience, it was harder to come sometimes on E, but I had an ulterior motive for going down on her. Putting my hand out, I waited until one of them slapped a tube into it.

Scarlett’s hands left my hair as she was shoved back onto the bed. My eyes flicked up, finding West had his hand around her throat and had pinned her to the sheets.

“Please,” she whined, her hands grasping at his arms as if she wanted him closer. “Why won’t you kiss me?”

He stared down at her with an intense expression, like he was considering it.

“You can kiss Pres or Frankie, Scar. I’m sure even Drake would consider it, but he’s busy between your legs.”

Preparing you for what’s to come, little wisp.

I don’t think she was happy with his answer. She looked like a petulant child and her nails dug into his tattooed forearms. He didn’t seem to care about her inflicting injuries on him, but West loved pain with his pleasure. It was his thing.

“I can’t,” she whispered. “Pres only gives them as rewards. I haven’t been good for him.”

West leant closer, his expression softening a fraction.

“You want to kiss him right now?” he murmured.

She nodded, letting go of West’s arms.

“I think he might be willing to make an exception.”

Fuck, the hope in her eyes had me wanting to tell Prescott to get his act together and sort his shit out with her. Clearly, in her drug-fuelled haze, she’d forgotten about their arguments. About how he’d hurt her.

“Pres, come here,” West said, looking towards where I was sure Prescott and Francis were, but I couldn’t see them.

“Why?” came Prescott’s response.

“Because I fucking said so.”

I pulled back from Scarlett’s pussy and flipped the cap on the lube. Her eyes went to me, her body bowing towards my face. She didn’t want me to stop. I stroked her inner thigh, reassuring her I wasn’t going anywhere. Then I coated my fingers and slid them between her cheeks, rubbing them around her tight little hole. She pressed herself against me like she wanted me to prep her even though she was distracted by West.

Prescott came into view as he sat on the other side of Scarlett. His expression was cautious as Francis joined West, sitting on the bed by Scarlett’s head.

“Ask him, Scar,” West said, waving at Prescott.

There was fear in her eyes but she turned to Prescott when West let go of her neck. Her hand moved slowly, reaching out and landing on Prescott’s thigh. He stared down at it like he couldn’t believe she wanted to touch him.

“Pres.”

He leant towards her as if he couldn’t help but want to be near her. The moment he got close enough, she wrapped her other hand around his neck and

tugged him against her. His hands landed on either side of her as she captured his mouth in hers. I watched him kiss her back with no hesitation. You could see the tension leaving his body as his fingers speared into her hair.

While she was distracted by his kiss, I pressed a finger inside her before lowering my mouth to her clit again. Her moan, muffled by Prescott's mouth, fuelled me. I wanted to give her more, make her explode. As I worked her with my fingers, she thrust her hips almost like a demand to keep going.

"Please," she whimpered into Prescott's mouth. "Fuck me, please."

Prescott released her and sat back, looking like he was in a daze from having kissed the woman he was in love with.

"Is she ready for it?" West asked me.

I'd worked two fingers inside her tight entrance, but I didn't think it would be enough.

"Needs more prep," I told him as I pulled away from her pussy.

"Fine, she can sit on my dick whilst you do it."

I grinned and pulled my fingers from her. West didn't take long to take off his clothes and sit up against the headboard next to Francis, who'd stripped off already.

"Come here, Scar."

Scarlett flipped over onto her hands and knees before crawling over him. West didn't hesitate in grabbing hold of her hips and sliding his cock in her thoroughly wet little pussy. She moaned, gripping his shoulders like an anchor.

"This what you want, Scar? You want dick?"

"Yes, please, more, give me more."

He smirked as he shoved her down fully on his cock. I tossed the lube to Francis and nodded at her. He could have at her first considering that's what West had suggested downstairs. What she'd agreed to.

Francis picked up the lube, flipped the cap and got behind her. She looked at him over her shoulder while she rode West's dick. West leant forward and took her nipple in his mouth, making her whine in response. Francis put his hand around Scarlett's neck, tugging her back against him while his other hand delved between them.

"You want me to fuck you, huh?" he murmured. "You want to take us both?"

"Please."

“What a good little whore you are.”

The way she all but preened for him was hot as hell. She let out a choked moan a moment later, indicating he'd penetrated her with his fingers. While I watched him prep Scarlett further for his dick, I stood up and undressed. Prescott did the same. None of us gave a shit about being naked in front of each other. I was secure in who I was, not to mention we'd known each other practically our whole lives. Everything we'd gone through had formed an unbreakable bond.

“Please, Frankie, please fuck me.”

Hearing her say that after all these years had me pausing. Francis hadn't mentioned she'd called him Frankie. Considering he hadn't reacted, she must've done it before. He merely pulled his fingers from her and grabbed the lube.

West sat back and eyed her with a smirk.

“You going to ride us both, Scar?”

She leant closer to West, their bodies brushing together as if she was giving Francis better access. Her lips trailed along his jaw, something West didn't stop. He merely held her hips still while Francis put his hand on her back, the other grasping his dick.

“Yes,” she murmured against West's skin. “I want to fuck all of you.”

“Dirty girl.”

Fuck me, little wisp, you are something else. Something I never expected, but I need you. All of you.

I wanted my hands full of her, fucking her like they were as Francis pressed inside her. She gripped West's shoulders, letting out a sharp cry of pleasure and pain. I couldn't help but be drawn closer to her and by the looks of it, Prescott felt the same way. The two of us moved either side of the threesome. I leant closer and nuzzled her neck with my lips. She tilted her head to allow me better access.

“Please, more,” she whimpered.

Prescott dug his hand between West and Scarlett, cupping her breast and pinching her nipple. I did the same to her other breast, rolling her nipple between my forefinger and thumb. She panted, her head falling back against Francis' shoulder as he pressed deeper inside her. I kissed her neck, running my tongue along her skin. Her hands left West's shoulders and instead landed on

my dick. I was pretty sure she was touching Prescott's too judging by the way he grunted. West gripped her hips harder and encouraged her to fuck him and Francis, guiding her so she could stroke Prescott and me at the same time.

This was the closest the four of us had ever been to a woman together. Touching her. Fucking well worshipping her. When we shared, it was often two on one, perhaps three, but this? This was us and Scarlett, the way we were always meant to be.

"Harder, I want it harder, please."

Francis wrapped a hand around her shoulder to get better leverage. She cried and whimpered as he gave it to her, but the sounds were of pleasure, need and desire.

"That's it, my little whore," he murmured. "Fucking take it."

I pinched her nipple harder as Prescott moved his hand lower to seek out her clit. She closed her eyes, turning her face into Francis'. He caught her lips, tangling their tongues together in a messy kiss. When he released her, she turned to me, wanting my mouth. I let her kiss me, my hand curling around her jaw to bring her closer. She tasted so fucking good. It reminded me of the night she'd been covered in blood and it only made my cock throb harder between her fingers. Fuck did I want to do it again. Bathe her in it before fucking her until she screamed.

Scarlett cried out in my mouth, her body shaking as she came violently. I released her, allowing West and Francis to hold her between them. I sat back on my hands, watching them continue to pound into her, both driving towards their own releases. Scarlett let go of me and Prescott, her hands going to West's chest to keep herself steady.

It was then I understood Prescott's voyeurism. Watching the three of them together, the boys barreling their way to their own climaxes as Scarlett panted between them was alluring in a whole different way. I'd watched before, but something about it being Scarlett had me needing more. Needing to see it. And when the two of them groaned, finding their mutual pleasure in our woman, I was enraptured by the scene in front of me.

They held Scarlett for a few minutes while the two of them came down, before Francis pulled out of her and slumped down on the bed. West lifted Scarlett off him and handed her over to me. She sat in my lap, panting with her

eyes closed. Reaching up, I stroked her cheek before waving at Prescott to grab the water off the bedside table. He handed it to me and I pressed it to her lips. Scarlett opened her eyes before she drank from it, staring up at me with a grateful expression on her face. When she was done, I handed the glass back to Prescott.

“Are you going to fuck me now, sir?” she whispered.

I leant closer, my lips dusting across hers.

“Yes, Scarlett. Then you can fuck Pres, mmm?”

She nodded before she kissed me and I was utterly lost in her sweet mouth and the feel of her against me. I let myself drown in Scarlett because come tomorrow, she wouldn't be so pliant or giving. Of that, I was sure.

EIGHTEEN

PRESCOTT

Drake laid Scarlett down on the bed next to where West sat. He'd picked up his joint from the ashtray and lit it again, his amber eyes on our friend stroking his fingers down our woman's chest as she stared up at him with wide eyes.

When she'd taken a kiss from me, I swear I almost died, my heart was beating so fast. It was as if she'd forgotten all the pain and heartache between us. She still wanted me... needed me. Fuck did I love this woman. Everything about her. All I did was think about her. Fixate on her. Wanted to be in her presence. I wanted to damn well worship her.

The others accused me of being self-absorbed and to an extent, it was true. I didn't care about the effect my actions had on others. In fact, I liked to watch them in pain and suffering. I wanted to infect them so I could leave them in the dust. But with Scarlett? I wanted none of those things.

Well, I wanted to infect her so I could keep her. And I had up until the night of the killing. Then she'd seen who I really was. A man with no morals like the others. West was right. I'd shattered her illusion. I was worried I'd destroyed her feelings for me completely. Perhaps she couldn't accept me for the way I was. For the way all of us were. But I kept reminding myself Scarlett was one of us. She was meant to be by our sides. She was ours.

Wicked men need a woman to keep them grounded. They need a guiding light. Scarlett had been that for us when we were younger. I wanted her to be that for us again. I needed it.

"She's going to crash hard after this," West said, pointing his joint at Scarlett.

"We'll have to look after her," Francis said.

He'd leant up against the headboard on the other side of Drake and Scarlett

with a beer he'd brought up. West eyed him with a pensive expression on his face before taking another drag of his weed.

"Perhaps."

Drake put Scarlett's hands above her head and held them down with one hand. His other ran up her leg, pressing it up to her chest.

"I can rig her up if you want," Francis said to Drake.

Drake raised his head, his eyes curious.

"How?"

"Nothing fancy." He nodded above them. "Tie her hands to the ring."

For a moment Drake said nothing then he gave Francis a sly smile.

"Go ahead."

Francis set his beer bottle down and tugged open a drawer, pulling out a length of rope from it. Drake got off Scarlett who looked puzzled until he encouraged her to stand. She rubbed herself against him as if she was craving human contact. Unsurprising given she was high on fucking E.

"Which one? The centre of the bed or the wall?" Francis asked, nodding to the different metal rings bolted to the ceiling and walls.

"The wall, better leverage."

Francis pried Scarlett away from Drake and made her put her wrists out for him. She let him loop the rope around them before he tugged her closer to the wall and made her put her arms up. He then tied the rope to the ring, making it impossible for her to go anywhere. It made my predatory instincts flare seeing my little lamb trapped and unable to escape.

Scarlett stared at Drake when Francis moved away. Drake approached her, his hands going to her waist as he encouraged her to turn around. There was enough slack in the rope to allow her to do so freely. He tugged her body against his, putting one hand above them and wrapping it around her bound wrists.

"Sir," she whined. "Their cum is running down my leg."

He nuzzled her hair, adjusting her, so she was at a better angle for him to fuck her standing up.

"I don't care." Drake bent at the knees and thrust up inside her, making Scarlett cry out and shift in her bonds. "I like knowing you've been used by them."

None of us has ever been bothered by that shit. It was part and parcel of sharing.

West stared up at Drake as he held onto Scarlett and fucked her. The man had a perfect view of Drake sliding in and out of Scarlett's wet little pussy. It was a view I'd normally love, but right now, I was too enraptured by watching the way her lips parted as she looked back at Drake. The way she panted and moaned. Seeing her come alive with her pleasure. She was far more important to me.

My hand went to my chest, rubbing the place where the aching organ inside lay. I wanted to be with her. To hold her close and show her how much I loved her. It's not like I could tell her now. Not when she was high. Besides, I had to make shit up to her first. Prove I was hers and hers alone. The fact she'd even thought I would be with anyone else had cut me. Scarlett had no idea the depth of my devotion to her. How every passing day she dug her claws further into my heart without even trying.

"More," she panted. "Please."

Drake said nothing. He wasn't one for talking much in general and didn't tend to be very vocal during sex. He pressed his lips to her neck and took her harder, their skin singing the tune of their passion.

"You want to come again, Scar?" West asked, blowing out the smoke from his lungs.

"Please."

West set the joint on the ashtray and shifted closer to them. Scarlett's hips weren't flush with the wall so he could stick his head between her and the wall. Her cry when his mouth met her clit while Drake continued to fuck her echoed around the room.

"Fuck," Francis muttered.

He'd sat down next to them again, his eyes fixed on their bodies. Unsurprisingly, he was hard again, his hand wrapped around his dick and stroking slowly. How could you not be turned on by the erotic sight in front of us? It was way better than beating off to porn.

"Oh fuck," Scarlett all but screamed. "Please, don't bite, oh, oh fuck!"

West didn't give a shit if he hurt her, he liked to bite. She writhed against Drake who didn't do a damn thing about West biting her clit. He merely buried

his face in her neck and let out a harsh breath.

“Make her come,” he ground out. “I want to feel her.”

West wrapped a hand around her thigh and fucking went to town on her clit, leaving Scarlett to hang there, tortured by the two of them. Tortured with pleasure and pain. And fuck, when she came, they didn't stop. She bucked and screamed, but Drake and West didn't give a shit. They wanted to drag it out until she was begging, outright begging them to end it.

“Please, please, I can't. I can't take any more,” she all but sobbed.

West finally released her, sitting back against the headboard again with a smirk. Drake had his hands full of her body as he continued to fuck her until he shuddered at her back, groaning in her ear with his climax.

When he released her, pulling out and taking a few steps back, she sagged in her ropes, her body clearly feeling the effects of the brutal poundings she'd taken.

“Let her down,” I said to Francis.

He did as I asked, letting Scarlett curl up on the bed, her body trembling. Leaning over her, he pressed a kiss to her cheek.

“It's okay, shh,” he whispered. “I've got you, Scar.”

He stroked her back while Drake sat down on the edge of the bed and stared out over the room.

“I want Pres,” she whispered to Francis. “Please.”

I didn't hesitate, moving towards her so she didn't have to be without me. I lay behind her and pulled her against my chest, my hand going to her stomach. She turned her face towards mine, her hazel-green eyes full of happiness at the sight of me. Her tear-streaked face made my heart lurch. I pressed a kiss to her temple, which only made her smile.

“What do you want me to do, little lamb?” I murmured.

Usually, I would take what I wanted, but the need to keep the smile on her face drove me to ask her what she needed. She turned around in my arms and wrapped her leg around my waist, rubbing against me with her body. Her cheeks were flushed with her arousal.

“Like how you did in your room,” she whispered.

I bit my lip, relatively sure of what she was asking for.

“Your wish is my command, sweetness.” I looked over her shoulder at

Francis. "Give me the lube."

He shifted, grabbing it and slapping it in my hand. Even though Scarlett was rubbing the other guys cum all over my dick, it wouldn't be enough. I slathered lube over my dick before notching it to her tightest entrance. Given Francis had fucked her here, there was little resistance as I pressed inside. Scarlett held onto me, her eyes fixed on mine as I took her. They betrayed her feelings. For the past week, she'd looked at me with contempt and pain, but now... now she was showing me her desire. I held onto it knowing it wouldn't be the same come morning when she crashed down from her high. Who the fuck knew how she would feel about all of this?

Her fingers speared into my hair, tugging me closer while my body pressed deep into hers. There was nothing quite like her tight, hot little arse, her walls rippling around my cock with each thrust. Her lips brushed against mine, showing me she wanted kisses. I didn't delay, my lips moulding with hers and tasting her sweet mouth. The thought of making her work for it went out the window, all I wanted was to kiss her and fuck her until we were both wrung out.

I gave it to her with short, sharp thrusts, making her moan and pant in my mouth, but I didn't stop devouring her. Her tongue tangled with mine, her nails digging into my scalp. I liked the sharp pricks of pain, reminding me I was still alive. No part of me cared how this looked to the others. I was lost in Scarlett's body and her need... in making love to her.

"Harder," she breathed. "Fuck me harder."

My hand went to her hip, holding onto her so I could give her what she asked for. My hips were practically flush with hers with her leg pinned beneath me.

I love you, little lamb, I love you so fucking much.

The words were on the tip of my tongue, wanting out of my mouth, wanting to whisper in her ear and give my devotion to this woman. I loved the girl she'd been and the woman she was, but we needed to join the two together. Give Scarlett the truth of who she'd been.

"Don't stop, Pres, please, don't stop, give it to me."

Her nails dragged through my scalp, down my neck and across my back. I grunted at the sensation of her dragging them down my spine, raking across my skin and scratching me up.

"Mark me, little lamb," I whispered. "I'm yours."

It was the closest I could get to telling her the truth of my feelings. And to stop myself from saying any more, I released her mouth and bit down on her shoulder. She cried, her body tensing against mine. She needed claiming all over again, reminding who she belonged to. The need to see her skin painted with my marks drove through me.

“Mine,” I told her before I bit her again. “Fucking mine.”

And with that, she dug her nails into my back, shattering in my arms as I continued to pound into her tight little hole, loving the way she felt as she came. Everything about this was perfect. A moment in time where it was me and her, even though I knew we had an audience. The intensity of it had me letting go, groaning as I came inside her, emptying everything I had into the woman I loved. It was all hers anyway. All of me belonged to this small but incredibly strong and resilient woman in my arms.

The two of us held each other when we finally came down after Scarlett pressed her face into my chest. I didn’t want to let her go, but she was clearly exhausted.

“I don’t want to fight anymore,” she whispered against my skin. “I just want you, Pres. I miss you so much.”

I didn’t know what to say. How could I respond when she wouldn’t feel this way tomorrow? She’d be angry all over again when she was in her right mind. I pressed a kiss to the top of her head.

“I’m sorry, sweetness. I’m so sorry. You have me, I’m right here. I’m yours.”

I spent a few more minutes holding her until I pulled away. Scarlett’s eyes were drooping and her body was almost limp. We’d worn her out. I sat up and stroked her hair off her sweaty skin, looking around at the others.

“We should clean her up.”

The last person I expected to move was West, but he swooped in and picked up Scarlett like she was a child. She curled up against his chest, apparently not fazed by the fact it was West who had a hold of her.

“Wait,” Drake said as West moved to carry her from the room. “What are you doing with her?”

West gave Drake a wink from over his shoulder, not even bothering to stop on his way out.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got her.”

The three of us looked at each other with confusion.

“He better take care of her,” Francis said as he got up, “or I’ll deck him in the morning.”

“As if he’d let you,” I replied.

He gave me a look.

“She’s probably going to give him hell,” Drake said.

I shrugged as I got up and gathered up my clothes.

“Let her... he deserves it.”

Before they could say another word, I walked out. I wasn’t going to think about tomorrow. I was going to bed to savour the time I had with her and decide how I was going to tell the woman I loved her. It’s all I cared about. All I could care about. There was nothing left for it. I would do whatever it took for her forgiveness, because my life without Scarlett was too depressing for words. And I wasn’t prepared to live in misery any longer.

I’ll prove myself to you, little lamb, until you learn to trust me again.

NINETEEN

SCARLETT

My brain hurt. Someone had taken a tiny hammer to it and was knocking on my skull. It wasn't the only pain I registered in my body as I regained consciousness. Everything ached. What the fuck had I done last night to cause this? Why was I feeling so... shit? Like I wanted to bawl my eyes out. Nothing made sense. I didn't want to move. I wanted to curl up in a ball and disappear.

My fingers twitched. The pads of them brushed over skin that wasn't my own. Cracking my eyes open, I found myself encircled in the embrace of two tattooed arms. My face was pressed into a solid, muscular chest and I was naked. Completely and utterly bare. My eyes followed the line of his chest up to his chin and found the slumbering form of the one person who terrified the shit out of me.

What the fuck am I doing with West?

I let out a squeak of shock, then pressed my hand over my mouth, trying to shove it back in. No way in hell I wanted to wake the psychopath up. Not when I had no idea what I was doing here. My brain went into overdrive, trying to remember what happened last night and why on earth I would have willingly got into bed with West of all people.

"I want to fuck all of you."

My words rang in my ears. The ones I'd said to him when they'd taken me to what I gathered was the room they fucked women together in. And holy crap, had I really had sex with all four of them again? I'd asked for it, rubbing myself all over West and demanding he give me his dick. What the hell had got into me?

Then I remembered they'd given me a pill after telling me I wasn't allowed to

do drugs with them. I'd taken Ecstasy. I'd been fascinated with the Horsemen after it kicked in. Their touch had me craving more, made me horny and want to fuck them. All of them. I'd needed it so badly, I hadn't even cared about the way they'd used me. I'd begged for it.

This was hell. Absolute hell, because now all I could think about was the way West had carried me out of the room and taken me into his own. I remembered asking him to kiss me again and him refusing, telling me it wasn't something he did. Then he took me into his bathroom and washed me in the shower. It hadn't occurred to me it was weird for him to treat me with care. He'd kept my hair out of the spray so it didn't get wet as he cleaned me. Then he dried me, got me another glass of water and insisted I drank the whole thing before he put me to bed. I'd fallen asleep immediately, having been completely worn out from the night's activities.

West took care of me. What do I even do with that?

What did I do with any of what happened last night? I should never have taken the damn pill. All it had done was made me let all my inhibitions fall to the wayside and fuck the men I was mad at. Now I was pissed with all four of them because none of them had stopped it. They'd all participated like it was normal to have a girl begging for them after she'd taken drugs.

Well, fuck them.

I had to get out of this room and as far away from West as possible before he woke up.

Extracting myself from his embrace was accomplished with some difficulty. I moved slowly, wriggling out from his arms and slipping out of his bed.

When I stood, my eyes roamed around the room. One wall was a massive glass window, like the other two had in their bedrooms. West's bed was right in the middle of the room with black sheets and red pillowcases. He had a huge painting on one wall. My feet carried me closer to it without thinking about the fact I needed to escape. The colours matched his sheets. A rider carrying a huge sword on top of a horse set on a dark red background. It reminded me of Prescott's horsemen figurines in his room. Did West have a weird fascination with the mythology of the horsemen too?

I thought the painting was apt for West. It reminded me of violence. He was a rather violent and unforgiving person from what I knew of him.

“Prescott got me that... he thinks I’m War.”

I almost jumped out of my skin. Turning on my heel, I found West on his side propped up on his elbow staring at me with a damn smirk on his face. The sheets were pooled at his waist, but I wouldn’t be surprised if he tossed them off to let me see him in his naked glory.

I couldn’t deny the fact West was hot as hell in the worst way possible. A deadly predator wrapped up in the most glorious bad boy package with those damn tattoos. But this man wasn’t a bad boy. No, West was a villain through and through. Stupid me happened to like that about him. I hated the fact I got wet from him telling me he would burn down the world if I asked him to. Who got turned on by the idea of a man destroying shit for you? Me... apparently.

Why had I not run away the moment I got out of his bed? Here I was, staring at this painting of his in the nude rather than escaping the crazy man’s bedroom. A part of me was fascinated with West’s personal space. I wanted to explore it even though I knew I shouldn’t. I hated the fact I was intrigued by him.

His eyes roamed over me, making me incredibly self-conscious and unsure of what to do.

“What are you doing out of bed, Scar?”

I crossed my arms over my chest, covering my breasts.

“Getting away from you.”

He licked his lip.

“Are you now? That’s not what you said last night.”

God. Damn. This. Man.

My cheeks heated. All I could think about was how I’d begged, actually begged him. This was so wrong, but it felt so right. Being with him and the others had made me feel complete.

“I was literally on drugs. What makes you think anything I said wasn’t tainted by that?”

He laughed. Fucking laughed. And I got distracted by him running his hand down his bare chest. Why was I thinking about trailing my tongue down those grooves, and lower?

Stop. It.

“So... you didn’t mean it when you said ‘Please fuck me, West. I want it. Please give me your dick’? Because from what I remember, you were pretty

eager to sit on it.”

I almost fucking died on the spot, especially since he'd decided to mimic me in this high pitched needy, desperate tone that did actually sound a lot like I had done last night.

“You... you... you... just shut up!”

I hated the way he grinned in a super boyish way, softening his features and making him ten times more attractive.

“Come on, Scar, you can't tell me you didn't enjoy yourself.”

“As if I'm *ever* going to admit that to you.”

Hell, did I want to be away from this man. I was feeling like absolute crap and here he was taunting me.

“You look upset.” He patted the sheets next to him. “Come here and let me make it better.”

“How the fuck would you make anything better? All you do is torture me for your own amusement.”

He didn't even flinch when I said it, just kept rubbing the sheets with his hand as if to order me over to him. Screw him. I was done, but I also remembered I was naked and going out into the penthouse like this when I was feeling so unnerved didn't feel right.

Instead of going over to him, I stomped over to where I could see his wardrobe doors and ripped one of them open. I could feel him watching me. My eyes roamed over his clothes before I snatched out a black shirt and put it on, buttoning it up to cover myself. When I turned around again, West was smirking.

“Do you think I won't take that off you?”

“You'll have to catch me first.”

I sprinted across his room, ignoring the way my muscles screamed. When I got to the door, I fumbled with it and let out a panicked squeak when I found it locked.

How the hell do I unlock this fucking door?

A hand slammed down on the wood above me. I froze, terrified of moving and looking up at him. My skin prickled when I felt his hot breath against the side of my neck. I'd made a grave error of judgement. And now I was in trouble. Big fucking trouble. I'd provoked the crazy man who'd locked me in his room

with him. The big bad fucking wolf.

“Going somewhere, Scar?” he murmured.

I didn’t answer him. Not sure I could. My body was in flight or fight mode. It couldn’t decide which way to go.

My breath whooshed out of me when he nuzzled my neck. And I panted when he wrapped his other hand around my throat, pressing me against his body.

“You can run all you want, but you’ll never be able to hide from me. I’ll track you down and drag you back here. You know why that is?”

I shook my head.

“You belong to me. I don’t like my possessions to go wandering off on their own. They could hurt themselves and we wouldn’t want that, now would we?”

I shuddered, feeling all of his hard muscle at my back, caging me in and stealing the breath from my lungs. His fingers squeezed, reminding me to answer him.

“No,” I whispered.

“Do you know what I’ll do if you get hurt, Scar?”

“No.”

He pressed his lips to my cheek.

“I would tear apart the person who has the audacity to lay a fucking hand on you limb from limb and give you their still-beating heart as a trophy. After that, I’d hold you down and fuck you until you’re crying as punishment for leaving and getting yourself hurt. I wouldn’t even stop to clean up the fucking blood, do you hear me? I’ll fuck you in it until you’re a panting, whimpering mess and then I’d give you to Drake because he gets off on that shit, and no doubt he’ll fuck you so good, you won’t know your own name. So don’t go wandering off unless you want me to tear apart the fucking world to find you.”

Jesus Christ.

What could a girl say to that? What could anyone say to it?

“Now, are you going to be a good girl for me?”

I nodded. There was no other answer I could give. West had never pretended he was anything else. The man was violent and possessive. I shouldn’t be turned on by those things, but I was. If he put his hand between my legs, he’d find me wet and wanting despite the fact I’d been thoroughly fucked by the four of them

last night. I'd let him pin me against the door and fuck me until I cried if he wanted to.

“Let's go get you something to eat then, hmm? You burnt through a lot of energy last night and I wouldn't want you passing out on me again.”

He stroked his thumb down my neck before he released me. I stayed by the door, waiting for him while he put something on before he came back over to me. He put his hand on my shoulder, tugging me away so he could unlock it. I let him take my hand and pull me out of his room. The man had outright terrified the shit out of me and turned me on at the same time.

Maybe West had been right the first time he'd fucked me on his desk. Maybe fear turned me on. And maybe it's why I found this man so attractive when I really, really shouldn't.

Well, fuck.

TWENTY

FRANCIS

West holding Scarlett's hand as he pulled her down the stairs had my eyebrows rising. I glanced at Drake, who was flipping through his tablet next to me at the table. My eyes went back to Scarlett. Her expression was a mixture of apprehension and fear. What had West done this time? And why was she following him so willingly?

After last night, I was concerned about her feelings towards us. Did I regret what we'd done? No. Seeing Scarlett stripped of her inhibitions and everything holding her back was something else. The way she'd begged was damn fucking sweet. But it hadn't stopped my concern over what she would think come morning.

"Morning, dickheads," West said, giving me a wink.

I glared at the idiot. Why did he always have to be such a little shit?

He took Scarlett into the kitchen, picked her up, and set her on the island. Her legs dangled off it, her hands going to the edge.

"Stay," he told her, and she obeyed.

He moved to the kettle and flipped it on. Scarlett looked over at me and Drake. Her eyes narrowed. It confirmed she wasn't happy about recent events. But when the fuck had we ever made Scarlett happy since she'd come back into our lives?

"What do you think he did to make her compliant?" I murmured to Drake.

He looked up, eyes drifting over Scarlett and West before coming to land on me.

"What he does best. Be himself."

I snorted and shook my head, bringing my mug to my lips.

“You’ve seen the way she stands up to him.”

“She always has, Francis. She’s the only one who was ever able to control him. Why do you think I’ve fought so hard to get her back, huh?”

I sighed and sipped my tea. Drake might appear aloof and uncaring, but the man was hiding a fucking dragon inside him. We’d left no stone unturned in our search for Scarlett because of him. Drake never gave up, no matter how many times we ran into a dead end. Me, Prescott and West had told him it was futile on so many occasions, but he kept sending us after new leads until one finally paid off. Then we realised just how fucked we were. You didn’t go up against men like Stuart Carver without having some serious clout at your back. Fortuity was not only our baby, but our way of becoming powerful enough to challenge the man who’d taken our woman all those years ago.

“You wanted her back too, so don’t act like this is all because of West.”

He gave me a sidelong glance and went back to his tablet.

“I’m not.”

“Okay, Mr Aloof, you tell yourself that.”

Drake clenched his fist on the table, the only outward sign of his irritation.

“I don’t trust her.”

“This has nothing to do with trust, Drake. You can admit you want her to remember you. The world isn’t going to fall apart just because you have feelings.”

The way he glared in my direction had me smiling. Then his fist unclenched and he shifted, his expression fading.

“I can’t sleep knowing she’s here.”

“You been spending time in your hideaway then?”

He nodded, flexing his hand on the table.

“Too much time.”

“Have you been taking the pills?”

He shook his head. I rolled my eyes. Drake didn’t want to medicate his condition. I understood, but the man couldn’t run off no sleep forever. He would crack eventually and take the sleeping pills, if only for his own survival.

“You don’t have to spend your whole life worrying about the rest of us, you know. We’re capable of taking care of ourselves.”

“I know that,” he muttered.

“Do you? The world isn’t on your shoulders, Drake, stop acting like it is.”

I got another glare for my comment. It wasn’t often I pushed Drake’s buttons, but he did like to get in his own way far too much. Overthinking shit all the time and being wrapped up in his own thoughts rather than actually living. Too fucking stubborn for his own good, which didn’t help matters either.

“I miss having her there to talk to,” he said with a long, drawn-out sigh. “She was always so... understanding.”

I nudged his shoulder.

“Then stop being a heartless bastard towards her.”

“I’m not.”

“You can’t expect her to think you actually like her if the only time you’re nice to her is during sex. That’s not how it works.”

My smile as his face dropped and his eyes narrowed only made it worse. Drake looked like he was ready to throw me out the window.

“As if I’m going to take relationship advice from you.”

“She sleeps in my bed, so I must’ve done something right.”

I knew I was winding him up, but I was too amused by his attempt at keeping his temper in check to stop.

“Yeah, let’s see if she still does after last night. She keeps giving us daggers.”

“You did trick her into taking E, Drake.”

He gave me a sly smile.

“I wanted to give her a night of freedom. Seeing her smile the way she did... totally worth it.”

“Aw, you’re getting all sentimental.”

His smile dropped.

“Fuck off.”

The drugs were Drake’s idea, but the rest of us had gone along with it.

“I should go smooth things over with her.”

He gave me a look but didn’t reply as I got up and wandered into the kitchen with my mug between my fingers. Scarlett watched me when I approached her and leant up against the counter. Her mouth thinned, and her hazel-green eyes narrowed.

West was moving about the kitchen, making her some breakfast. I noted it was French toast with an excessive amount of cinnamon. He remembered

Scarlett's tastes as well as I did.

"You mad at me?" I asked her in a quiet voice that didn't carry across the room.

"Let's see... you didn't stop what happened last night, and actively participated in the whole thing, so what do you think?"

I reached out and stroked her arm, amused she couldn't bring herself to admit she'd had a fivesome with us out loud.

"I'm sorry."

"No, you aren't."

I bit my lip and shifted closer, setting my mug down on the countertop.

"Can I make it up to you?"

"How?"

Turning to her, I moved my hand from her arm to her face, capturing her chin between my fingers. The freckles dusting across her nose shifted as she frowned but she didn't stop me.

"I'll teach you how to tie some of my knots and maybe next time... you can tie Drake up."

West snorted and looked over at us with amusement painting his features.

"As if he would ever willingly submit to that," Scarlett muttered, glancing at West.

"No one said anything about him being willing."

Her lips parted as if she couldn't believe what I'd just said.

"You'd help me?"

I shrugged.

"Perhaps."

She leant closer until our breath mingled.

"I had no idea you were so..."

"I think the word you're looking for is imaginative," West put in. "Our Frankie is the mastermind behind our more deviant plans, even if he likes to pretend he isn't."

It was almost a compliment coming from West.

Scarlett didn't look at him, her eyes remaining fixed on me.

"Is that true?"

I rubbed her bottom lip with my thumb.

“It is.”

There was no hiding it from her now West had sold me out.

“Teach me and I might forgive you.”

“I’ll take it.”

Scarlett didn’t hesitate in kissing me back when I pressed my lips to hers. Such a pliant mouth she had. She’d grown far more confident since the first time I’d kissed her, and it was beautiful to see.

“Leave her fucking mouth alone, Frankie, she needs to eat.”

Pulling away, I shot West a dark look. Scarlett’s smile made dealing with his shit worthwhile. She reached up and stroked my jaw.

“Don’t mind him... if he wants to kiss me, he could just say it instead of making snide comments.”

West walked over to us and set a plate down for her on the counter. Then he leant over her, his mouth meeting her ear from behind.

“What happened to being a good girl for me today, Scar?”

His voice was deadly and full of promised violence.

“Maybe I like making you jealous,” she replied, without taking her eyes off me.

“I’m not going to kiss you, so this little game you’re playing here will only end up with you crying and choking on my dick, you hear me?”

Her hand left my jaw and fell on my shoulder. I didn’t even bat an eyelid at him threatening her with that. It was West all over.

“Maybe I want that,” she whispered. “Maybe I like it when you threaten me.”

For a moment, I’m not sure West knew how to react. Then he chuckled and reached up, stroking her hair back from her face before his fingers traced a line down her throat.

“I don’t threaten, I only make promises. You carry on, you know what will happen and on your own fucking head be it. Now, turn around and eat your breakfast.”

He pulled away and walked back over to the stove. Instead of doing what he told her, Scarlett leant forward and kissed me again. When she pulled away, she smirked before turning and digging into the French toast West had made for her. The woman was playing with fire and she knew it.

“Fire burns, Scar,” I said after she stuffed some toast in her mouth.

“Remember that.”

“You saying you’re not going to save me from him?”

I raised an eyebrow.

“You wouldn’t want me to.”

“I suppose you’re right.”

Leaning closer, I propped my chin up on her shoulder and curled my hand around her thigh, stroking my fingers across her bare skin. She was only wearing a black shirt, which I’m pretty sure belonged to West. Her clothes were in my room. Having spent all week sleeping next to her, I couldn’t help but need to touch her after she’d spent the night with West.

“I missed you last night,” I whispered in her ear. “Did you have any nightmares?”

I didn’t care about admitting my feelings to her. Not even Drake’s warnings about us not being able to trust her stopped me. If I wanted to build a relationship with Scarlett, there had to be some semblance of honesty between us, despite all the secrets and lies. Perhaps then she wouldn’t hate me so much when she discovered the truth about her past. When she remembered. I was damn sure she wouldn’t be happy with any of us for lying to her about knowing who she was. And she’d be even more annoyed when she realised what we’d done had triggered the catalyst of events leading up to her accident and the destruction of her old life.

“Not that I remember.” She stroked her fingers along my hand on her thigh. “Thank you for asking, though. No one really cared about my nightmares nor how they affect me.”

I frowned. It struck me as odd no one would care about her well-being.

“No?”

She shook her head. The haunted look in her eyes concerned me.

“Not like they could do anything, you know. So I kept it to myself.”

Somehow I didn’t think it was the real reason, but I didn’t press her on it. Not sure it would have won me any points with Scarlett. There was always an air of despair surrounding her whenever she talked about anything to do with the past ten years, especially in relation to the Carvers.

Scarlett said nothing more, merely finished her French toast and the tea West had made for her. Then she shoved the plate away and stared at his back with a

curious expression on her face.

I heard footsteps, so I turned to see who was coming into the kitchen. Prescott had a rather determined look on his face. He'd been down earlier to eat but hadn't been particularly talkative and had disappeared soon afterwards.

He approached Scarlett, grabbed her by the waist, and slung her over his shoulder. She let out a squeak of surprise. West turned around and raised his eyebrow as Prescott carried her off towards the stairs. Scarlett looked up at us from her position, her face a picture of shock and irritation.

"What the fuck, Pres? What are you doing?" she screeched, trying to escape him.

He didn't say a word, ignoring her fists pounding on his back the next moment.

"Let me go!"

The man walked up the stairs with Scarlett, her complaining the entire way, and out of sight. We could still hear her decrying him until a door slammed shut.

"Well, someone woke up and found his balls this morning," West said, coming over to pick up Scarlett's discarded breakfast things. "You reckon he's going to punish her little pert arse for giving him such a hard time over what we did?"

"He's going to tell her he loves her," Drake said.

Both mine and West's heads whipped around to our stoic friend.

"What?"

Drake waved a hand towards the stairs.

"Pres is in love with her. He told me and now he's going to tell her."

"Well, fuck me," West said with a grin. "Pres fell in love. What a fucking miracle, he actually cares about someone other than himself."

Drake scoffed.

"You're a fine one to talk. You think we don't know how you feel about her?"

West's smile disappeared in an instant.

"Fuck off, Drake."

Drake shrugged and went back to his tablet as if it was a normal, everyday occurrence for Prescott to declare his love for a woman. But honestly... I wasn't surprised by it at all. Scarlett was the girl we'd grown up with. The one

none of us could ever forget. We'd gone to extreme lengths to return her to us. The only thing that did surprise me was Prescott being the first one to fall. West was the one who had loved Scarlett all our lives. Then again, West was just about as capable of telling a girl he loved her as he was at keeping his violent urges in check. Guess we'd have to wait and see how long it took him to crack.

Could love even enter the equation between the five of us?

Us sleeping with her was one thing, but love and a relationship were something else entirely.

And me?

Well, I didn't know how I felt. I'd not considered it. And maybe I needed to. The future was up in the air, but the bond between the five of us had always been permanent even if our missing piece had forgotten who we were.

TWENTY ONE

PRESCOTT

When I woke up this morning, I decided enough was enough. Scarlett was going to hear me out. I couldn't go another night with this discord between us hanging over our heads. Not when she'd kissed me so willingly last night. When she'd asked for me and told me she missed me. Who gave a fuck if she was high. The woman had said she didn't want to fight any longer. We weren't going to fight. We were going to have a conversation. And I was going to tell Scarlett the truth.

I loved her tenacious little soul. She was my little lamb. And she was going to accept she belonged to me.

I'd tried things her way. Waited for her to give me a fucking chance and it had got me nowhere. This time things were going to be on my terms.

It's why when I'd gone downstairs, I picked her up and took her to my room. She complained, struggled and hit me the whole way, demanding I put her down, told me I was behaving like a caveman and I had no fucking manners, but I hadn't paid her any mind.

I slammed my bedroom door shut and locked it before I set her down. My woman had rage burning in her hazel-green depths when she looked up at me. Her fists were clenched at her sides as if she couldn't decide whether she wanted to pound my chest or tell me to go fuck myself.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" she demanded. "I am not a fucking ragdoll for you to toss around whenever you please."

I kept my expression neutral as I looked down at her. Fuck, she was so small compared to me, but Scarlett was the strongest woman I knew. The boldest and most fearless. And the one who owned my heart.

"No, you're not."

“Then what the—”

I put my hand over her mouth and wrapped my other arm around her back, tugging her against me. She blinked, then tried to wriggle out of my grasp, but I only held on tighter. Her hands went to my chest, shoving at it.

“You can hit me all you want, sweetness, I’m not letting you go.”

The way she glared had me fighting a smile. I dropped my hand from her mouth to hold her closer.

“Why the hell are you being like this?”

“Because you haven’t given me a chance to talk to you.”

“I gave you one yesterday.”

I shook my head.

“No, you accused me of fucking another woman, and we argued. That was not a conversation.”

Her mouth snapped shut. She knew I was right.

“I want you to hear me out, okay?”

“What if I don’t want to?” she shot back.

By fuck did I want to tell her to stop being so stubborn, but I wouldn’t. She was hurt and lashing out at me because of it. I couldn’t afford to piss her off any further.

“You don’t have a choice right now, sweetness. And before you give me shit, I have a good fucking reason.”

“Oh yeah? And what’s that?”

My arms dropped from around her and my hands went to her face instead. I needed her to look at me. To really fucking see me and hear me. Her skin was so damn soft against the pads of my fingertips, reminding me of how I loved having her body against mine. How she was perfect in my eyes.

“You’re mine, little lamb. You’re mine and I’m yours. And you... you fucking well have something of mine. I don’t want it back because I expect you to keep it safe. I know you’ll keep it safe. I trust you with it.”

Her bottom lip trembled, and her expression grew softer.

“You trust me?” she whispered.

I didn’t directly answer her question with my next words, but I was determined to get all of my damn thoughts out.

“I’m sorry I didn’t show you every part of me, so you weren’t prepared that

night. I'm sorry I wasn't truthful with you about the real me. I'm not a good man, sweetness. There are things I've done, we've all done, that would make you question who you're with. I've hurt, I've maimed, I've tortured and I've killed... and I liked it. I won't pretend to be anything else other than the man you see standing before you. I like to cause other people harm. It fucking feeds my soul when I infect them and ruin their lives just because I can."

Her eyes fixed on mine. I couldn't read her thoughts, but I couldn't stop. It all had to come out, so she'd believe me when I told her how I felt. So she'd see the damn fucking truth.

"All those things are a part of who I am. The parts you've not seen. And I should have trusted you with them. I fucked up, sweetness. I know that. I'm sorry for it. You deserved more than the crumbs I gave you of myself."

Her hands slid up my chest to my neck, wrapping around it as if she needed an anchor.

"The thing is... the fucking thing is... I have never felt this way about anyone before. I've never looked at anyone the way I do you. You're precious to me, so fucking precious. I never want to harm you. You mean everything to me."

I swallowed, and my hands tightened around her face. It was now or never. Even if I couldn't tell her how I'd known her my whole life. How I loved the parts of her she'd lost. The parts of her she'd gained. And everything in between. I had to tell her this one thing because it was killing me inside being without her.

"I didn't think I still owned a heart, but you showed me I do... because my heart belongs to you."

Tears welled in her eyes. She knew exactly what I was going to say. It didn't matter. I had to say it anyway.

"I love you." I stroked my thumb over her cheek. "Please stop fighting me... please let me love you, my precious little lamb."

Those threatening tears spilt down her cheeks. I waited, allowing my words to sink in. Letting her process them. No matter how much it killed me to watch her in silence, I had to let her work through her emotions. I would fight for the right to be by her side. I would do anything for Scarlett. I loved her.

"Pres," she sobbed, letting go of my neck so she could slap my chest with her palm. "Damn you... why do you have to be so fucking perfect?"

Before I could utter a word, she went up on her tiptoes and kissed me. I wrapped her up in my arms and kissed her back. It was desperate and all-consuming. All our feelings poured out. The hurt and pain. The want and need. The lust... and what I hoped was love.

I lifted her up, grasping her thighs as she wrapped her legs around my waist. I carried her over to the window and pressed her against it, keeping her pinned. Scarlett's hands were in my hair, holding me closer. Our tongues were a tangled mess of passion and desire.

"I love you," I whispered between kisses. "I fucking love you."

Scarlett pulled away. Her tear-filled eyes were wild as she stared at me, holding onto my head so I couldn't kiss her again.

"Show me."

I propped Scarlett up against the window with my body and legs. My hands shoved the shirt she was wearing up to find she was bare underneath. I almost groaned at the sight of her. Then my fingers were at the buttons, tugging them open and exposing her stunning body to me. I ran the tips of my fingers down her chest, listening to her gasp at the physical contact.

"Please, Pres, I want you."

Her hands went to my t-shirt. I helped her tear it off my chest and dropped it on the floor. Then she was unbuttoning my jeans, tugging them down enough to allow my cock to spring free. Scarlett guided me to her wet entrance, staring at me the whole time as I thrust inside her. I couldn't help the groan escaping my lips.

"Fuck me like you mean it," she sobbed, grasping my head again and pulling me closer. "Show me you love me."

Her tears were decimating me, but I did as she asked. I held her tight and fucked her like I meant it. My cock slid in and out of her wet little pussy with rapid, sharp thrusts. I drove into my woman again and again so she'd know I meant it. Meant every single fucking word. And my tongue went to her cheeks, licking away her tears.

"Pres, more, please. Don't stop. Never stop. Fuck!"

Her head banged against the glass as she tipped it back, but Scarlett didn't care. She was lost in us. Lost in the pleasure and the pain. Her thighs gripped me harder, trapping me between her legs. I wasn't going anywhere. This woman

was the best part of me. The only part that even mattered.

“I belong to you, little lamb,” I ground out in her ear, listening to her panting and loving the way she clawed at me. “Do you believe me? Do you believe I love you now?”

Her nails dug into my shoulder, her body moving back against mine.

“Yes,” she cried out. “Yes, fuck, please.”

“Say it. Tell me you believe me.”

“I believe you, Pres. I know you love me. Just don’t stop. Don’t stop.”

I never wanted to leave her pliant, soft little body. Never wanted to let her go. The way she took me and begged was fucking magical. But there were things I wanted from her too. Things I needed to fucking know.

“Who do you belong to?”

“You,” she whimpered. “I’m yours. I never stopped being yours.”

She didn’t even hesitate. Fuck did I love that about her. Everything about her was perfect to me. She might be broken in half, her memory fractured, but I only saw all of her. And I would protect her with my fucking life if I had to.

“More, please, I’m so close.”

I gave it to her harder, adjusting the angle of our bodies to stimulate her better. It only made her cry out louder and dig her nails into me to the point they almost drew blood.

“Yes, like that. Just. Like. That.”

I didn’t stop. Didn’t falter. I drove her into oblivion because I wanted to see her fall to pieces. To shatter under my hands and come all over my cock. The sensation of sliding in and out of her wet pussy was driving me crazy, but I held back. Held on to make sure she got there too.

“Fuck, Pres!”

She came apart, her whole body shaking and trembling with her climax and triggering my own. I grunted, spilling inside her hot body and never wanting it to end. I couldn’t let go of her. She’d branded herself on my heart. She owned me. And I didn’t even care. I wanted her to have me.

Her fingers left my shoulders, wrapping around my body as she held me against her. Scarlett pressed her face into my neck, breathing heavily against me.

“Pres...”

“Yes, little lamb?”

Her hold on me tightened.

“Even though I can’t remember who I was and I feel like I’m not whole inside, it doesn’t change the fact I love you too because my heart knows you and that’s what matters.”

All the tension left my body.

“Your heart knows me?”

She nodded.

“I don’t know how, but it does.” She pulled back and stared into my eyes. “I love you, Prescott... so you better take care of my heart, okay?”

I pressed my forehead against hers. I shouldn’t promise her this because of everything to come, but I couldn’t help it. She needed me to reassure her. And she loved me. This woman loved me. I didn’t deserve Scarlett, but I’d do everything in my power to love her the way she deserved.

“I will, sweetness. I’ll protect it with my life.”

She kissed me again. I was lost in her. In this woman I’d known my entire life. And I hoped when Scarlett remembered me, the part of her she’d lost would love me as much as this version of her did. I couldn’t live in a world without her again. I refused to.

Don’t leave me in the dark again, little lamb. Don’t leave any of us. We need you.

The girl we’d sacrifice the world for was in my arms. I would never set her free because she was a part of all of us. And we weren’t complete without her.

TWENTY TWO

SCARLETT

Prescott loved me. He loved me. One of the crazy, fucked up psychotic men I'd been sent to destroy loved me. And I loved him back. I loved Prescott Ellis. My heart recognised him and wanted him. I'd finally listened to the stupid organ and admitted the feelings living inside it. How could I not when he'd trusted me with his truths?

All weekend I'd gone back and forth with myself over it. Over the conflicting feelings about the situation I was in. I'd already established I couldn't hurt Prescott, but it was worse now. So much fucking worse. He'd given me his heart for safe keeping. The thought of ruining him or the others made me feel sick. Bile kept rising in the back of my throat. And I hated everything about it.

What the fuck was I going to do?

It's not as if I could tell my father I wasn't going to do his bidding any longer. I dreaded to think what he would do. Likely have Mason drag me back to the estate and then... the less I thought about that, the better. I didn't want to imagine the beatings and being locked up in the cold room with nothing but the clothes on my back for days on end. There was just me and the concrete floor. The only human contact I'd had was when one of the staff changed the fucking bucket I'd been left with to do my business in and when they fed me. The isolation made my nightmares worse. I would scream for hours at night, but no one could hear me.

I did not want to go back to that life under any circumstances.

It left me in the worst sort of predicament. While I knew the boys would protect me if anyone tried to take me, I didn't exactly have a choice in the matter when it came to my father's demands. What the hell could I even do?

Feed him false information? What would it achieve if he found out I was lying to him? Nothing.

I didn't want to hurt the boys either. I had to admit that to myself. I'd fallen in love with one of them, begun to have feelings for another - and the other two? Well, it was up in the air. I wasn't sure Prescott would forgive me if I did something to endanger his friends. I wouldn't forgive myself either.

The only time I wasn't thinking about this shit was during sex. And after his declaration, Prescott had pretty much kept me in bed all of Saturday other than to feed me. Something about being in a blissed-out post-coital haze prevented negativity from encroaching on me. Only when he'd fallen asleep next to me, looking peaceful as ever with his dark blonde hair mussed from my fingers and his chest rising and falling steadily did the guilt eat me up inside. And kept me from being able to stay level-headed.

Sunday came and went with no drama between the five of us. In fact, the others had kept to themselves, leaving me and Prescott to be in a little bubble of our own. I hadn't expected them to be so... considerate.

Monday rolled around and I was tired, but Drake wasn't being too demanding at work. In fact, he gave me a bunch of tasks and left me to my own devices. Didn't mean I was let off from making him coffee.

I carried a fresh cup into his office, noting he was on the phone. Making sure to be as quiet as possible, I placed the mug down on the coaster and was about to leave when he put his hand up. I paused as he waved me closer. Given I never knew what I was going to get with Drake, I was cautious as I came around the desk towards him.

When he grabbed my arm and tugged me in his lap, I tried not to yelp. His arm banded around my chest, holding me in place so I couldn't escape.

"No, that's not going to happen ... I don't know what you want me to say ... you've already told me that before ... no, I'm not going to budge on it."

I shifted in his lap, trying to get a little more comfortable. There was no point in trying to run. I would only get punished for it. Drake did not like me talking back to him or being disobedient. Though after my conversation with Francis about Drake the night of the killing, I had a feeling Drake took great pleasure in punishing me when I stepped out of line.

"What does that matter? We don't need their business ... well, it's not my

problem.”

I almost squeaked when he pressed his face into my neck and breathed me in. What was he doing? This wasn't like Drake at all, from what I knew of him. He wasn't particularly affectionate or demonstrative of his feelings. I mean, I knew he wanted to fuck me. He'd made it pretty clear, but everything else? Not so much.

“Quit moving, Scarlett,” he whispered to me while the person on the other end of the phone kept talking.

Why did it make me want to do the exact opposite of what he told me? I don't know why I enjoyed pushing Drake's buttons so much. Was I asking for a punishment like last time when he spanked me with his belt? I shuddered at the thought of it, shifting against him despite him telling me not to. His harsh breath told me he was not happy with me.

My reckless streak decided to rear its ugly head. Without warning, I turned around in his lap so I was straddling him. Luckily I'd worn trousers today or I might have ripped my skirt with the movement. Drake's indigo eyes came into view and there was no mistaking the darkness in them. I gave him a smile as my fingers went to his tie, straightening it for him. His hand came up and gripped mine, stopping me from doing anything further. For a long moment, the two of us stared at each other. He was willing me to back down and I was refusing.

He released my hand and placed his over the bottom of his phone.

“Enough.”

The low and deadly tone of his voice made me shiver. But I wasn't interested in obeying him today. Not when he'd manhandled me into his lap for no apparent reason.

He took his hand off the phone.

“This isn't up for debate, Clive, either you sign papers or we have nothing left to discuss.”

I slipped off his lap and leant against his desk instead. Then I ran my fingers down the centre of my chest and bit down on my lip. Drake's eyes followed the path of my fingers.

“No, I have already spoken to Francis and he agrees with me ... well, you're the one who doesn't want to understand our position. As I said, it's not my problem.”

My fingers went to the top button of my blouse. I undid it, exposing the tops of my breasts to him, and the lacy bra I was wearing underneath. I deliberately dropped my eyes to his lap and licked my bottom lip. When I raised them again, Drake's expression was fierce and stern.

He placed his free hand on the arm of his chair and pushed himself up to his full height. I swallowed, knowing I was about to be on the receiving end of his fury. He took my hand, spun me around and shoved me up against his desk, forcing me onto my stomach. The man held my arm against my back, keeping me pinned there while he continued his conversation.

"My final answer is no, either deal with it or don't ... I'm not missing out on anything, thank you very much ... fine with me, no skin off my nose ... goodbye, Clive."

He tossed his phone down on the desk and leant over me. I could feel his hot breath on the back of my neck, as I'd put my hair up in a bun today. Prescott told me yesterday if I wanted to provoke West, all I had to do was put my neck on show. And maybe when I'd come out of his bathroom this morning, he'd smirked, but didn't comment on it. He knew what I was doing. It would serve West fucking well right if he got riled up by it. The man kept threatening me with things and not delivering.

Drake, on the other hand, I knew he delivered, so I had no clue why I'd decided to play with fire.

"I see someone woke up and decided to be a brat this morning," he said, his voice like a caress across my skin. "Tell me, Scarlett, do you enjoy this? I have a feeling you don't want to be able to sit down for the next couple of days."

"You think I enjoyed it when you... spanked me?"

"Yes."

I spluttered, unable to form a damn sentence. I did not want him to do it again... did I?

"We've already established you do this on purpose. You want me to punish you. If you didn't like it, you would have stopped pushing after I did it the first time. So, why don't we both save ourselves this conversation, hmm?"

"I wouldn't have to push your buttons if you just fucking talked to me like a normal human."

He kept one hand pinning my arm to my back while the other dusted over

the curve of my arse as if he was testing the waters.

“That’s what you want from me?”

“I...”

Was it? I didn’t know any longer. Everything about these four men was so fucking confusing. Well, I wasn’t confused about my feelings towards Prescott, but I didn’t understand why I was so drawn to the other three. Why did I want to knock down Drake’s damn iron fortress and make myself a home inside the ruins?

“Maybe,” I whispered.

His hand landed more firmly on my behind, almost caressing it with his fingertips as they stroked along my clothes. And for some reason, I arched into his touch like I wanted more.

“I see.”

Drake took my wrist from my back and pressed my palm on his glass desk, pinning it there. My other hand was already resting on the glass on the other side. His lips traced a line across the back of my neck, making me tremble.

“You’re so soft and pliable,” he murmured, his deep resonating voice making me melt on his desk. “No matter how many times you defy me, I will always conquer you in the end.”

My breath came out in bursts with my need for him to do something other than stroke my behind. The anticipation made me press back against him. Was I asking to be punished?

“Drake, I wanted to talk to you about... oh, oh my... I’m sorry, I didn’t know...”

My head whipped up, almost knocking into Drake’s as his body remained over mine. Standing in the doorway was Tonya. Her eyes were wide with shock and her mouth was opening and closing like a fish.

“Leave and close the door,” came Drake’s firm voice, vibrating across my back.

For a moment, she continued staring at the two of us. It must have looked quite the sight, me bent over Drake’s desk with his hand pressing mine down and the other cupping my behind. Her eyes betrayed her disapproval and judgement at finding me in such a compromising position with my boss. Only Drake was kind of more than just my boss. I didn’t know how to define my

relationship with the Horsemen, but we'd crossed the line between employer and employee the moment West fucked me over his desk. The fuse to a catalyst of events leading up to me becoming theirs to do what they wanted with. And me giving in.

"Can I see you after this?" she asked.

"Now, Tonya."

She put her hands up and backed out, but not before glaring at me. I didn't react. It wasn't worth it. I could tell West about it and he would probably gut her like he'd threatened. Maybe it wasn't the best idea. I didn't want him killing her for me.

The door shut, leaving the two of us alone again. Drake nibbled the top of my ear, making me shudder against him.

"I'm not going to go easy on you, Scarlett."

He straightened, letting go of my hand. Both of his went to the button of my trousers, before he tugged both them and my knickers down, exposing my bare behind to his gaze. I almost flinched when he stroked his hands over my cheeks. And I cried out when he slapped me, the sting radiating up my spine. They came again and again, across each of my cheeks until I was shifting on the desk, trying desperately not to cry.

It occurred to me Drake's punishments didn't remind me of the horrific things my father had done when I stepped out of line. When I'd come here, I'd been meek and obedient because of it, but the girl behind the glass wasn't either of those things. She was fire and brimstone. The more time I spent around the Horsemen, the more I became like her. I could feel it. The change echoing around me and giving me back the person I was. The cracks forming across the glass were small and perhaps I'd finally be able to smash through. I'd see the past and it would explain everything... or at least, I hoped it would.

A particularly hard smack across a sore spot jolted me out of my thoughts and returned me to the room. Who the fuck knew how many times he'd slapped me. All I could feel was the burn across both my cheeks. I knew sitting down would be unpleasant for the rest of the day. And the worst part? I was ridiculously aroused by the entire ordeal.

You do like to push his buttons and get punished for it. It's a game and you like playing it.

I wouldn't admit it to him, but I could tell myself the truth.

The final smack he gave me was harder than the rest. The sound of it rang in my ears. His fingers caressed the sore skin, making me whimper in response.

“I don’t make idle threats. Every time you push, you will receive a punishment. And trust me, it will not be this every time. I can be quite creative when I want to be.”

I didn’t doubt that in the slightest.

“Now, go make me a fresh cup of coffee and get back to work. And if I hear you’ve been in one of the others’ offices for any reason that’s not work-related, there’ll be consequences. Work hours are not playtime.”

I hadn’t planned on going to one of the others, but him telling me I couldn’t made me want to see Prescott all the more. However, the thought of Drake punishing me further today had me resisting the urge to seek out the man I loved.

I lifted myself off Drake’s desk and pulled my clothes back on, hating the way they rubbed over my sore and no doubt red behind. Turning around, I looked up at him. He had his hands shoved in his pockets and his expression was neutral like the whole thing hadn’t affected him in the slightest.

I don’t know why I stepped up into his personal space and pressed my hands against his chest. He didn’t move, but he didn’t tell me off about it either. Going up on my tiptoes, I pressed a kiss to his cheek before dropping back to my feet and walking away. I didn’t look back to see his reaction as I knew there wouldn’t be one. Not a visible one, anyway. Maybe I wanted to leave him wondering why I’d done it. I was pretty sure the last thing Drake expected after he’d left me with a red arse was affection from me in response.

You can wonder all you like, Drake Ackley. If you’re going to be so insistent on this punishment shit, then I’m sure as hell going to play you at your own fucking game in return.

TWENTY THREE

FRANCIS

The concentration on her face as I tied the knots around her wrists made me smile. Scarlett had a little furrow between her brows, her eyes intent on my fingers as I explained what I was doing. She was laid out on her stomach in her pyjamas on my bed, resting on her elbows so I could show her how to tie some very simple knots. My legs were on either side of her.

“Over like this,” I said, watching her face rather than what I was doing. “Then under here.”

I could probably do these in my sleep, but I had to start somewhere with her. She’d demanded I show her this evening after admitting she’d been punished by Drake earlier for pushing his buttons. I’d expected her to want to spend time with Prescott, but she’d sought me out.

“Can I ask you something?”

I undid the knots around her wrists to show her again.

“If you’d like.”

“It’s about Drake.”

The rope dropped on the bed. Scarlett looked up at me with a rather sheepish expression on her face.

“What about Drake?”

I couldn’t keep the suspicion out of my voice. While she’d come in here to make me fulfil my promise to show her how to tie knots that would be hard to break out of, I didn’t like her using me as a source of information about the others. Especially not Drake. If she wanted to know things about him, she could ask the guy herself. Didn’t matter if he was a locked box. It was his choice what he told her and what he kept to himself.

“I’m not asking you to tell me his secrets.”

“Hmm.”

“Put your wrists out, I want to try.”

I did as she asked, watching her pick up the rope and wrap the length around one of my wrists.

“It’s just when West... threatened Tonya last week, he called her Drake’s step-cousin. And I was wondering about it.”

Drake’s family was a sore subject for him. His parents had been through a rather messy divorce when we’d been sixteen, around the time of Scarlett’s accident. His father had an affair with his now-stepmother. The only people he was in contact with now were his mother and his step-uncle, Fletcher Sinclair. He’d given us the original funds to start Fortuity. And the only reason he kept Tonya around was because of his uncle, even though we’d already paid him back every penny. I’d done that for us. Drake didn’t want it hanging over our heads or for his uncle to have any say in our company. He had no idea why we’d wanted to start it in the first place. Why the girl with me was the reason for everything we’d done in our lives.

“You should ask him about it.”

“Asking Drake anything is like pulling teeth.”

I snorted. He wasn’t the most forthcoming out of the four of us, but he had his reasons. Many of them had to do with the girl currently struggling to tie the knot I’d shown her.

“Not like that, remember, over then under.”

Scarlett readjusted the rope and did as I said.

“All I can tell you is Tonya is his step-cousin.”

“Do you like her?”

I frowned. After learning what she said to Scarlett, I wasn’t particularly impressed. Then again, Tonya had always been a problem. I’d met her long before Prescott and West. Couldn’t say I’d ever liked her, but I had nothing against the woman... until now.

“No. She shouldn’t have said that shit to you.”

Scarlett looked up at me having tied the knot I’d shown her. The knots around my wrists were loose, but they weren’t too bad overall. If she tightened them up, she might actually be able to trap Drake with them.

“She seems like a rather jealous and vindictive person.”

I wasn't going to dispute it. And I knew from the moment she met Prescott, she'd wanted him. Given the state of Prescott and Scarlett's relationship, I had a feeling our girl wasn't too happy with Tonya's crush on her man.

“She has a lot to be jealous of. You have us, of course she's going to hate it.”

Scarlett gave me a look. Clearly, it had been the wrong thing to say. Tonya was likely jealous because Scarlett was beautiful, strong and had captured our attention. She had no idea of our previous relationship with the girl who'd been our everything back when we were kids.

“I have you, do I?”

I traced my finger along her jaw. There was no denying I felt something for Scarlett. She'd been my best friend. Someone I had always cared for. Just because she was trying to destroy us now, didn't change those facts. She didn't know any better. She didn't remember. And unlike the others, I wasn't going to hold it against her.

“Yeah, you do. That a problem?”

For a second, she didn't react, but the wicked glint in her eyes had me narrowing mine. Scarlett shifted up onto her hands and knees, then she crawled under my bound arms, straddled my lap and wrapped her arms around my neck.

“No.”

Her mouth was on mine, kissing me as she pressed her body against me. The suddenness of it had me scrambling to stay upright with my hands bound. I landed flat on my back with Scarlett on top of me, still kissing me and rubbing her body on me. My bound hands rested on her back. I didn't try to escape the loose knots she'd made, not when she was all over me like this.

Her hand slid down my body between us and wrapped around my rapidly hardening cock. I groaned in her mouth, unable to help myself. She kissed her way down my jaw, stroking me over my clothes. Fuck, I wanted her. I'd tried not to think about how much I needed this woman. How much I wanted her to remember me. How much I wanted to fuck her while she was chained up with metal wrapped around her body. The way it would leave indents all over her skin. How I'd make it so tight, it would put a strain on all of her muscles and joints.

No, you're not going to do that. Don't forget what you did to Chelsea.

Guilt flooded my senses, making me stiffen. She must have felt it as she raised her head and stared at me.

“What’s wrong?”

I shook my head and looked away.

“Nothing.”

“Don’t you want me?”

The rejection in her voice made my chest hurt. I looked at her again, wanting to reassure her I was in the moment with her.

“Hey, no, I want you, Scar. You have no idea how much. Just got shit on my mind is all... and no, I don’t want to talk about it.”

Her free hand slid across my jaw, her hazel-green eyes full of concern.

“Why are you and the others not bothered by being with the same woman? Not that we’re together or anything, but you know what I mean.”

“We’ve always shared.”

It wouldn’t make sense to anyone else, but the four of us had been through hell and back. We’d done everything together since we were kids. As we grew up and developed sexual desires most people would balk at, sharing women who were into it didn’t feel like a big deal to us. Maybe we’d all become a little voyeuristic like Prescott. It was the way we were. And it hadn’t changed because we’d got Scarlett back. If anything, our need to be with her together was intensified by our connection to the girl from our past.

“So I’m just another notch on your bedposts?”

“That’s not what I said.”

Scarlett started to slide out from under my arms, but I tightened them around her.

“If I was only interested in fucking you, do you think I’d have taken care of you that night? Do you really think I would have got in the shower with you, held you whilst you cried and made sure you were okay?”

She froze, her eyes widening.

“I care about you, Scar. Don’t start trying to think otherwise.”

“Or what?” she whispered.

I wasn’t like Drake who wanted to punish her for every indiscretion, but her words made me pause. Did she want consequences for doubting me?

“Or... I’ll bind you to my bed.”

“And do what to me?”

The huskiness of her voice had me slipping my hands from the loose knots around my wrists, but I didn't move them from her lower back just yet.

“Remind you why you're my whore.”

She shivered, her pupils dilating as her fingers tightened around my cock. Clearly, she wanted me to do exactly that.

“Frankie,” she breathed before I captured her mouth with my own.

My hands ran up her back and tangled in her hair. Her hand resumed stroking my cock. I wanted her pussy wrapped around it. Her hot, wet little pussy. I wanted her to scream my name. Without warning, I flipped us over, pinning her down on the bed with my hands wrapped around her wrists above her head.

“You're such a bad girl,” I murmured against her lips. “My little whore.”

“Tie me up.”

I let go of her wrists and grabbed hold of the discarded rope. Then I looped it around her wrists and tied them together. Standing up, I pulled her up onto her knees. I reached up and looped the rope over the bar bolted to my ceiling, suspending her wrists in the air as I tied it off too. She had to raise up on her knees a little, but she could still move her legs.

My hands shoved her t-shirt up, exposing her tits. I sucked one into my mouth and loved the way she gasped when I bit down. My other hand dug underneath her shorts, seeking her wet warmth. She moaned when I speared her with my fingers, shoving them deep and groaning at the way she clenched around them. I wasn't gentle. I wanted her to fucking well feel it. Wanted to show her she was mine.

“Do you want my cock, whore?”

“Please.”

“Good, because I'm going to make you come all over it.”

I thrust my fingers inside her harder before biting down on her nipple again. She arched into me, crying out at the intensity I was playing her body with. She couldn't do a damn thing about it other than take it.

“Frankie, please.”

Pulling my fingers from her, I shoved her shorts down her legs, tugging them off before freeing my cock from the confines of my clothes. I gripped both Scarlett's hips, pulled her over me and impaled her on it in one brutal,

unforgiving thrust. The way she panted as I drove into her again and again made my heart fucking pound. Pressing closer, I kissed her mouth, sucking her tongue and tasting her.

“Mine,” I grunted. “You’re mine, whore. You better not forget it again, you hear me?”

“Yours.”

I bit her lip, making her whine as I continued to drive into her little body. Making her take every inch. I was trying to avoid touching her behind because I knew she was sore from Drake’s punishment earlier. Her hips gave me enough leverage to give it to her the way she craved. Scarlett liked it rough and raw. She wanted passion and fire. I could tell from the way she writhed and squirmed with each of my thrusts.

“Frankie,” she panted, “don’t stop.”

I loved the way she said it so easily now. It wasn’t even a conscious decision on her part. Every time she called me, Frankie, my feelings for her got more and more tangled up in the web of lies we’d weaved. How would she react when she found out the truth? Who the fuck knew. It was a gamble we’d eventually have to take. And soon. No matter what Drake said, I was done with this farce. Done with the secrets. If Scarlett was ever going to come back to us as the girl she’d been, we needed her to remember the past. Needed her to know who we truly were to each other.

My hand shifted from her hip to her thigh so I could thumb her clit. I wanted Scarlett to come all over me. There was no better sight in the world.

“Come for me, whore. Show me who you belong to. Show me how much you love my cock.”

Her back arched and her mouth parted on a silent scream. I’d known she was close. I could feel it. The way she clenched around me was so damn sweet, her pussy milking my damn cock for all it was worth. I choked out a groan, unable to help myself as I emptied myself inside her tight heat.

Scarlett leant against me, panting and trying to regain her equilibrium. I held her close, still rocking my hips into hers with the last pulses of my own climax. She pressed her face into my neck, kissing my pulse point.

“When I first met you, I never imagined you’d be like this.”

I stroked my hands up her back.

“Like what?”

“Well, you were so friendly and... nice... but neither of those things are true, are they?”

Moving back, I looked at her. There was no judgement or reproach in her eyes, only understanding.

“No, I’m not... but I think you like that.”

I reached up and brushed my thumb along her bottom lip.

“The dark is alluring,” she whispered. “And the men who live in it even more so.”

I slid my thumb between her lips. Her tongue curled around it. Those eyes of hers burnt with a heady mix of desire and satisfaction.

“It’s what we do, Scar, lure you in until you’re so deeply involved, you can never escape.”

Perhaps I shouldn’t have said it, but I didn’t care. I wanted her in the darkness with us. I craved it. We all did.

She only sucked on my thumb harder, her tongue sliding over the pad. It sent a jolt right to my cock, which was still half-hard inside her. What the fuck was it about her? She was intoxicating. I wanted to kiss her until she couldn’t breathe. Fuck her until her pussy was raw. I wanted to dig myself inside her chest, smash through her walls and truly make her heart as much mine as it was Prescott’s. He may have told me she’d reciprocated his love but warned me not to mention it to West or Drake. Her relationship with those two was precarious enough as it was. I had no intention of intervening.

“Bad girl.”

She smiled around my thumb, her eyes twinkling. I brushed my nose against hers.

“Have you forgiven me for Friday?”

She nodded before my thumb popped from her mouth.

“You’re my safety, Frankie. Please don’t ruin that for me.”

Fuck.

I couldn’t promise her I wouldn’t. Not when she had no idea what we did. How the only reason she’d been left broken was because of us.

“I’ll try not to.”

Digging my hands in her hair, I kissed her. My dick grew hard, so I fucked her

again until she was crying, panting and begging me not to stop. Until I made her come so hard, she screamed and thrashed in her bonds. Then I let her down, cleaned her up in the bathroom and tucked her up in bed with me.

She curled up against my side with her head resting on my shoulder, her hand placed directly on my racing heart.

“When’s your birthday?”

I almost stiffened but made a supreme effort to stay relaxed as I stroked her shoulder. One question I could not answer under any circumstances. Not my birthday nor the others. It was a sure-fire way of opening up a can of worms I wouldn’t be able to shove back in.

“Why? You one of those astrology types who wants to check if we’re compatible or something?”

She shoved me.

“No... not that there’s anything wrong with it. I’m just trying to get to know you.”

“Well, all you need to know is I’m twenty-six and it’s not any time soon.”

To distract her, I grabbed hold of her chin and kissed her. She didn’t need to learn anything more about me this evening. Especially not about that. And if she tried to question me again, I would bury my face between her legs. Make her come enough times, she would be too exhausted to ask me shit.

There were some doors better left shut while she couldn’t remember the past. When she did, our woman might realise the significance of her question. And why I had to keep it a secret for all our sakes.

TWENTY FOUR

SCARLETT

I didn't know why, but every time I left my office this week, Tonya was lurking in the hallway. It was like she was watching me. I didn't like it, but I had said nothing to the Horsemen. Knowing if I did I would be signing her death warrant because of West's threats, I kept my concerns to myself. The only saving grace was that she hadn't made any further remarks to me. In fact, she barely acknowledged my presence unless it was to say good morning.

Tonya was the least of my concerns. All day my father had been blowing up my phone with calls and texts demanding I give him an update. With everything going on between me and the boys, going on a night-time spying mission hadn't been top of my list of priorities. I always fell asleep before Prescott or Francis as I was spending alternate nights in their rooms. Being with them kept my nightmares at bay. I didn't wake up screaming or whimpering every night any longer. It was the first time in a long time I'd been at peace, even if I should be on high fucking alert around these men. Didn't matter if I loved Prescott and he loved me, there were too many secrets and lies between all five of us. I could feel them hanging in the air, almost suffocating us and keeping trust and honesty from surfacing.

I couldn't put off the conversation with my father forever. When the penthouse was silent, I crept from Prescott's bed out into the hallway and downstairs. My feet carried me to the view of the cityscape from their open plan living space. I tugged at my sleep shirt, my phone clutched tightly in my hand, staring out over the tops of the buildings spread out before me. Something deep in my heart resonated with this place. It felt more like home than Kent ever did. It was where I'd grown up, that much I knew. In the weeks I'd been here, I'd

grown used to the background noise accompanying the place. It was never silent and still.

At first, I hated it. The noise made my nightmares worse and left me feeling more alone than ever. And I'd felt completely alone for the past ten years in my prison. Then the sounds of the city became comforting. They reminded me I'd escaped for the time being. I'd found my freedom. And now, here with the Horsemen, I was in a different cage. One I wasn't sure I wanted to escape. Not when I'd fallen in love. But I loved someone who kept secrets. I could never fully trust any of them.

My fingers went to my chest, rubbing the sore spot where my heart lay beating. I wanted to crawl back into bed with Prescott. I wanted him to kiss away my pain. To call me his little lamb and do dirty things to my body. Never in a million years did I think I would end up needing the man I'd been sent to destroy. I think I needed all of them, even if I was terrified of West and Drake was a locked vault. Then there was Francis who made me feel safe. He'd chased away my demons. He made it okay for me to go on after the night I'd killed a man. It should haunt me. Somehow, when he'd taken care of me that night, he washed away the horror, guilt and regret. He'd re-written my narrative.

I sighed. I wasn't okay with what I'd done, but I had to go on living. There was no other choice.

Raising my phone to my face, I stared down at the screen before I dialled my father's number. He would be pissed off, but what could he do? I wasn't a miracle worker. I wrapped my other arm around my middle and stared outside as the phone rang.

"Scarlett."

"Dad."

"Where have you been?"

The quiet calm of his voice had my limbs trembling. It was the precursor to the rage. An anger I knew all too well. It would result in fists of fury and my battered body being thrown in the concrete room. I hated the place with a passion. Many times I'd wanted to burn it all down. To take a fucking match to the building and watch my prison disintegrate. But it was wishful thinking on my part.

"With them. I couldn't exactly answer when they're watching me."

“You couldn’t answer my texts?”

“I’m sorry, things were hectic today.”

Learning how to lie effectively had been an early lesson for me. It hadn’t always worked, but it kept me out of trouble half the time. The other half? Well, the less said about it, the better.

“That’s not good enough, Scarlett.”

Nothing I did ever was for Stuart Carver. Sometimes I wondered why they’d even adopted me in the first place when they’d never loved me. I was a burden to them and they never let me forget it. It hadn’t started until after my recovery. After I learnt to walk and talk again. After my injuries had healed and my body was almost whole again. No, they’d been loving and caring then. But things gradually began to change. The loving parents morphed into... monsters. And I hated them for it. Both of them.

“I know.”

My voice was quiet and meek. My body wouldn’t stop trembling. Fear was rushing through my veins even though I knew he couldn’t physically hurt me from here. His words would crush me though. Destroy my spirit. He’d ruin my hard-earned progress towards finding myself again.

“Living away from us has made you forget your place. I don’t think you’re ready for freedom. If I didn’t want to nail those bastards to the wall, I would make you come home right this instant. Do you hear me?”

“Yes, Dad.”

“They think they can hide in their ivory tower forever. Well, they’re wrong. You are going to find out the truth for me and you’re going to do it fast. This has gone on long enough. It’s going to end with you. All of it. You’re going to *end* them.”

A tear slid down my cheek at the thought of ending Prescott. I couldn’t. My heart wouldn’t let me.

No, I won’t end them for you. I can’t. I love him.

“Now, have you got what I asked for?”

I shook my head, dreading the word I had to utter.

“No,” I whispered.

“Why. Not?”

The deadly tone he’d used had me putting my free hand to the glass to keep

myself upright.

“They’re always watching me. Always.”

“They’re not watching you now.”

I flinched. No way I wanted to sneak around while I was on the phone with him. I wouldn’t even know where to start. I knew where the boys’ bedrooms were and downstairs they had a gym, but if there were other rooms, they hadn’t shown me them. Besides, why the hell would they have kept evidence of what my dad accused them of doing? It wouldn’t be very smart. The Horsemen weren’t stupid. They couldn’t have got to where they were now otherwise.

“What exactly do you want me to find, Dad? A way to get past their security? The layout to their penthouse?”

“All of it, Scarlett. Everything. I need everything. Taking those bastards down is paramount, do you hear me? They need to die for what they’ve done.”

What you think they’ve done.

“Okay. I’ll try.”

I needed to placate him somehow. His voice had gone up several octaves.

“Trying is *not* good enough. You haven’t given me anything. I’m beginning to think you have no intention of doing what you’ve been told.”

“I do, I swear.”

I’d known this would be bad, but I couldn’t help my sinking stomach and the sick feeling coiling in it. Knowing he couldn’t get to me with his fists was the only thing keeping me from collapsing on the floor in fear.

“You’re weak, you know that? You’ve done absolutely nothing for me. Nothing. We’re no further forward at all.”

“We are. I’m closer to them than anyone else could ever get, Dad.”

“It’s meaningless if you can’t find a damn thing on them. You are fucking useless, Scarlett. You always have been. Lord knows why we even paid for your private fucking healthcare when you’re nothing but a disappointment.”

His voice was so loud now. I couldn’t deal with it. I was shaking all over, wanting this to end.

“We’ve given you everything and this is how you repay me?”

“I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“Sorry? Fuck sorry. You are going to do as you’re told, do you hear me? No more excuses. None. Get me what I need.”

A hand clapped on my shoulder. I jolted and spun around so fast, I made myself dizzy. My hand reached out blindly and landed on a solid chest. My dad was still shouting in my ear, but I barely heard what he said. My eyes raised as my head cleared. I found indigo blue ones staring down at me.

Oh, fuck!

“If you don’t do what I tell you, I’ll bring you home. I’ll bring you back here and then your life won’t be worth living, you hear me?”

My mouth parted, but I couldn’t say a damn thing. And no doubt Drake could hear the volume of my father’s voice through the speaker. Probably why he plucked the phone away from me and put it to his ear.

“I’m sorry, Mr Carver, but Scarlett needs to get back to bed. She’s had a very busy day.”

Drake hung up the phone. I snatched my hand back from his chest and stumbled into the window behind me. My phone dangled between his fingers and he stared at me with an unreadable expression on his face. I’d never been able to decipher Drake’s moods, but now I knew I was in trouble.

“Can I have my phone back?” I whispered, putting my hand out.

He placed it between my fingers without hesitation. I slipped it behind my back, holding it there because I was scared he’d change his mind and take it away from me.

“I... I was just...”

What the hell could I even say?

“Talking to your family.”

I nodded, unsure if he was going to ask why my father had been shouting at me. It’s not as if I could tell him. They couldn’t find out what I was really here for. The threat of my father was all too real for me. He would hurt me in unimaginable ways if I revealed the truth to the Horsemen. If I ruined everything.

Drake cocked his head to the side before he stepped closer. I sucked in a breath when he cupped my cheek with his large hand.

“You’re shaking.”

I hadn’t stopped. My body was on high alert from my conversation with my father. I couldn’t get rid of the sickly feeling I had inside. The horrific memories of the concrete room kept resurfacing in my mind.

“I’m... I’m fine.”

We both knew it was a lie. I couldn’t afford to say anything else.

“No, you’re not.”

And with that, I found my face smashed into his hard chest and his arms encircling me. My body was stiff, wondering why on earth he was being nice and not questioning me about what he’d heard. Surely it should be his first concern, shouldn’t it?

“What are you doing?” I whispered into his shirt, my arms hanging limply at my sides with my phone still clutched in one of my hands.

He didn’t respond as his fingers traced lines down my spine. The motion was soothing, but I was too jumpy and unnerved by the whole thing to relax. Did he think I was going to melt and tell him everything? Was it why he was doing this? I couldn’t help my suspicions given all our interactions with each other.

He must’ve realised this wasn’t working. I wasn’t going to calm down. I didn’t have that sort of relationship with him. I didn’t feel safe letting go. Not in the way I did with Prescott and Francis. Drake was made of stone compared to them. And I didn’t particularly want to be comforted by a fucking statue.

The awkwardness between us when Drake let me go settled over the room. It was almost suffocating. He stared at me with those damn beautiful but terrifyingly cold indigo eyes of his. I wanted to be away from him. Away from all of this.

“Are you going to tell me what that was about?”

I shook my head.

“Secrets aren’t going to win you any favours, Scarlett.”

“There’s nothing to tell.”

His eyes narrowed.

“I’m sure that’s what you want me to think.”

“I don’t need you to think anything because it’s none of your business.”

He’d made things worse by hanging up on my father. Now I was going to be in bigger trouble. Maybe I should throw this fucking phone off the roof. Let it smash on the ground so my father couldn’t call me any longer. Would I be free of him then? Or would he find a way to get to me?

Could I trust Drake to keep me safe from my father? Could I trust any of them? I had no idea, and it’s why I kept my mouth shut. Why I couldn’t tell him

my father was an abusive piece of shit who'd sent me here to find out the truth and destroy them.

“Are you scared of him?”

The question cut me. I wanted to say yes, but I couldn't.

“Do you really think I'm going to tell you, of all people, anything about me? You don't care. You literally don't give a shit about me other than how you can use me. So no, Drake, I'm not going to stand here and answer your questions. You haven't given me any indication you actually have any feelings whatsoever, so fuck you.”

His jaw ticked at my words, but he didn't respond. Deciding I'd had enough, I shoved past him and walked towards the stairs intending to go back to Prescott. I was no longer upset, I was mad. So fucking mad at Drake for being an unfeeling dick. He might have tried to hug me, but it wasn't real. He did it because he thought it would placate me. Then he could fucking butter me up and make me answer his questions.

What I didn't expect was to have him come after me, grab my wrist and shove me up against the wall next to the staircase. And I certainly didn't expect him to lean into me, those indigo eyes dark with repressed emotion.

“You think I don't care about you?” he hissed, wrapping my hair around his fist. “You have no idea. No fucking idea at all.”

My mouth was claimed in a hot, searing kiss that made my toes curl. Drake attacked it like he was starving and I was his sustenance. I was utterly helpless against the onslaught. My fingers gripped his waist, pressing my phone into him because I had nowhere else to put it. His body was hard and unyielding, keeping me pinned to the wall so I couldn't escape him. And right then, I didn't want to.

His tongue tangled with mine, demanding everything from me. His large hand gripped my thigh, pulling it up and wrapping it around him. It only brought his body closer to mine. The heat of him was everywhere, burning me up. A needy, high-pitched whine echoed in my throat. If Drake tore my clothes off and fucked me right there, I wouldn't have objected. To be honest, I probably would have encouraged it.

“You're maddening,” he muttered in my mouth. “Utterly maddening.”

Then he bit my lip so hard, it bled. I cried out from the pain, but it was muted when he sucked my lip in his mouth. When he tasted my blood. My eyes flew

open, staring into his intense ones. The possessiveness and desire in them had me trembling. It's like the floodgates had opened and I was seeing the real man hiding beneath all those layers.

He released my lip with an audible pop. I blinked before licking along the inside of it. Tasting what he had. The metallic liquid spread across my tongue, making me wonder why he found it so alluring.

"Go back to Pres, Scarlett," he all but demanded, his voice hoarse and gravelly.

Drake backed away, looking distinctly harassed by the whole experience. Almost as if he couldn't believe he'd lost control. But I'd seen it and felt it. He couldn't hide from me. From us. If I pressed him, I was in no doubt he'd shut right back down and go back to being cold and unfeeling.

Even as everything screamed at me to go to him. To take off my clothes and offer myself to the statue of a man who gave me whiplash, I didn't. I pulled myself away from the wall and walked upstairs.

My feet carried me to Prescott's bedroom and I slipped inside. He was still asleep, his hand resting on his bare chest and the moon bathing him in its light. My heart hurt at the sight of the man I loved. I put my phone on the bedside table, crawled into bed with him and curled myself around him, pressing a kiss to his chest. He stirred, wrapping his arm around me and holding me against his body.

"My little lamb," he breathed, nuzzling my hair.

"I love you," I whispered into his skin.

I did. So fucking much. Being with him made everything else melt away. My stupid altercation with Drake. The kiss... fuck, that kiss. I'd never been kissed with such intensity before. Well, in all honesty, I'd only kissed two other men, and they were both pretty demanding, but Drake... I didn't know how to even go about describing the passion hiding behind those indigo eyes.

Prescott didn't ask where I'd been. He tucked his hand under my chin and pressed a kiss to my mouth. He whispered how much he loved me before cuddling me to him and falling asleep again. His presence soothed me and calmed my racing heart.

I fell asleep hoping he would ease my throbbing pussy in the morning because I couldn't deny I was turned on to high heaven by a certain man who'd

utterly confounded me tonight. And I had no idea what the hell I was going to say to him next time we saw each other.

TWENTY FIVE

DRAKE

I'd lain awake half the fucking night cursing myself for the way I'd kissed her. Why did she erode my control? Why did having her here make me so fucking insane? I could barely stand the distance between us even though I'd put it there. And I was utterly done with everyone accusing me of not caring about her. They fucking well knew I did. I'd fought so hard to get her back. Gone to extreme lengths to return Scarlett to us. Me. I'd done that.

My little wisp. I brought her back to us.

Her not knowing I cared was more than I could take. The way I cared for her couldn't be quantified. I was just fucking realistic about what we were dealing with. And after overhearing what Stuart fucking Carver said to her last night, and the way she'd behaved towards me, I was right to be damn well suspicious and reticent when it came to dealing with her.

"I'll bring you back here and then your life won't be worth living."

What the fuck did he mean by her life wouldn't be worth living? Hadn't they treated her well while she'd been with them? Had they... hurt her?

I would fucking gut the cunt if he'd laid a hand on her. I'd drain him dry of his damn blood because he deserved nothing less. If anyone hurt our woman, I would stop at nothing to ruin them alongside Prescott, Francis and West. We'd hunt them down together. And we'd bathe in their misery before the end.

Scarlett wasn't going to tell me what her father meant. And I doubted she'd tell the others. It became very clear to me when she started acting all cagey, she was afraid of Stuart. Terrified of him. In fact, I had a feeling she must fear him more than she did us, because why else would she be here? Why would she have gone to these lengths when she had a glimpse of who we were hiding

underneath our façades?

It was why I'd called the others together. Prescott had left Scarlett in his room to watch TV in bed while we gathered in the room next to our home gym. The one she didn't know existed. Francis had dubbed it the war room. It contained everything we'd found in our search for Scarlett. One wall was plastered with pictures of her. Everyone connected to her. Everything we had on the Carvers. All of our memories and mementoes of the girl we'd lost. The things we hoped to show her when she returned to us. But Scarlett wasn't whole yet. She didn't remember who we were. This place had to remain a secret until she did.

West stood in the corner with his arms crossed over his chest and had his eyes glued to the last photo we'd taken of the five of us together at sixteen. We looked so young. All of us were smiling. Scarlett stood in the middle between West, who had his arm wrapped around her, and Prescott. Francis was next to Prescott and me on the end with West. Our little gang of five who had stuck by each other through thick and thin.

Fuck, I miss those days. We had our whole lives ahead of us. And now we're fractured. It's not fair.

Prescott walked over to it and ran his fingers over the photo.

"Little Nyx," he murmured.

He looked at West who narrowed his eyes but didn't comment on our childhood nickname for Scarlett. We all knew why West hated it so much. The reminder of the night everything had fallen to shit wasn't a pleasant one for any of us, but for him... it was worse.

"What's this about, Drake?" Francis asked as he took a seat at the table we had in the centre of the room.

I took a chair at the head of the table and leant my elbows on it. We hadn't been in here since she'd come to work for us. There was no need. But right now, we required somewhere safe to talk where she couldn't overhear us.

"I found Scarlett up late last night in the living room, speaking to Stuart on the phone."

Prescott whipped his head around and stared at me.

"I woke up when she came back to bed, but I didn't ask her what she'd been doing."

None of them were surprised by me being up. They all knew about my bouts

of insomnia. Right now, it was so bad I was barely getting a few hours in every night. Francis had commented on it, telling me to take my damn sleeping pills. I knew I should listen to him. However, now I'd found Scarlett in the living room when she should be in bed, it made me want to keep an eye on her even when everyone else was asleep. Prescott should have locked his fucking door last night. That was the agreement, so she didn't wander around in places she shouldn't be. I'd have to remind all of them.

"He was having a go at her."

"Did you hear what he said?" Francis asked, a concerned expression flitting across his face.

I rubbed my wrist with my fingers.

"A little and I didn't like it. Not one fucking bit."

West shoved off the wall and walked over to the table before leaning on it with both hands.

"What did he say?"

The irritation in his amber eyes was very apparent.

"He said something about bringing her back home and her life wouldn't be worth living if that happened. So I took her phone, told him she needed to go back to bed and hung up on him. She, of course, denied anything was wrong, but I don't believe her."

West's hands curled into fists.

"That cunt, if he's hurt her—"

I put my hand up.

"I know, but we can't be sure he has been. I'm not sure of anything right now."

The whole thing had rattled me. Overhearing her conversation. Her denial. The way she'd accused me of not caring about her. And the kiss. The damn fucking kiss. She stole my self-control. Ruined it. She was wrecking me on the inside and I had no clue what the fuck to do about it. How to stop this descent into hell. Because this was absolute hell for me. The worst fucking kind of insanity.

West shoved off the table and paced away, his back rigid with his anger.

"I'm going to kill him. He deserves it. The motherfucker deserves to be gutted. He needs a fucking slow and painful death. He took her. He took what's

ours.”

Prescott and Francis watched West pace the length of the table. We all agreed with him. Stuart Carver deserved to die for everything he'd done.

“We can't do anything to him,” I said after a minute.

West almost slammed his fist into the wall. Instead, he stopped and slapped his palm against it, breathing heavily.

“I know. I fucking hate it, but I know.”

There were so many reasons we had never been able to go after Stuart Carver, the owner of the premier league football club, Rotherhithe United. The first being that very fact. He was a prominent and rich man. Not to mention the circles he ran in. Friends in high places. Politicians. Celebrities. The criminal underworld. The man had been rather good friends with Frank Russo before he got offed. And worst of all, his best mate had become the Met Police Commissioner a few years ago. We'd had a run-in with Garrett Jones when he was still a Detective Inspector. No way any of us wanted to get back on his radar.

Our biggest obstacle always came down to one thing. You tried to off a man like Stuart Carver, you'd bring a world of trouble down on your head.

Besides, we couldn't kill him when he had Scarlett and he knew it. He fucking well knew it. It's why he took her. He took her to punish us. To say we had a vendetta against the man was an understatement. The four of us wanted to burn his fucking football stadium to the ground and destroy everything he'd built.

Even now, when we had Scarlett back, going after him would be a gamble. Especially while Scarlett had no idea who she was. Who she'd been. And why we'd even got ourselves into this mess.

“So what do you want to do about this then?” Francis asked when none of us said anything for a few minutes.

“First of all, if you have her with you at night, lock your door so she can't leave. We do not need her finding anything she shouldn't, especially not this room.”

Prescott rubbed the back of his neck.

“Sorry, I got a little... distracted last night.”

“Let me guess, you were too busy giving her a dick down,” West said, pulling away from the wall and smirking at Prescott.

Prescott dug his hands in his pockets and tried not to smile.

“Maybe. You jealous?”

I knew for a fact West hadn’t touched Scarlett intimately since the night we’d given her E. He’d kept his distance. I wasn’t entirely sure why or what was going through his head.

“As if.”

“She wanted it this morning, but *someone* called a meeting.”

West’s smirk got wider.

“Is that so?”

“Yeah, so I’d quite like to wrap this shit up.”

West turned away, but not before I caught him biting his lip as if he was planning something.

“This is important,” I said, not wanting to get in between him and Prescott.

I watched Prescott roll his eyes.

“Yes, I know, Drake... but when your woman wants your dick, you give it to her.”

“Apparently, I missed the memo.”

Francis and West snorted. The way Prescott smiled at me had me narrowing my eyes.

“Well, you see, the way I hear it, it’s your fault she’s all worked up and in need of release.”

I almost choked on my own breath.

What the fuck?

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Francis looked at Prescott.

“I thought you said you didn’t ask her what happened.”

Prescott shrugged.

“I asked why she was so horny and she placed the blame at Drake’s door but refused to say any more. So, tell us, Drake, what did you do to Scarlett last night after you caught her?”

Clenching my jaw shut, I rested my palms flat on the table. No fucking way I was telling them about the kiss. The godforsaken fucking insane kiss between us.

“Hmm, it’s not the first time she’s been all turned on and shit after an

encounter with you,” Francis said, crossing his arms over his chest and levelling his gaze on me. “Are you holding out on her?”

“What the fuck is this? Question me about my relationship with Scarlett day? I didn’t sign up for that.”

West barked with laughter, making my face fall further. Why the fuck were these lot trying to mess with me?

“Well, if you’d just fuck her instead of punishing her, then we wouldn’t have to say anything,” Prescott said, giving me a wink.

“You’re all a bunch of cunts, you know that right?”

“Says the man who seems to be a little scared of Scarlett’s cunt right now,” West said with a grin.

I stood up and glared at the idiots I called my best friends. They were getting on my last fucking nerve. My ability to keep myself in check was already shot to pieces by that damn woman last night and now this bullshit.

“Fuck. Off.”

“Hit a sore spot, have we?” Prescott said.

I clenched my fists, trying to rein in my temper. Trying not to lose my shit with them. This was not what we were meant to be discussing.

“We are here to talk about Stuart, not my relationship with Scarlett.”

Francis rolled his eyes.

“What do you want us to do, Drake? Ask her outright if Stuart’s been hurting her? She’s not going to tell us anything.”

“This is why I keep saying we need her to remember the past,” Prescott said, waving his hand at me. “And we need to do it soon. She’s not going to trust us until she knows the truth.”

Shoving my hands in my pockets, I paced away. He had a point. Maybe I was scared of her remembering. Scared of the repercussions. A huge part of me didn’t want her to know what happened the night of her accident. It changed everything. But I knew it wasn’t fair to keep it from her either.

“We’ve already deviated from the plan by bringing her here.”

“We’re gambling with a real person. One we all care about, no matter what happened in the past or why she’s here now. Plans change... or we wouldn’t all be fucking her now, would we.”

I sighed and turned back to them.

“You’re right. She is a person and it’s something we have to handle delicately. We can’t go off half-cocked and fuck her up even worse. Let’s revisit this when we’ve all had time to think about it and come up with a potential solution, okay?”

The three of them gave me a nod of agreement. I needed a minute to work out how we should go about this. What would be the safest way? I mean, we weren’t known for doing anything ‘safely’ but Scarlett and her amnesia weren’t something we could afford to mess around with. Our mere presence clearly wasn’t working fast enough.

“And don’t ask her about Stuart. Do not press her about any of it. We need her to think we’re not suspicious. It’s the only way she’s going to let her guard down.”

I wanted to know everything that had gone on in the Carver household, but pressurising Scarlett wouldn’t get us anywhere. We needed to approach it from a different angle.

“Yeah, yeah, okay, we get it,” Prescott said.

“Good.”

“Are we done?” West asked.

I nodded, wanting to be alone with my own thoughts to calm the fuck down. He looked at Prescott who narrowed his eyes at our friend.

“What are you planning?”

West merely grinned and moved towards the door.

“West.”

He unlocked it, pulled the door open and turned his head back to look at us.

“It’s between me and her.”

West walked out, shutting the door behind him and leaving Prescott glaring.

“I knew I shouldn’t have said anything about her being horny,” he grumbled. “He’s going to fuck with her, isn’t he?”

“You should know West will use any excuse,” Francis said with a chuckle and a shrug.

Prescott shook his head and rubbed his chin.

“Fuck.”

I didn’t give a shit what West did. Ignoring Prescott and Francis, I walked out. They could damn well fight it out amongst themselves. I wasn’t in the

mood to deal with them any longer after they'd given me a hard time. I made my way underneath the stairs and opened the door to the stairwell. If I was ever going to get my head on straight, I needed to get away from these idiots for a while. And try to find my equilibrium again.

TWENTY SIX

WEST

I stalked upstairs, not giving two fucks if Prescott wanted to satisfy Scarlett's urges. He'd had more than enough time with her after his whole 'I love you' declaration. She probably thought I'd given up on fucking with her head. I was merely lulling her into a false sense of security. Psychological warfare happened to be one of the many ways I liked to mess with people. Everyone thought I was a violent piece of shit who couldn't control himself. They were all fucking dumb and had no idea who they were dealing with.

I threw Prescott's door open and walked in. Scarlett was tucked up in Prescott's bed, her eyes glued to the TV. She looked over at me when she heard the door, her eyes going wide.

"West? Where's Pres?"

I didn't answer her, merely stalked over to his bed, ripped the covers from her body and plucked her up from where she was laying. Scarlett was unceremoniously tossed over my shoulder, making her let out a yelp. I carried her from the room, my arm pinned over the backs of her legs.

"What the fuck? Put me down!"

In response, I smacked her arse, earning another yelp from her lips. The verbal abuse I got for it wasn't worth repeating as I took her into my bedroom. I locked the door before I tossed her on my bed. She scrambled into a sitting position, glaring at me as I walked over to my window and looked out across the city.

"What is wrong with you? You could have asked me to come with you."

"Would you have?"

"No."

I smiled and dug my hand in my pocket, extracting a joint and my lighter.

“Then you’ve answered your own question.”

Sticking the joint in my mouth, I lit it and breathed the smoke in, holding it in my lungs before I blew it out. I slid my lighter back in my pocket. It might be early to start smoking, but I didn’t care. It always took the edge off.

“What do you even want, West?”

I raised my hand and beckoned her over without looking back. It took a minute, but she joined me by the window, staring at me with a frown.

“I’m here. What do you want?”

Grabbing a hold of her hand, I slid the joint between her fingers. She looked at it with no small amount of suspicion.

“You want me to smoke this with you?”

“You need to relax, Scar. Not everything needs to be a battle between us.”

She didn’t take a toke.

“I don’t want to do drugs with you.”

I took the joint back from her, dragged the smoke in my mouth before grabbing hold of her face. My fingers squeezed her jaw, forcing her mouth open. She tried to get away, but I leant into her and breathed the smoke into her mouth, shutting it before she could do a thing. She choked on it for a moment before I released her. Scarlett shoved me away from her, spluttering as I grinned and took another drag.

“You’re a dick,” she ground out.

“If you’d just taken it without complaint, I wouldn’t have to make you.”

“I hate you.”

“I’m sure you do.”

She clenched her fists, clearly perturbed by my nonchalant tone. The woman could say whatever the fuck she wanted to me. I knew she liked it when I had my hand around her throat. When I touched her. When I fucked her. I was in half a mind to give it to her now. To make her come all over my dick. Prescott said she wanted it, so why the fuck not?

Sticking the joint between my lips, I grabbed a handful of her arse and tugged her against me. My other hand captured her wrists and held them behind her back. Then I took the joint from my mouth and held it between her lips instead.

“Breathe it in, Scar.”

“Fuck you.”

“We can do it the hard way again if you wish.”

Her glare made me tighten my hand around her wrists. She winced and did as I asked, sucking in the smoke. She choked again, but she held it for a moment and breathed it out into my face. I smiled at her.

“Good girl.”

“I don’t want to be your fucking good girl.”

Don’t you? Hmm, then I think I know what you want.

“You want to be a bad girl, then?”

“No!”

“Oh, Scar, it’s okay. I know you want it, you’re just too scared to admit it.”

She struggled against me. I laughed at her attempt to escape. Even if she wanted to run, there was nowhere for her to go. I would hunt her down and drag her back in here by her hair. And she would regret it because I would make her life hell for a few hours.

“If you keep that up, you’ll only get my dick hard.”

She stopped, the fire in her eyes mounting with every second.

“Let me go.”

“Smoke this with me and maybe I will.”

I made her take another toke, watching the smoke curl out of her mouth afterwards. Taking my own drag, I smiled at her and licked my lip.

“Is this something you do all the time?”

“Smoke weed? Sometimes.”

“And other stuff?”

I shrugged, adjusting my hold on her.

“On occasion, I do E and LSD. The other three don’t like dealing with me when I’m out of my head, so you know, I keep it on the down-low.”

Didn’t matter to me if she knew about my drug use. I drank whisky and smoked weed more than I did pills. It was my way of keeping my need for violence at bay. And right now, even though we were smoking, I wanted to get violent with her. Very fucking violent.

Pulling Scarlett away from the window with me, I popped the joint in the ashtray on my bedside table. Then I ran my free hand down her throat, gripping it between my fingers and squeezing.

“How about you turn those sharp claws on me, Scar, hmm? If you hate me so much, show me.”

I let go of her wrists but kept my hand around her neck. The defiant look in her eyes made me want to push her further. Fuck how I wanted to make Scarlett snap. I shoved her back towards the window and pinned her neck against it.

“Go on, I know you want to hurt me.”

She wrapped her hand around my wrist and dug her nails into my skin. I cocked my head to the side and licked my lip.

“You can do better than that.”

Sliding her other hand under my t-shirt, she dug her nails into my chest and dragged them down towards my stomach. I let out a breath, feeling myself growing hard under her touch. Then I leant closer, getting right up in her face.

“Hurt me, Scar. Fucking hurt me.”

Her hand left my chest and she slapped me across my cheek. The sound rang through the room. It stung, but I loved it. I looked her up and down, running my teeth along my bottom lip.

“Again.”

The heat in her eyes made me want to rip her clothes from her body and fuck her senseless. Her hand came up and she slapped me. This time it was harder. She hissed at the impact as if it hurt her as much as it did me. I squeezed her neck. I wanted to bite it and leave marks on her skin. Wanted to remind her of who she belonged to and why she would never be free of me.

“That’s it. Let it out, Scar. I want you to hurt me.”

“I hate you,” she whispered, her nails digging harder into my skin.

“If you’re going to tell me you hate me, say it like you fucking mean it.”

Her eyes darkened.

“I hate you.”

The hand she’d slapped me with came up and gripped me by the throat.

“I. Hate. You. West.”

There you are, Scar. There’s my girl. Fuck, you’re magnificent.

Her fingers squeezed. I tore her away from the window and pressed her down on my bed instead. Her light brown hair fanned out across the black sheets. I was going to show her the real me. All the other times we’d fucked, it had been tame. It was time she saw my true nature. The feral beast lurking inside me.

My free hand slid into my pocket and I drew my knife from it, flipping it out. She watched me place it at the top of her t-shirt, right above her breasts.

“You’re about to hate me a whole lot more.”

I tore it down her t-shirt, slicing through the fabric. She stared at me with wide eyes as I exposed her breasts. I ran the point over the tip of her nipple before circling her areola with it. She trembled, her nipples hardening under my ministrations. My woman was terrified and it showed. Her breathing was heavy and her heart rate spiked under my fingers. But Scarlett had her legs spread for me as I leant over her. I pressed my knee into her pussy, rubbing the fabric of her shorts against it.

“You’re mine, Scar. All fucking mine. I’m going to make sure you never forget it.”

I leant closer and ran my nose up her cheek.

“Don’t move or it will hurt worse, you hear me? If you struggle and ruin it, you’ll only have yourself to blame.”

“What are you going to do?” she whispered, her voice shaking on the words.

I pulled back and smiled at her.

“Make sure everyone knows who you belong to.”

Releasing her neck, I placed my left hand on her breastbone, holding her there as I pressed the knife tip to her skin just below her collarbone.

“This is going to hurt,” I murmured. “But you can take it, Scar. You’re my girl.”

I dug the knife in, cutting through her skin and dragging it down to form a line. She let out a cry of pain, but she kept still other than her fingers curling around the covers. I was very precise with my cuts. I wanted it to look good on her, not some jacked-up jagged scar, but something beautiful. Pretty almost.

Scars for my stunning Scar.

Her eyes remained fixed on me the whole time. Tears ran down her face and small whimpers erupted from her mouth, but not once did she tell me to stop. She took the pain just like I knew she could.

When I was done, I watched the blood running down her chest, seeping from the word I’d carved into her skin.

War.

For once in my life, I wanted to live up to our name. The one we’d been

given when we landed on the financial scene and caused a fucking huge stir.
They'd branded us gods. And now I was embracing it.

I'd given her my mark.

She belonged to War.

And War was me.

TWENTY SEVEN

WEST

Scarlett's eyes flicked down. She didn't say a word. She kept staring at the blood and the carving like she couldn't believe what I'd done. Her fingers loosened from the covers, but she kept them by her sides. Her chest rose and fell in rapid bursts, making me think she was in shock.

"If Drake was here, he'd want to lick the blood from your skin," I murmured.

Her watery eyes met mine again. I leant closer and kissed the wound, making her whimper. The cuts wept with her life-sustaining liquid. I licked it from my lips. While I wasn't like Drake with his blood obsession, the sight of it here satisfied me unlike anything else.

I put the knife to her mouth. She knew what I wanted her to do. I could see it in her eyes. There was no more mutiny. She didn't know whether to hate me or beg for me to fuck her.

Her tongue slid out and licked the length of the blade. I flipped it over and let her clean the other side. Then I shifted up on my knees and stared down at her. The t-shirt I'd cut lay on either side of her. She wasn't naked enough for me. My fingers dug between her shorts and her skin. I ripped them down her legs. Then I used the knife to slice through her underwear on either side of her crotch. It fell away, revealing her pussy to me. Her dripping pussy, glistening in the sunlight streaming in through the windows.

"Who do you belong to, Scar?"

Her bottom lip trembled. She lay there staring at me with wide, tear-filled eyes and didn't respond. I pressed the flat side of the blade against her pussy. Not like I would cut her with it here, but she didn't know that.

"Who do you belong to?"

“War,” she whispered. “I belong to War.”

“Good girl. Now get on your fucking hands and knees.”

She did as I asked, her whole body trembling with the effort of turning over. I set the knife down next to me before I tore the remnants of her t-shirt from her body and leant down to run my tongue up her spine. Straightening, I pulled my t-shirt off my body and unbuttoned my jeans. When I was bare, I knelt behind her, running my hand up her cheek and along her back.

“This pretty pussy is mine.” I pressed my thumb to it, sliding it along her slick entrance. “She belongs to my cock, Scar. I’m going to abuse her the way you need.”

I dipped my thumb into her heat. She whimpered but didn’t dispute my statement.

“Mmm, you’re soaking. Did the pain turn you on, Scar? Do you want me to make it hurt more?”

Pulling my thumb from her pussy, I slid it higher, finding her clit. She jerked, but I held onto her hip, keeping her from moving away. I rubbed her clit in slow circles, eliciting harsh needy pants from her lips. She wanted more. I could tell by the way her hips shifted in my grasp.

Removing my thumb from her clit, I gripped my cock and slid it between her lips, knocking the head against her clit. I repeated the action, slipping back and forth until she let out a whine.

“Please, West.”

I notched the head of my cock to her entrance.

“Does this pussy need filling?”

“Please, I need you.”

Teasing her entrance with the head of my cock, I chuckled and adored the way she tried to back herself onto it.

“I’m going to hurt you.”

“Please.”

The desperation in her voice had me slamming inside her in one unforgiving thrust. She cried out, choking on her own breath as her hands gripped the covers below us. I slid back out and plunged inside her again. I curled my other hand around her hip and fucked her. My body pounding into hers with loud slapping noises. They rang through the room with my brutality. I wouldn’t give

her mercy.

“Your pretty pussy takes my dick so fucking well,” I ground out through my teeth.

“Fuck! Fuck me.”

Releasing her hips, I dug one hand into her hair and pulled at it, making her head snap back. The way her neck strained as she stared at me was so fucking beautiful. A damn goddess, she was. My fucking goddess. Mine.

I tugged her hair more, pulling her up by it until her back met my chest. My other hand slid up her body and wrapped around her neck. I held her against me, her legs bent either side of mine as I thrust upwards, making her take me deep and hard.

My lips went to her ear and I bit down on the lobe. Her hands curled around my back, holding me to her. If I was in any doubt she wanted this before, I wasn't now. My eyes went to the cuts I'd made below her collarbone. The blood had started to clot. I'd make sure to clean her up real fucking good when I was done with her. First, I wanted to make her come all over my dick and paint her insides with my cum. Show her who owned her sweet pussy. Who would give her everything she ever desired.

“You're my bad girl, Scar,” I murmured in her ear. “Only I'm allowed to hurt you and make you cry. No one else gets that fucking privilege, you hear me? No one. If anyone touches you, I will kill them. They'll regret ever laying a finger on your precious skin. It's mine. All of you is mine.”

My fingers tightened around her throat, restricting her airway. My other arm wrapped around her waist, giving me better leverage to fuck her with. My thrust grew harder even if they were shallow, showing her I owned her little body. As if she didn't already know that when I'd carved my ownership into her skin.

She let out these beautiful gasps as she tried to suck enough oxygen into her lungs. Fucking perfect. That's what my girl was. Her fingers tightened around me, trying to tell me it was too much, but it would never be enough. Never.

“You want to come, my little Scar? Want to explode all over my dick?”

Her choking whine was the only answer I needed. I slid my hand from her waist up to her chest and gripped one of her nipples between my fingers, twisting it.

“West,” she choked out.

“I’ll make you come when I’m good and fucking ready.”

My fingers slid higher, brushing over the cuts. Then I pressed them into her skin. She cried. Oh, how she fucking cried. I watched the tears running down her cheeks with rapt attention. And licked them away, tasting her pain on my tongue.

“Please,” she gasped. “Please.”

My hand slid to her nipple again, massaging her breast and slipping her nipple between my fingers. I tightened them around it. She bucked and writhed against me, but she didn’t let me go. She held onto me, letting me fuck her and tease her nipples. Her pussy felt so fucking good around my dick. The way she clenched when I squeezed her nipple too hard was the icing on the cake.

This girl had driven me half-mad my entire life. Now I had her back. I had her warm, lithe body against mine. I’d carved myself into her skin. And I’d brand myself all over her heart again. She was mine forever. She’d been destined to be so from the day she was born. Destined for all of us.

“Anyone who’s hurt you, I’ll take their lives, you hear me?” I whispered in her ear. “I’ll destroy them for you. Every single one.”

I didn’t care if Drake couldn’t confirm his suspicions. We were going to kill Stuart Carver regardless of whether he’d hurt our girl or not. But I knew he had. There was no fucking way she’d be scared of him otherwise. Our woman was strong as fuck. She wouldn’t let anyone intimidate her. Not even us. So whatever the fuck that cunt had done to her, I would get it out of her one day. I would make her tell me everything. Then I would rid the world of the scumbag who’d stolen her from us ten years ago. I’d rip out his fucking heart.

“West,” she whimpered.

“That’s right, Scar. I’ll burn them all to the fucking ground.”

My hand slid down her body and sought out her clit. I stroked it the way I knew she needed. The exact way to make her buck and tremble in my grasp while my cock hammered into her sweet pussy, hitting all the right spots. My fingers tightened around her throat, almost choking her.

“Come on this dick. Fucking milk it.”

Her silent cry a few minutes later as she rocked against my cock and fingers was everything. She choked and spluttered as I kept a tight hold on her throat, but she came so beautifully. Her body shook as it raced through her. Her pussy

tightened and released, milking my cock in the way only she could.

“My bad little Scar,” I hissed in her ear.

I loosened my hold on her neck, allowing her to suck in more air. Her nails dug into my skin, but I liked it. I wanted the pain. It reminded me I was alive and I had her with me.

Her body slumped against mine. Her thoroughly used and wrecked little body. I let go of her neck and pushed her forward onto her hands. Then I gripped her hips and thrust into her over and over. I punished her pussy until I exploded inside her, emptying all my pent up lust and rage into her body.

“Scar,” I groaned. “Fuck.”

Nothing ever felt so good. No other pussy felt this sweet. She was everything to me. I couldn't admit it to her, but she owned me. Each and every part of me belonged to Scarlett. It always had. The years separating us and her loss of those memories from the past didn't matter. She and I shared a bond. It transcended all of that bullshit. She knew it deep down. She could feel it. It's why she stayed with us. Why she was drawn here. Why she came back.

When my dick was spent, I pulled out of her. I stroked her hip as she swayed on her knees. I climbed off the bed and plucked her off it, cradling her in my arms. Scarlett placed a hand to my chest and stared up at me as I carried her towards my bathroom. She didn't say a word when I kicked the toilet seat closed and set her on it.

I walked over to the cabinet above the black granite sink counter and opened it. Pulling out the items I needed, I set them down on the counter next to Scarlett. Next, I grabbed a washcloth and wet it. Then I knelt at her feet and pressed the cloth to the carving I'd made on her skin, gently wiping away all the blood. My other hand stroked along her bare thigh when she hissed at the touch of the cloth.

In order for it to permanently scar, I would need to make sure she didn't cover it up. I knew all about scarification even if I'd never had it done myself. Penn told me about it during an inking session. It's how I'd met the Fixer. He tattooed on the side.

“Do not let anyone else touch this, you hear me? Only I'm allowed to take care of it.”

She placed her hand on my tattooed one.

“Okay,” she whispered, giving me a subtle nod.

Leaning forward, I pressed a kiss to it.

“It’s perfect, just like you are. A scar for my Scar.”

She shivered, her fingers tightening around mine. I wished I could tell her the truth. Tell her of my feelings and remind her of who she was to me. Remind her of our past and everything we’d done together as kids. All of the times I made her laugh. The way her eyes would light up the moment she saw me.

Not a day had gone by since she’d disappeared where I didn’t feel her loss. The girl who’d been precious to my damn soul. She was mine to protect. And I would protect the woman she’d become with every part of me. I’d slay our enemies to keep her out of harm’s way. We were the only ones who could do anything to her. And even as we hurt her, we took care of her too. We kept Scarlett safe.

I kissed the word I’d carved on her skin again, making sure she knew it would mark her for the rest of her life the way she’d marked me. It might be invisible to everyone else, but I felt it. My little Scar had signed her name on my heart when we were kids. And it would remain there... forever.

TWENTY EIGHT

SCARLETT

I lay on West's bed, completely bare except for a pair of knickers he'd retrieved for me after he'd ruined my other clothes and stared up at the white ceiling. His head was on my stomach, his fingers tracing soft lines along the skin below my breasts. His eyes were closed, and my hand was in his light brown hair, stroking the soft strands. West wasn't asleep, but he was quiet as his chest rose and fell with his breathing.

After the brutality he'd fucked me with, the peace and quiet was alien and almost unnatural. It's as if carving the word 'war' into my skin and fucking me senseless afterwards had calmed him. I hadn't processed my feelings about what he'd done. It was fucked up. So fucked up, but I didn't exactly hate him for it. How did you even go about unpacking that shit?

A man I barely knew, and who terrified the shit out of me, had cut me with the intention of creating a scar. His way of branding me. Showing the world who I belonged to. And I'd given into it. I'd allowed him to do it without complaint. What kind of person did it make me? I had no fucking clue. Perhaps I'd crossed the veil and walked into the darkness with them... or maybe I'd been roped into it. Didn't matter when I was locked in the abyss now.

Where could I even go from here? I was in love with one of them and another had carved his ownership over me onto my skin.

My eyes flicked down to the wound below my collarbone. It really fucking hurt when he did it. Even now, it was still sore. He'd been gentle when he cleaned it and told me it needed to stay uncovered. I hadn't expected care from a man like West. One who went from calm to batshit crazy at the drop of a hat. It's why I hadn't objected to him keeping me in his room now. Besides, I wasn't

sure how the fuck the others would react to what he'd done. My sneaking suspicion was none of them would be very impressed.

West's eyes opened. His lips curved up into a smile as his fingers moved higher, stroking the bottom of my breast. I tried not to react to his touch. Tried and failed. Goosebumps rose all over my skin. He didn't speak as he raised his hand and used the pad of his finger to brush over the tip of my nipple. The more he did it, the harder it became until it was a stiff peak, eager for more of his maddening fingers.

"I didn't think you were capable of being gentle," I muttered under my breath knowing he would hear me regardless.

Those amber eyes regarded me without a hint of emotion in them.

"I'm capable of many things, Scar," he murmured. "Things you can't even imagine."

He raised his head only to shift higher and lower his mouth towards my nipple. His tongue darted out and traced a line around my areola before he sucked my nipple in his mouth. I bit my lip, trying not to whimper at the way his tongue bathed it. My hand went to his hair again, brushing through the strands and adoring the way it felt against my fingertips.

My nipple popped out of his mouth and he breathed on it, making me tremble from the sensation of his hot breath on my wet skin.

"I'll show you one day. The way I kill would make your stomach turn, but I'll make you watch, let you hear the screams whilst I rip a man's heart out of his chest with my bare hands."

And here I thought psycho killer West had been contained after he'd been satisfied by me. Clearly not.

"Does everything come down to violence with you?"

He pressed a kiss to my breastbone.

"For the most part." His eyes flicked up to mine and a wicked smile appeared on his face. "You like my violence, you're just unwilling to admit it."

I pursed my lips. There was no way in hell I wanted to incite more of his violent nature right now. He'd already hurt me enough today to last a lifetime. I was in no doubt he would make sure my new scar would be permanently etched on my skin for all to see. The only saving grace was he hadn't made it too big. The word was small, but if I wore anything with a low neckline, it would be

visible.

How on earth am I going to explain this to Prescott?

Why was I even thinking about that? It was West's job to explain this shit to them, not mine. It hadn't been my idea.

"If I asked you to be gentle, would you?"

His fingers stroked my nipple as he kissed his way down the centre of my chest.

"Maybe."

I couldn't stop my body from trembling from his touch. All I'd experienced from West was a brutal form of fucking. This was so at odds with what I knew of his nature. And I couldn't help the way one of my walls fractured inside as he chipped away at the bottom of it.

As his mouth met my belly button, he licked his way around it, watching me from under his lashes. I hadn't noticed how long they were before. You couldn't call West anything other than gorgeous, even if he was fucking terrifying at the same time.

"You'd have to be good for me, Scar, then I'll be as gentle as you need."

His fingers curled into my knickers, tugging them down my legs, which he set on his shoulders before burying his face in my pussy. West brought me to not one but two intense orgasms, his tongue bathing my clit and his fingers speared into both my holes. I clawed at his head, but he didn't let up until I was crying, tears streaming down my face at the overwhelming pleasure. I was surprised he didn't try to fuck me again given the way his cock strained in his boxers when he'd finished with me. And I didn't let on how disappointed I was about it. West's dick was something else. At least, the things he did with it were. He knew how to hit me in the right places to send me flying.

West got off the bed and pulled on the rest of his clothes. He made me sit up and dressed me in the things he'd got from Francis' room. Half my clothes were in there and the other in Prescott's room. The loose t-shirt he dressed me in semi-hid the cuts on my skin and was so long it almost covered my jean shorts.

He took my hand and led me from the room after unlocking the door. I fidgeted, following him downstairs where we found all three of the others lounging on the sofas with the TV on. Drake was reading on his tablet while Francis and Prescott spoke in low voices. Their eyes followed me and West as

he took me into the kitchen. He gathered up my hair in his fist, brushing it aside so he could place his lips to my neck.

“Go sit with the others whilst I make lunch,” he whispered into my skin.

“Will you make me a tea, please?”

He brushed a thumb along my stomach.

“As you wish, my little Scar.”

Then West pushed me towards the living room area. I padded over to the sofas, wondering who to sit with. Prescott put his hand out to me, so I chose to sit next to him. He curled his arm around my shoulder and pressed me against his side, kissing the top of my head.

“Okay, little lamb?”

I nodded, unsure of whether to say anything about what happened between me and West. My eyes went to Drake. His indigo ones were narrowed, fixed on my t-shirt. I instinctively pulled it higher on my collarbone and tried not to hiss at the fabric rubbing against the cuts.

“What is that?”

The tone of his voice scared the shit out of me. Deadly and cold.

“What’s what?”

“Don’t be smart, Scarlett.”

Prescott looked at me with concern, his eyes falling on where I was clutching my t-shirt over the carving on my skin.

I don’t want to show them.

Everything inside me screamed to jump off this sofa and hide in the false safety of West’s body. I could hear him moving around the kitchen and knew he’d heard Drake. He wasn’t going to protect me from this.

“What are you hiding, sweetness?” Prescott asked, reaching for my hand.

“Don’t!”

He gripped my fingers, peeling them away from my t-shirt. Then he tucked his own fingers under the fabric and exposed the word ‘war’ carved into my skin. For a moment, Prescott didn’t react, his blue eyes fixed on the marks. Then he sucked in a breath and his head whipped around to West. The anger in his blue eyes made me attempt to shrink back, but Prescott’s arm around my shoulder tightened, keeping me pinned against his side.

My head turned enough to allow me to see West. He stood by the kitchen

island, a chopping board full of vegetables set out before him and his fingers clutched around a large knife. The sight of him casually making lunch shouldn't have made me tremble, but West and knives had always brought me a shit ton of trouble.

“Go on,” West said, giving Prescott a maniacal smile. “Let’s hear it, Pres. You want to have a go at me for what you’re going to describe as mutilation. And I’m perfectly willing to listen.”

Prescott’s mouth pressed into a thin line and he didn’t say a word. He didn’t have to, as Drake rose to his feet, throwing his tablet down. He moved towards me and Prescott, his indigo eyes almost black with anger. My bottom lip trembled when he leant over me and stared at the word on my collarbone himself. Then his eyes flicked up to West.

“I’m only going to ask this once. What the fuck were you thinking when you decided this was appropriate?”

“She needed a reminder of who she belongs to,” came West’s explanation. “A permanent one.”

I swallowed. It’s not as if I stopped him from doing it. But could I have done so if I tried? When it came to West, I didn’t think so.

“You carved ‘war’ into her fucking skin, West.”

“You can blame Pres.”

“What the fuck? I have nothing to do with this shit,” Prescott interjected. “I did not tell you to mutilate our girl.”

“What can I say? Your obsession with the horsemen wore off on me.”

“Fuck you. I’m not letting you put this shit on me.”

“We put up with a lot from you, but this... this...” Drake trailed off.

Without thinking, I reached out and touched Drake’s face. His eyes snapped to mine. The harsh breath emitting from his lips when I stroked a thumb across his cheek had me in half a mind to keep my mouth shut.

“It’s okay,” I whispered. “Don’t be mad at him.”

Who the fuck knew why I was defending West’s actions. Perhaps it was the way he’d cared for me afterwards. And he had made me come three times today.

Drake’s eyes narrowed.

“What did you just say?”

“I don’t want you all to fight over this.”

He straightened, forcing me to drop my hand from his face.

“Are you seriously defending him after everything he’s done to you?”

He pointed at the cuts on my collarbone. Prescott released my t-shirt, allowing it to settle back over them. I winced but kept staring up at Drake and his cold expression.

“No, but what is the point in arguing? It’s not going to change anything. I’m the one who has to live with it, not you.”

I don’t think Drake liked me speaking back to him. His jaw ticked and his hands curled into fists at his sides as if he was holding back from grabbing hold of me to teach me another one of his lessons. Pretty sure I’d had enough fucking lessons today after I’d been scarred for life by a psycho who was more than a little obsessed with me.

“We’ll discuss this later,” was all he said before he walked back to the sofa and sat down.

I had a feeling I would not be included in any discussions the four of them had about what West had done. Not wanting to earn myself another punishment, I kept my mouth shut and curled into Prescott instead, wrapping my arm around him. He rested his head on mine.

“Do you want me to punch him for you, little lamb?” he whispered.

“Who? West or Drake?” I whispered back.

He snorted.

“Both?”

I shook my head and buried my face in his chest, wincing at the movement of my shoulder. It pulled on the cuts. I was going to have to deal with this while it healed.

“No, just hold me.”

He kissed my hair and didn’t say any more. I was tired and it was barely the afternoon. My father hadn’t tried to call me back last night. I hadn’t heard from him yet today either. No doubt it was only a matter of time before he got hold of me. And to be honest, I dreaded that far more than anything these four could do to me.

While I didn’t know how I felt about West’s actions, I did know he would protect me. He’d told me so. And if he ever found out about what my father had done to me, I was pretty sure he would make good on his promise to kill

whoever had hurt me.

Did I want my parents dead for what they'd done to me?

It was a question I had no answer to.

No answer at all.

TWENTY NINE

PRESCOTT

I couldn't remember the last time I'd seen Drake this pissed. He paced the room like an angry dragon waiting to strike. His nostrils flared and his fists were balled at his sides. West had done a lot of shit in the years we'd known each other, but apparently, this was a step too far for Drake. And to be honest, I was kind of unhappy about it too. West had never learnt the art of restraint.

Scarlett had been forced to go back to my room by Drake. She'd glared at him behind his back before she'd left with me. I'd had to lock the door under his orders to prevent her from coming out, but not before I'd kissed her thoroughly and told her it would be okay. Scarlett had this look in her eyes like she didn't believe me, but I'd be back for her. I would take care of my girl.

"Of all the fucking things you could do to her, West, of all the fucking things," Drake ground out, not stilling in his pacing.

West didn't say a word. He merely sat on the kitchen island with his legs wide and his hands dangling between them as he lent on his thighs with his elbows. The lunch between the five of us had been stilted and silent, the tension in the air ripe with anger. The only person who'd kept his mouth shut about the whole thing was Francis. I had no fucking clue what he thought with his blank expression. It wasn't like him. Usually, he'd be the first one to be giving West hell. The two of them were at each other's throats more often than not.

"I tell you I'm suspicious of that cunt hurting her and this is what you do in response? You brand her? Fuck. I don't know what to do with you any longer."

West's mouth twitched but he kept staring at Drake without a single hint of emotion in his expression. It meant he was in one of his moods. The kind where he could snap at the drop of a hat and things could get bloody.

“You didn’t ask her how she felt about it,” I put in, waving my hand at Drake. His head whipped around, the glare he sent my way utterly chilling.

“Are you excusing his behaviour?”

“Fuck no. I’m just saying... shouldn’t we ask her? Like she said, she’s the one who has to live with it.”

I didn’t want to get into an argument over the whole thing. Sure, I could deck West, but would it actually help matters? No. It would merely increase tensions between us. All of us were already on edge after being in the war room and Drake finding Scarlett talking to Stuart last night. I wanted to ask her, but I wouldn’t. I might trust Scarlett with my heart. It didn’t mean I trusted her to tell me the truth about her home life before she came back to us. Not when she was clearly under Stuart’s control.

“This isn’t about her. It’s about him.” Drake pointed at West. “You need to rein it the fuck in, West. We are already walking on thin ice. How is she going to cover that up, huh? Did you think about that?”

“You should know he’s not some mindless animal,” Francis said. “Everything he does is deliberate.”

It was the first time he’d spoken since Scarlett had come downstairs for lunch with West earlier. The guy sat on the sofa with his arms crossed over his chest, his grey eyes narrowing on Drake. West eyed the back of Francis’ head, suspicion flitting across his features.

“Now you’re defending him. What the fuck is this?”

“This isn’t me defending shit, Drake. I’m saying you’re asking the wrong questions. Why don’t you ask West what happened between him and Scarlett when we were teenagers? Might give you a better idea of why he felt the need to carve himself into her skin.”

Drake stilled, his eyes going to West.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Francis stood up and dug his hands in his pockets.

“I think it’s time someone came clean, then the rest of you might stop hating on me for that night.”

He walked over to the windows and stared out at the city with his back to the rest of us. West’s eyes were on Francis. He didn’t look annoyed but he didn’t look happy either. I didn’t know what to think. I knew West had a crush on

Scarlett when we were kids, but as for something happening between them? It was unexpected.

“Did she tell you?” West asked, his voice low.

“Yes, some of it, anyway. I kept it a secret this whole time so you can thank me later,” Francis replied without turning around. “She made me promise not to speak of it. I don’t want to break her trust. It has to come from you.”

West let out a breath, his eyes falling on the floor in front of him. The last time I saw him look defeated was when we discovered who took Scarlett. He opened his mouth and his words came out hushed.

“A week before her accident, Scarlett came over to mine. She was having a hard time dealing with what happened.”

I winced. The memory of the events leading up to the night of her accident descending over us like a black fucking cloud.

“She didn’t want to be reminded of it, of that day. She wanted a new memory... and she wanted it with me.”

West rubbed his chin. The implications of his words were clear, but he continued on anyway.

“We were going to make a go of it, a real relationship, you know. And we were going to tell you all about it, but then...” he trailed off and closed his eyes.

Then the accident happened. Then our lives were changed irrevocably. And nothing was ever the same again.

“The first time she had sex wasn’t when I fucked her in my office. It was when we were sixteen. She was mine. She’s still mine.” He put a hand on his chest. “She’ll always be mine but she doesn’t remember it. She doesn’t remember that night and the promises we made to each other. So be mad at me all you want. I don’t care. But you don’t get to tell me I did something wrong when she and I have a history you don’t know a fucking thing about.”

Francis turned around then. West raised his head and they shared a look of understanding between them. Something about it told me West was still holding a few things back, but Francis wasn’t going to make him tell us the rest. Wasn’t going to force him to confess his other secrets.

“I told her because of your relationship,” Francis said. “She deserved to know what her boyfriend was up to on her behalf. What we’d all decided to do.”

West jumped off the kitchen counter and shoved his hands in his pockets.

His eyes narrowed.

“I know, Frankie, but it doesn’t mean I forgive you for it.”

Then he walked away towards the stairs without even sparing me and Drake a glance. I’d known West had feelings for Scarlett, but her reciprocating them was something else. West’s behaviour over the years started to make more sense in light of his little revelation.

“Well, thanks for the fucking heads up on that shit, Francis,” Drake ground out.

“It wasn’t my place to tell you. Their relationship is between him and Scarlett, not the rest of us.”

I rose to my feet and made my way over to the stairs.

“Where are you going?” Drake asked.

“To be with Scarlett.”

I didn’t stop to let him ask me anything else. My feet carried me up the stairs and along the hallway. I unlocked my bedroom door, walked inside and closed it behind me. Scarlett was sitting on the floor with her legs crossed staring out of the window. I crossed the room, lowered myself to the floor behind her, curled my arms around her waist and held her against my chest.

“Little lamb,” I whispered into her hair before resting my chin on her shoulder.

A big part of me felt for West. She didn’t know what she’d lost, but he did. And it was clear being around her tortured him way more than any of us had previously thought.

“I don’t hate him for doing it,” she murmured, her eyes still fixed on the window. “I might not understand West and why he did it, but I don’t hate him.”

I held her tighter against me, waiting for her to continue. Scarlett wasn’t done. I could feel the words she wanted to let out vibrating inside her. Her hand raised and she brushed her fingers over her t-shirt right over where he’d cut her.

“He scares me, but as he keeps telling me I like the fear. I like how it makes me feel inside.” She turned her head to look at me. “The first night we were together you said you wanted to chase me, catch me and fuck me in the dirt... do you still want that?”

My fingers traced a line across her stomach. The thought of giving into my primal side with her had me growing hard. I wasn’t sure why she’d brought it up

when we were talking about West, but I wasn't going to ask or press her.

"Yes."

I captured her hand and brought it to my lips, kissing her fingertips.

"I feel alive when I'm scared, Pres, so chase me, terrify me the way he does," she whispered, staring into my eyes. "I trust you to keep me safe."

I tilted my face closer to hers so our mouths were almost brushing against each other.

"You want me to take you out to the woods and hunt you down? Make you feel the fear?"

"Please."

I kissed her lips, imagining myself running after her. How I'd make her desperate for me. My hand slid down her stomach and cupped her jean-clad pussy. She rocked her hips back into me.

"Didn't West fuck you after he carved into you?" I asked, my words vibrating across her lips.

"He did."

"And yet you're still needy?"

"I'm always needy for you."

I groaned, attacking her mouth again and rubbing her through her shorts. Kissing this woman felt so natural. There was no need for games and rewards. The way we felt about each other surpassed that. She was my world. My fucking sun.

Scarlett turned in my embrace and straddled my legs, wrapping her arms around my neck. Her hazel-green eyes fixed on mine. They bled with her emotions, searing into me. I reached up and stroked her hair from her face before cupping her cheek. My other hand curled around her behind.

"How pissed is Drake over what West did?"

"Pretty pissed."

"And Francis?"

I shrugged.

"I think he understands."

She leant closer, her nose knocking against mine.

"How do you feel?"

I kissed the corner of her mouth.

“West does as he pleases. He always has. Your feelings about it are the only ones that matter to me, little lamb. Only you.”

While I wasn't happy about West's actions, learning about his past with Scarlett made me realise there were too many secrets between all of us. There was too much history between us for this to be something we fell out over.

“I don't know how I feel.”

“That's okay, sweetness. You're my concern because I love you.”

Her eyes softened. I couldn't stop telling her how I felt now it was out in the open. I'd never loved anyone before. Didn't think I was capable of it. Of allowing someone access to my heart. My need to express my feelings was compounded by the fact I didn't know how long it would be until she remembered the past. And when she did, everything could come crashing down around us. I stole these moments between us where our love wasn't tainted by it. Where she didn't question this thing between us. Our relationship. Where the lies and secrets weren't an issue like they would be when she found out the truth.

Her fingers threaded in my hair before she rubbed her nose against mine.

“You're a little bit perfect.”

I squeezed her behind.

“Only a little?”

“You're my kind of perfect, Pres.”

I lowered my hand from her cheek, brushing my fingertips along her jaw. Then they hovered over the cuts below her collarbone. I didn't want to hurt her by touching them.

“Is it sore?”

“Yes... and he told me no one else is allowed to touch it whilst it's healing except him.”

“Sounds like West.”

He was one possessive motherfucker when it came to Scarlett. Most people wouldn't understand why he was okay with us touching her but not anyone else. But the five of us were bound for life. It had always been this way between us. Only now it had become more about sexual desire rather than friendship.

“I didn't think he was into the whole horsemen thing like you are.”

I smiled.

“Am I still your Pestilence?”

Scarlett ran her teeth over her bottom lip.

“Always.”

“And he’s your War.”

She grinned.

“Yeah, I guess he is.”

She kissed me, her nails digging into my scalp. Then Scarlett pushed me down on the floor and rubbed herself against me. I was completely ready to fuck her senseless like I had planned to this morning before West decided to intervene.

Even as I worked her little jean shorts down her legs, I couldn’t shake the feeling a storm was coming in the wake of what West had revealed today. And none of us could ever prepare for the fallout.

THIRTY

DRAKE

The weekend had gone by with far too much drama between the five of us. I swear having Scarlett here was creating more tension between the four of us than ever. West and I were not exactly on speaking terms after he'd decided to carve a fucking brand into her skin. I knew I had to get over it, but fuck, she'd received enough scars to last a lifetime. The worst ones were invisible. They were locked within her memories. And I knew I had to stop procrastinating when it came to the issue of her amnesia.

Scarlett hadn't spoken to me all day. She'd brought me coffee and been as silent as a damn mouse, refusing to make eye contact and looking distinctly uncomfortable in my presence. I suppose she was annoyed at my dismissal over her feelings regarding the 'war' issue.

When she approached me after dinner while I sat reading in the living room on the sofa, I narrowed my eyes at her, immediately suspicious of what she wanted. Scarlett sat down next to me, rubbed her fingers over her thighs and gave me a tentative smile. Her nervous habits had never changed. She was always worrying at something with her fingers.

"Um, so... I need to ask you something," she ventured.

I put my tablet on the arm of the chair.

"Go on then."

She glanced over at Prescott who was filling the dishwasher in the kitchen. West had disappeared off somewhere, probably to smoke a joint while Francis had decided he wanted to work out.

"Would it be possible for me to leave early on Thursday?"

I almost outright said no, but I needed to be a little less closed off with

Scarlett. She told me she wanted me to talk to her like a normal human being. And she wouldn't have asked without a reason. I intended to find out what it was.

"It entirely depends on why you're asking for time off."

Her eyes went to her lap. It was clear this conversation made her uncomfortable and she didn't want to have it with me.

"My... my dad wants me to go to a game on Thursday and he wants to see me before kick-off. I don't really care about football, but it's my dad and I haven't seen him since I moved."

I desperately tried to keep myself in check knowing she'd spoken to Stuart again today. I wanted to rip that motherfucker a new one and tell her no, she couldn't go under any circumstances. Not when he might be hurting her. Not when she was ours. And not when there was a risk he'd take her back. He'd take her from us again. I couldn't have that. None of us could.

And why the fuck did he even want to see her? Whatever the reason was, it couldn't be good.

"He wants you to go to a football match."

Her eyes flicked up to mine. My tone was flat. I couldn't afford to let on how much this angered me.

"Yeah, sounds crazy but I've never been before."

It hardly surprised me Stuart had kept that part of his life from Scarlett. He'd hidden her from the world for ten years in a place we couldn't get to her. His estate was almost impenetrable. Security everywhere monitoring everything twenty-four-seven. It was a fortress. And we'd only recently found out it was where he'd been keeping her. Before, we'd had no idea where Stuart had hidden our woman.

"Do you want to go?"

She nibbled her bottom lip.

"I guess so. It would be nice to see my parents."

I could tell it was a lie from the way her voice shook.

I glanced at Prescott who was eyeing us with concern. He'd leant up against the counter, seemingly not wanting to interrupt my conversation with her. Who knew if she'd mentioned this to him before she came to me. I doubted it. Scarlett didn't talk about the Carvers with us. The fact she was now meant

Stuart had pushed her into this. He clearly wanted information from her. Maybe I should let her go to see what would happen. To see what he might ask her to do.

“It’ll be perfectly safe if that’s what you’re worried about. And he’s sending me two tickets. I don’t have to go alone.”

Now I really was suspicious as fuck.

“He said I should bring Mason, but as I’m not allowed to see him...”

“Francis will go with you.”

Prescott’s eyes widened and she looked at me like I’d grown two heads.

“What?”

“You’ll go with Francis.”

There was no way in hell I would send West with her. It would end up in a bloodbath. Prescott would be way too protective over Scarlett. She wouldn’t want me with her so I wasn’t going to offer. The safest bet was Francis. I trusted him not to fuck anything up. He could keep a cool head. The only person who’d ever managed to rattle my best friend was West. And it was par for the fucking course. West wasn’t exactly known for keeping his mouth shut.

“Francis?”

“Yes.”

“But—”

“This is not up for debate. If you want to go, he is coming with you.”

I could see Prescott wasn’t very happy about my decision, but he could fucking deal with it. If he went, he would act far too coupley with her and it would spell disaster for us. Stuart could not find out about their relationship under any circumstances. Not when it would likely antagonise him. Francis was the safe one. He wouldn’t act like her fucking boyfriend when they were there.

“You haven’t asked him if he wants to go.”

“He doesn’t have a choice.”

“Do you make all of his decisions for him?”

My hand snapped out and gripped her chin, tugging her closer to me. She let out a yelp, her hands landing on my chest to stop herself from toppling into me.

“Do not question me.”

Her hands pressed against my chest, trying to push me away from her.

“Let go!”

“No.”

She ripped herself out of my grasp and scrambled away from me. At least, she tried. I grabbed a hold of her leg and tugged her right into my lap. I held her arms behind her back to stop her from struggling.

“Get off me!”

“Do you want me to change my mind, Scarlett? Is that it? Because this is only going to end one way if you don’t cut it out.”

The way she glared at me made my dick thicken. Fuck. Why did she do this to me? The war between us was intoxicating as fuck. I wanted to pin her down on the damn coffee table and give it to her until she was crying and begging for mercy.

“I want you to stop being such a dick to me.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“Are you sure you’re not acting out because you want my dick?”

A loud snort came from the kitchen but I ignored Prescott. He was better off staying the fuck out of this.

Scarlett’s mouth dropped open. Her eyes widened and her body stiffened in my grasp.

“What the fuck did you just say to me?”

“Isn’t this how it goes, Scarlett? You act out, I punish you for it, you get wet and I deny you pleasure, hmm?”

“Go fuck yourself, Drake. Literally, just go fuck yourself. I don’t want anything from you.”

I leant closer.

“Liar.”

Before she could say another word, my mouth was against hers, tasting her fucking intoxicating bratty lips. The ones I couldn’t get out of my damn head. Scarlett struggled against my grip, trying to turn her face away but I held it between my fingers and kept her still. I forced her to open up to me, needing to taste every inch of her. Fuck, I’d never wanted someone more than her. Never needed a girl so damn fucking much. She tortured me with her words and constant need to disobey me.

Her tongue tangled with mine in a battle of wills as I kissed her deeper, wanting so much fucking more. Then Scarlett bit my lip so hard, she drew

blood. I released her mouth, panting. The metallic taste of my own blood only made my dick throb between us. The wild look in her eyes and the heaving of her chest told me she was just as affected.

I licked the blood before spreading it across my teeth and baring them to her. Her nostrils flared then she ripped herself out of my grasp, toppling backwards on the sofa. She was up and scrambling away from me the next second.

“Fuck you!” she screamed before running towards the stairs.

I stood, watching her attempt to get away. There would be nowhere she could hide from me. Absolutely no-fucking-where.

“Well, that went well,” Prescott said.

“Stay out of this,” I growled as I strode after her.

That girl was not going to get away with this shit. No, I was going to punish her for biting me even though it had only heightened my need for her.

“Get away from me!” she screeched when she looked behind her as she ran up the stairs.

I didn’t answer her, my long legs eating up the space between us. She charged down the hallway when she reached the top of the stairs, but I wasn’t far behind her. She’d barely got to the first door when I pounced, grabbing hold of her by the waist and hauling her up against my chest. She kicked out and screamed, but I slammed a hand over her mouth.

“You are trying my patience right now, Scarlett,” I murmured in her ear. “Severely.”

I carried her down the hallway, not caring about the way she struggled against me. Nothing would stop me from having her now. My self-control was in tatters on the floor. My restraint... non-existent. At the end of the hallway, I kicked open the door to our play space. There was no fucking way I was allowing her in my bedroom when she’d misbehaved.

I dropped Scarlett down face first on the bed, my hand planted on her back to keep her in place. My hand went to my tie, tugging it until it loosened before I pulled it off. I took both her hands and coiled the tie around her wrists, knotting it to restrain them behind her back. She pulled at it, trying to get out of my makeshift restraint.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing!”

“You know your actions have consequences with me, Scarlett. Don’t act like

you're surprised this is happening right now."

My hands went to her skirt, shoving it up until it sat on her hips. I almost fucking died when I realised she wasn't wearing underwear.

"Was this for Pres, huh? You giving him unfettered access to this pussy now?"

She shook her head, still struggling against the bed while I stroked a thumb down her wet slit. This, she couldn't hide from me. The way she wanted it even when she fought against me.

"No! It wasn't for him."

"Then who?"

She turned her face into the covers.

"Why would I tell you?"

I removed my thumb from her slit only to smack her pussy. She cried out from the impact, shifting on the bed.

"I will punish you if you don't."

"West stole them from me earlier. He said I wasn't allowed to wear them at work," she whispered.

I wanted to roll my eyes. What the fuck was West playing at? Didn't matter. One less barrier for me to deal with. I smacked her pussy again for good measure, earning another yelp from her before my hands went to my own clothes. My dick was so hard, it ached and I couldn't help rubbing the tip along her wetness.

"Just so we're clear, this is for me, not you."

And with that, I thrust inside her. Her cry and the way she tried to escape made me smile. I gripped the tie around her wrists and used it as an anchor. There was no build-up. No gentleness. I fucked her with long, intense thrusts, making her squirm on the bed. The only sounds in the air were the wet sucking noises of her pussy around my cock, my body smacking into hers and her cries.

"If you behaved for me, I wouldn't have to punish you, Scarlett. I wouldn't have to keep teaching you these lessons, but you don't seem to want to learn."

No matter how I tried to keep my voice calm and steady, it was strained. I was lost to her sweet pussy and the sensations of her walls clenching around my dick. She wanted to hate me for fucking her, but she couldn't do a damn thing about the pleasure I was giving her. I knew she wouldn't admit how good my

dick was making her feel.

“Fuck you, Drake. Just fuck you,” she whimpered. “I hate you.”

“No, you hate how much you want me.”

“Go to hell!”

“Gladly. I’ll take you with me so you can burn too, burn in this with me.”

She shut up then and took what I was giving her. I leant over her, still punishing her wet pussy with my cock.

“We’re toxic for each other,” I whispered in her ear. “So fucking toxic, but it doesn’t mean I’ll let you go. I’m never fucking letting you leave us.”

All my pent up lust and rage was coming out in the way I fucked her. In the way I took from her without mercy, not caring if she wanted it or not. Scarlett was a fucking sickness inside me. She’d infected me the moment she walked through the doors of our damn building. The moment I’d laid eyes on her again after ten years. I’d searched for her for so long, built up this image of the girl we’d lost in my mind, and now she was here... I was lost in her defiance, in her fucking attitude, in her everything.

I let out a grunt as I came inside her. It had been way too fast, but I didn’t care. This wasn’t about pleasure. It was about punishment. I pressed my forehead into her back, trying to hold back from making further noise as my climax washed over me. Fuck she smelt so good. Like cinnamon.

She smiled at me as I deposited a cinnamon roll in her lap from the local shop.

“You are the absolute best, you know that?”

I shrugged, taking a seat next to her and knocked my shoulder into hers.

“I just know what you like, Little Nyx.”

Scarlett leant over and pressed her lips to my cheek.

“Don’t be modest, you’re a sweetheart... but only when no one else is looking.”

“Only for you.”

My heart fucking hurt as the memory washed over me. I wasn’t always like this. I used to be open and free with my emotions. Then, not only was Scarlett ripped away from us, but my family got torn to pieces by my cunt of a father. I hated him for it, utterly despised the man. He could quite frankly burn for all I cared. We’d all be better off he wasn’t in the fucking world any longer.

I hated how she’d reminded me of that shit. How when I’d needed her the

most she wasn't there. It wasn't Scarlett's fault, but it didn't matter to my heart. Not when she was so mixed up in my pain.

I moved off her so fast, she cried out from my dick pulling from her abused pussy. Shoving it back away in my boxers, I could feel the tendrils of toxicity suffocating me. I couldn't be near her any longer. Couldn't face this shit between us. I didn't stop to untie her, striding out of the room and hating myself for every moment. My feet didn't stop until I was back downstairs. Prescott was standing by the kitchen island with a beer in his hand.

"Go see to her, she needs you," I ground out as I walked under the stairs and tugged open the door to the stairwell.

"Where is she?" he called after me.

"In the playroom."

I didn't stop to hear his reply. I had to get away from everything, from everyone, before I did something I couldn't take back. I'd already fucked up with Scarlett tonight. And I wasn't sure she would forgive me for it, or if our relationship with each other would ever be the same again.

THIRTY ONE

SCARLETT

What the fuck happened? What the actual fuck literally just happened between me and Drake? I lay there on my front with my legs dangling off the bed, tears running down my cheeks, feeling as though I couldn't get any lower. My arms were trapped behind my back, making it impossible for me to go anywhere. Besides, how could I move after that? After he'd punished me.

A pitiful sob erupted from my lips. I didn't think I could despise him any more than I already did, but I was wrong. He was right about us being toxic. I pushed him into showing me his emotions and he responded with nothing but brutality. Like his true nature was as dark and twisted as West's. At least with West, he let it all hang out there for everyone to see. He wasn't hiding anything. Drake was a solid wall of coldness, but underneath was an inferno waiting to burn you alive. And I had stoked the flames a little too much.

"Little lamb."

Another sob fell from my mouth with his deep voice encompassing me. I could hear him move towards me, and his hands immediately went to the tie around my wrists.

"Pres," I whimpered.

"Shh, I've got you, sweetness."

He unknotted the tie, freeing me, and picked me up off the bed before sitting down with me in his lap. I lost it then, burying my face in his shirt and letting it all out. My muffled cries echoed around the room while Prescott held me to his chest and stroked my hair.

What the hell would I do without him? This man had become everything to me in such a short space of time. My heart was his. Irrevocably. West might

have carved his brand into my skin, but Prescott had carved his name on my heart.

“Take me out of here, please. I don’t want to be here.”

He stood without saying anything and took me out of their playroom. I curled my arms around his neck and rested my head on his shoulder. A door opened behind Prescott. My eyes met West’s a moment later as he stepped out. His amber ones narrowed as he took us in. I couldn’t contain my tears or my choking breaths.

“What’s going on?”

Prescott paused on the way to his room.

“Drake and Scarlett had a fight.”

I was glad he did the talking. I was incapable of speech, of explaining what their friend had done to me.

He continued walking, but what I didn’t expect was for West to follow.

“A fight?”

“Mmm.”

Prescott opened his door, carrying me into his room. He didn’t close it behind him, striding over to his bathroom. He set me down on the sink counter, but I wouldn’t let go of him. West came with us and leant against the doorframe.

“Shh, little lamb, let me clean you up, okay?”

I shook my head, keeping my arms wrapped around his neck so he couldn’t go anywhere. My legs locked around his waist. If Prescott let me go, I would disintegrate. I was barely holding it together as it was.

“What the fuck happened?”

Prescott turned his head towards West.

“Can you get Francis to go after Drake?”

“Not until you tell me what the fuck this is about.”

Prescott kissed my hair and held me, stroking my back. I was still crying. I couldn’t stop.

“Just text him, please. I don’t know what went on in the playroom between her and Drake, okay?”

My eyes were on West even as I held Prescott to me. His eyes were narrowed while he pulled out his phone and fiddled with it before slipping it back in his

pocket. Shoving off the door, he stepped towards us. His hand came up and buried in my hair, pulling me from Prescott's neck. West stared down at me with an unreadable expression on his face. Then he pressed his forehead to mine. I let out another sob, wondering how and when things had changed between me and him. Had him marking me been a turning point? I had no fucking clue.

"What did Drake do, my little Scar?"

"He punished me," I hiccupped.

"How and why?"

I didn't know how to answer him. How to begin to explain the escalation between Drake and me until it reached boiling point. Until we clashed in a mess of unwanted feelings and emotions towards each other.

"My dad wants me to go to a game on Thursday and... and I didn't like the fact he told me Frankie would go with me without even consulting him first. It got out of control and... and he... he..."

"He did what?"

My body shook with the memory of Drake pinning me to the bed, restraining my wrists and fucking me. I hated him for the way it made me feel. For how scared I was of him and how that fear made me wet. And most of all, I hated how he'd used sex as a way to punish me for fighting him. He used something so intimate rather than the pain of his palms or his belt. I would have infinitely preferred that to what he'd actually done to me.

"He fucked me to punish me... to hurt me for talking back to him," I whispered, choking out the words because they fucking broke something inside me. "And I hate myself for it. No matter how much I want to hate him, I can't. I fucking can't. My heart won't let me. It won't let me hate any of you, and I don't understand why."

West said nothing, but I could see my words affected him by the way his eyes darkened. And I knew they affected Prescott, as his arms around me tightened. West pulled away and looked at Prescott over the top of my head. They shared a silent conversation between them for a long moment.

"Undress her," West said before shoving off the counter and moving towards the shower.

My hands around Prescott's neck loosened as he released me and

straightened. West flipped the shower on before stepping out, his hands going to his t-shirt. I watched him strip out of his clothes. Prescott's hands were at my blouse, unbuttoning it and tugging it off my shoulders. He unhooked my bra, chucking it away too. Then he helped me off the counter, unzipped my skirt and tugged it down my legs, leaving me bare.

I didn't ask what was happening when West took my hand and pulled me into Prescott's shower with him. The hot water streamed over us instantly. West turned me around and pressed my back against his chest. His body was warm and calmed the war raging inside me a fraction. My eyes went to Prescott who'd started to strip too. West rubbed my arms and pressed kisses to my shoulder. It didn't take long for Prescott to join us, stepping up to my front and picking up my shower gel. West shifted back slightly while Prescott lathered up his hands. Then they were on me, dusting over my skin as he washed me.

The next thing I knew, West's hands were in my hair, applying shampoo to it with a gentle touch as he massaged my wet strands. I didn't know what to do or say. The two of them were taking care of me without having been asked. All of their touches were soft as if they knew I needed soothing.

As West tipped my head back to rinse it, Prescott's hands curled around my face and he leant down to kiss me. His kisses were comforting. The whole experience was. And I ended up crying in his mouth. I knew Prescott could be caring, but I had no idea West was capable of such things until he washed my hair with such reverence. It made my chest ache. Nothing about this was sexual, despite the fact we were all naked in the hot water with our bodies pressed together.

"My little lamb," Prescott whispered against my lips. "My precious little lamb."

I curled my hands around his waist, his wet skin feeling soft against the pads of my fingertips. West's hands roamed down my back, stroking along the wet strands of my hair. I sighed in Prescott's mouth. Their touch was my healing balm.

West pulled me out of the stream of the water to apply conditioner to my hair next. I reached out and grabbed Prescott's shower gel. He raised an eyebrow as I squirted it on my hands before rubbing them over his torso.

"Let me," I murmured over the sound of the shower running.

He didn't stop me from washing him in return. Being able to focus on his body helped stop my thoughts from running at a million miles an hour. My hands ran over his biceps and the taut muscles of his stomach. He watched me the entire time, his blue eyes full of emotion.

When I moved him to rinse off, he gripped my chin between his fingers, tipping my face up towards him.

"I love you, sweetness."

Prescott didn't leave me in any doubt of his feelings when we were alone, unlike certain other people in this household. I hadn't expected him to say it in front of West. My heart swelled. I went up on my tiptoes and pressed my body to his, wrapping my arms around his neck.

"Me too," I whispered into his skin.

Then I let him go and turned around. West pulled me to him and ran his fingers through my hair, tipping it back under the spray to rinse off the conditioner. My fingers itched to touch him. To wash him the way I had Prescott. Did I ask him if I could or did I just do it? The intimacy of the moment made me bold. My hand went to the gel again, and I lathered it up in my hands. I placed them against his chest. It reminded me of the night they'd given me drugs, and I'd wanted to touch him all over. If I was honest, I'd wanted to explore his body for longer than I cared to admit.

A low rumble erupted from West's chest as I washed him. It vibrated through me, making me want to open up to him, even though I knew he was fucking crazy. His spirit was twisted, but something about it intoxicated me. His nature called to mine. Made me want to stay with him in the abyss, no matter how many times he hurt me.

His fingers went to my shoulder, stroking over the cuts he'd made. I hissed in response, making him smile at me in a maddening way. It hurt. He knew it. He didn't care. And right then, I wanted it to hurt. I wanted to bleed out all over the place, to feel something other than the abject misery Drake had brought on.

West traced the word war with his fingertip, reminding me I belonged to him. And for some crazy fucked up reason, I wanted it to be true. I needed to be his.

"You're an addiction, Scar. One none of us can escape," he murmured as he leant closer. "My curse and my addiction."

He nibbled my jaw before biting down on my earlobe, making me arch into

his body.

“I’ll never be free of you.”

His words had a deeper meaning I didn’t understand. The soft agony in his voice made me ache. My hands curled around his back, running up his skin to keep him close to me.

If I was his curse, he was mine too. All of them were. I was bound by my word to my father to destroy them, and yet, I didn’t want to hurt them.

“Don’t leave me tonight,” I whispered. “Please.”

West didn’t respond. He pulled out of my embrace and finished rinsing the conditioner from my hair. Then he turned off the shower and pushed me towards Prescott, who took me out of the shower and bundled me up in a soft towel. I let him dry me off and seat me on the sink counter. My eyes roamed over the two men drying their bodies in front of me before they both pulled underwear on. The way they were so casual about being nude together, like it was no big deal, made me smile. Even if they hadn’t shared me in bed, it was clear they had a very close-knit friendship with each other. It didn’t stop their volatility, but I’d come to realise it was their nature.

Prescott picked up my hairdryer I’d left on his counter yesterday morning. I didn’t stop him from helping me dry my hair. He’d watched me do it enough times now. Then he picked up my toothbrush, squirting toothpaste on it before handing it to me. When I was done brushing my teeth, he plucked me off the counter and carried me into the bedroom. West followed, pulling back the covers when we reached the bed. Prescott laid me down in the middle, giving me a smile as he stroked my hair back from my face.

“You should get some sleep, sweetness.”

“Are you coming to bed?”

He nodded.

“Give me a few minutes, okay?”

Prescott didn’t wait for my response, pulling the covers over my naked body and tucking me in. He turned on one of the bedside lamps before clapping to turn out the main lights.

“I’m going to check on the others,” he murmured to West as he passed by him to grab his dressing gown.

Prescott shrugged it on and disappeared from the room. West stood watching

me for a long moment. He stepped towards the bed, knelt on the end and crawled over me, planting one of his hands by my head while the other he laid between my breasts.

“Do you love Pres?”

There was no emotion in his eyes, but his question made me tense underneath him. If I lied to West, I didn’t think it would go well for me. And after the shit with Drake, I didn’t want to cause any further problems.

“Yes.”

West licked his bottom lip and shook his head a little before he smiled. His hand left my chest. He curled it around the covers next to me and pulled them back. He flopped down beside me, tugging them over himself before he cupped one of my breasts in a possessive manner and buried his face in my neck. I didn’t know what to make of his reaction, nor the fact he’d laid down next to me.

“What are you doing?” I whispered, even as my fingers entwined with his on my chest.

“Staying like you asked me to.”

For a moment I was absolutely stumped. What would Prescott say when he came back and found West in his bed with me?

“Is Pres going to be okay with that?”

“Don’t care either way.”

I couldn’t help smiling.

Typical West, not giving a shit what other people think.

“West?”

“Mmm?”

“Are you ever going to kiss me?”

His breath dusted across my neck.

“No.”

I wanted to ask him what his aversion to kissing was. West clearly had demons I wasn’t privy to, but it struck me as odd when the others did it.

“What about if I kissed you?”

West’s whole body tensed at my words. His fingers tightened around my breast, squeezing my fingers between his.

“Stop pressing the issue, Scar. It’s non-negotiable. I don’t kiss. Deal with it.”

I didn't get to respond as Prescott came back into the room, shutting the door behind him. He didn't comment as he went back into the bathroom. A few minutes later, he came out with two piles of clothes in his hands. He set them on his armchair before getting into bed on the other side to me from West. He turned out the light and pressed a kiss to my forehead before curling an arm around my waist and laying his head next to mine.

"I told you to get some sleep, little lamb."

His fingers stroked my skin, encouraging me to drift off. Clearly, he wasn't perturbed by West being in his bed. I allowed myself to relax against the two of them. And I fell asleep wondering if Drake was okay after what happened between us, even though I shouldn't give a shit about him at all.

THIRTY TWO

FRANCIS

I didn't think I would be happy to be attending a fucking football match today, but after all the shit between Drake and Scarlett, I was glad to be out of the damn building. The aftermath of Drake's loss of control had been messy. I'd found him on the roof, pacing and dragging his hands through his hair. It took me half an hour to convince him to come back downstairs. He'd gone on and on about how he'd totally fucked up, and Scarlett would never forgive him for going too far. If he just apologised to her, things would likely blow over, but I let him work out his feelings until he'd calmed down.

Over the next couple of days, Scarlett refused to go near him and only communicated with him through email. After his whole guilt rant about the situation, it didn't come as a surprise when he acquiesced to her desire not to be around him. He had even taken to making his own coffee, something I'd taken the piss out of him for. Not that he'd been very impressed. Tonya offered to make it, but Drake told her it was none of her business and she should stick to doing the job he paid her for. I had a feeling that after she'd given Scarlett a hard time, Drake was less inclined to be nice to his step-cousin.

Speaking of Tonya, she was getting on my last fucking nerve. She'd had the audacity to ask me about Scarlett and her relationship with us. I'd politely told her our personal lives had nothing to do with work. Not sure she liked my answer, judging by the way she'd started giving me attitude for the rest of the week.

So yeah, I was glad to be away from the fucking drama, even if it meant I had to see the man who'd taken our girl from us.

I pulled up in the car park near the stadium and turned off the engine. Scarlett

and I had changed into smart casual clothes for this little outing. She rubbed her fingers along her black jeans, telling me she was nervous. I reached over and stroked her cheek, making her turn her face towards me.

“We don’t have to go. I can take you somewhere else instead.”

She gave me a tentative smile.

“I promised my dad.”

I didn’t give a single fuck about watching the game. It hardly interested me. I was here for Scarlett’s protection. To make sure Stuart didn’t try to take her back. Drake was suspicious about what Stuart wanted and so was I. The fucker wouldn’t ask to see Scarlett unless it was for a good reason. And no doubt one we wouldn’t be privy to. I was under orders to allow this to play out unless he tried to take Scarlett. Then all bets were off.

I didn’t care if Stuart would be unhappy about me showing up with her. There was no way we would have ever let her go with Mason. He needed to stay away from her. And he had so far, but it didn’t mean any of us trusted it would remain that way. Mason was a sneaky little fuck.

“Come here.”

My hand curled around Scarlett’s jaw. I drew her closer, wanting to reassure her everything would be okay. She’d told me I was her safe place. I intended to keep being it for her as long as I could. She’d felt the same way when we were younger. Scarlett always came to me when she was afraid or hurting. Likely why she’d told me about her and West’s relationship. She didn’t tell me she’d slept with him, only they were making a go of being a couple. Keeping it from Drake and Prescott hadn’t been easy, but I didn’t want to betray Scarlett’s confidence even after she disappeared.

Scarlett’s hand landed on my chest right before I captured her mouth. A low moan sounded in her throat when my tongue met hers. She’d braided her hair down her back. I wrapped my fist around it, holding her in place. I didn’t want her going anywhere. If anything, I wanted to pull her in my lap, tie her hands to the steering wheel behind her, and fuck her until she screamed.

I shook those thoughts from my head. My imagination kept running away with me every time I got close to her. It urged me to do things to her I’d banned myself from even considering.

I released her, knowing if I kept this up, it wouldn’t do me any favours.

Scarlett blinked rapidly before her eyes focused on mine. Her fingers curled into the collar of my black shirt. I stroked her face again.

“You make me want things I can’t have, Scar,” I murmured.

“Like what?”

My hand drifted from her face to her chest, stroking across where her heart lay. I wasn’t jealous of her love for Prescott, but I wanted her heart mine too. Fucked up when I hadn’t given her my own in return. I was wary of it when she didn’t remember us. Besides, trust didn’t come easily to me.

I might have grown up in a well-adjusted household with normal parents, but I’d seen the ugliness of the world far too many times, courtesy of my friends. Watching Drake’s family get torn apart by his father. Seeing how Prescott was affected by the shit stain that was his absentee father. Not to mention how West’s parents had disowned him. Sure, West could be one crazy motherfucker, but they had no excuse for it. You don’t abandon your sixteen-year-old kid whose girlfriend was in a tragic accident and subsequently went missing because you can’t handle his behaviour resulting from it. They didn’t want a son with sociopathic tendencies. Sure, he might have continued living with them until he was eighteen, but they were barely on speaking terms. Now he had nothing to do with them.

Drake, Prescott, West, and I were a family. And we needed the woman who belonged with us to complete it.

Scarlett looked down at my fingers, a frown appearing on her brow.

“I’ll tell you later. We should get to the stadium.”

I opened the car door and slid out, leaving her staring after me. Waiting while she got herself together, I leant up against the side of the car and shook myself. I had zero intention of telling Scarlett anything, no matter how much I wanted to.

She got out of the car and slammed the door shut before coming around it. I was about to shove off it when she stepped in front of me and ran her hands up my chest. My breath caught at the vulnerability in her eyes.

“You never talk about yourself to me... apart from the rope stuff. I want to know you, Frankie. Why won’t you let me in?”

I swallowed. How I wished I could. I’d tell her everything. How much I’d suffered without her. How I’d fucked up and hurt a girl I cared about because I

went too far in a sexual game. And how she'd almost died of an overdose, courtesy of West's intervention. It was my fault. I should have paid more attention.

I'm still sorry, Chelsea. I wish I could make it up to you.

Reaching up, I stroked Scarlett's shoulder.

"What do you want to know, Scar?"

"Anything. Like do you have siblings? What's your favourite food? How come you do whatever Drake tells you to?"

I snorted at the last question. Then I removed her hands from my chest and took one of them instead, pulling her away from the car. I locked it and stuffed the keys in my pocket. Scarlett stared up at me as we walked out of the car park.

"I'm an only child. My favourite food is banoffee pie. And Drake is a subject we're not going to discuss tonight. Did you forget you're mad at him?"

"Frankie..."

I sighed and rubbed my cheek.

"I don't do everything he tells me. I've told him to go fuck himself before and I'd do it again. Keeping you safe is an entirely different matter. I don't think you realise how important you are to all of us."

"I don't know why. I'm just a girl."

You're the girl who completed our gang of five as kids. You belong with us.

I leant closer.

"No, you're a rather impressive woman who has captured the attention of the infamous Four Horsemen. I reckon if people knew, they'd be rather envious of your position."

She snorted and batted my arm.

"Shut up."

"It's true."

"Oh yeah? Is that why Tonya hates me so much?"

I shrugged.

"She's her father's least favourite child. Guess she has an inferiority complex and seeing you get what she wants, which is Pres, by the way, has made her mad."

"What?"

Turning to Scarlett, I gave her a wink.

“I said what I said.”

While Drake might tolerate his step-uncle, it didn't mean he was unaware of Fletcher's faults. Number one being his eight kids by six different women. Tonya happened to be the result of a one-night stand I was relatively sure Fletch wished had never happened, judging by the way he talked about his daughter and her mother. Getting her a job at our company had been his way of placating Tonya.

“Pres is mine so she can fuck off.”

I laughed at the murderous look in Scarlett's eyes at the thought of Prescott being anywhere near Tonya.

“Possessive much?”

She looked up at me, her eyebrows raising.

“I don't know why you're amused. You're mine too. And considering you've seen what I'm capable of, I'd say you better watch yourself, Frankie.”

For a moment, I was at a loss for words. My heart hammered in my chest at the fact she'd called me hers. Before I could make an absolute fool of myself by melting before her eyes, I grinned.

“Is that so?”

We reached the stadium, finding queues of fans outside. Scarlett stopped me from walking any further by stepping into my path and putting her hand on my chest.

“Do you have a problem with being mine?”

“No.”

“Good.”

The next thing I knew, she'd tugged me down towards her and kissed me in front of everyone. I could hear a bunch of cheers in the background and someone shouted, “Get in there, my son.” I wanted to roll my eyes, but my mouth was too busy being claimed by Scarlett and her delectable lips.

When she released me, Scarlett's eyes were shining and her mouth was glistening. I swiped my thumb over her bottom lip.

“Was that necessary?” I muttered. “We're getting ogled by a thousand people right now.”

“Completely.”

“Are we going to have to queue with them?”

She smiled, shook her head before taking my hand again.

“Nope.”

Scarlett pulled me away from the queuing fans and walked around the building until we came to another entrance. When she approached it, she flashed some passes in her hand and we were allowed through. We stopped inside to talk to someone who directed us where to go to see her father.

“VIP treatment?” I asked.

“Sort of. They don’t know I’m his kid. Dad likes to keep his private life... private.”

More like he didn’t want anyone knowing about the nefarious shit he’d done. For him to invite her to a game, it meant something was up. I didn’t comment on it, merely let Scarlett lead the way towards the stairs up to the higher floors where Stuart’s box and our seats were.

When we reached his box, Scarlett let go of my hand and looked up at me.

“Is it okay if I speak to my parents alone?”

I nodded. She gave me a shy smile as I followed her into the room and stopped just inside the door, slightly off to the side. I watched Scarlett approach a man and a woman by the large windows, looking over the pitch. Stuart Carver was a short, jacked-up man with beady eyes and a bald head. He was wearing a grey suit with a black open-necked shirt. Next to him stood his wife, Phoebe. She had dyed blonde hair, long manicured nails, a face full of makeup and a ridiculously skin-tight black dress on. I tried not to glare at the two of them and kept my hands loose when they tried to curl into fists.

“Scarlett,” Stuart boomed, giving her a pat on the back before Phoebe embraced her.

I could feel the tension in the air between the three of them. Scarlett clearly didn’t want to be anywhere near them, judging by the fake smile she’d plastered on her face. I wanted to go wrap my arm around her and stake my fucking claim, but I stayed where I was, hating every single moment. Hating the way he casually touched her as they talked in low tones like she was a piece of fucking property. If I could gut the man right now, I would, especially when he turned his eyes my way and gave me a death stare. To piss him off, I smiled at him.

Fuck you, Stuart. Just fuck you.

Yeah, we might have wronged him, but I didn’t give a shit. The cunt deserved

it. In fact, he deserved everything coming his way. There was no way in hell any of us would give the fucker mercy when we got our hands on him. And we would... eventually. He stole our woman. We weren't the type of men who forgave easily. And Stuart Carver had signed his own death warrant the day he'd taken Scarlett from us.

THIRTY THREE

FRANCIS

Right before I was ready to storm over there and tear her away, Scarlett said her goodbyes. Stuart leant down to whisper something in her ear. He pressed his hand to hers in a gesture that looked to me like he was passing her something, but I couldn't be sure. I could only see the back of her head, so who the fuck knew what she was thinking.

Let it happen, remember? Just let it happen.

Scarlett turned and gave me a bright smile. It fell a moment later, her eyes fixing on something next to me. I turned my head and found the very last person I wanted to see, who had just walked into the room.

Mason fucking Jones.

Before he could move any further, I put my hand out and placed it on his chest.

“If you go anywhere near her...”

My voice was low, and I let the threat hang in the air. Scarlett looked between us, her eyes full of panic. I wasn't going to make a scene, but hell if I didn't want to see this fucker's face around here, let alone anywhere near my woman.

“Trust me, I'm aware,” Mason hissed, brushing my hand off his chest and glaring at me. “I'm not here for her.”

“Then who?”

Mason nodded his head towards a group of people standing by the windows. My stomach dropped. Standing in the middle of a group of men and women was one person I never wanted to lay eyes on again. The Met Police Commissioner, Garrett Jones, who definitely had it out for me, Drake, West and Prescott. He also happened to be Mason's father. The biggest reason we

couldn't lay a hand on the fucker. You didn't touch the Police Commissioner's son without consequences.

I needed to get the fuck out of this box before he saw me, but I did not want to alarm Scarlett either. Holy fuck, this was bad. Really fucking bad.

"Surprised you came with her, didn't think any of you would dare show your faces around here."

My hand curled into a fist, but I tried to keep my expression blank. It wouldn't do me any favours to lose my shit. Calm under pressure. It's why Drake sent me. And yet, right now, I was full of anxiety for myself and Scarlett.

"You think we'd leave her unprotected?"

Mason snorted.

"She's perfectly safe here."

"If you think that, you're stupider than I thought. She's not safe with any of you."

The evils he sent my way made me smile.

"As if you're any better. I took care of her."

I scoffed.

"Oh yeah? You took care of her so fucking well," I hissed. "No wonder she came running to us when she realised you don't have her best interests at heart."

"Neither do you."

He had not a fucking idea. We were who Scarlett needed, not him. We were hers and she was ours. It was how it had always been and it would remain so. Nothing he or Stuart did would ever tear apart our bond. They couldn't. It was permanent. Didn't matter if she couldn't remember. Scarlett gravitated towards us because she couldn't fucking help herself. None of us could.

"I am who I am, Mason. I don't claim to be nice, unlike you. Drop the act. You're jealous and it shows."

If we weren't in a room full of people, I reckon he would have decked me for that comment. As it was, his nostrils flared and his eyes were almost pitch black.

"She doesn't belong to you."

I reached out a hand towards Scarlett, careful of making any sudden moves. Didn't want to attract the unwanted attention of Mason's father. He was too busy talking to the people he was with.

I didn't give a shit what Drake said about keeping our relationship with

Scarlett under wraps. Mason needed to learn his fucking place.

“Doesn’t she?”

Scarlett made her way over, giving each of us a tentative smile. The moment she got near, I took a hold of her hand and tugged her against my side. Leaning down, I pressed a kiss to her forehead as I wrapped my arm around her waist.

“Ready to watch the game?” I murmured into her hair. “We should find our seats.”

She put a hand to my chest and looked up at me when I pulled away.

“Yes.” Her head turned to Mason. “Um... hey, Mase, you okay?”

It was very clear he wasn’t judging by the way the vein in his temple started popping as he stared at the two of us.

“I’m fine, Scar. How have you been?”

“Good. Um, Frankie and I need to go. It was nice to see you.”

She smiled brightly at him, but I could tell this whole situation was making her nervous. Her body shook next to mine. Mason stepped away from the door, but not before giving me another death glare. I gave him a wink, then tugged Scarlett out of the box. I glanced back and found not only Mason but also Stuart giving me daggers. I’d probably royally fucked up by making it clear Scarlett was mine, but I didn’t give a shit.

Drake is going to kill me.

When we were out of earshot, Scarlett looked up at me.

“What was that about?”

I tugged her towards the doors leading out to the stands where our seats were.

“What was what about?”

“You and Mason.”

I shrugged as we walked down to our row. We shifted along it and took our seats, Scarlett having quickly checked our passes. She tucked her bag under the seat and sat back, her eyes falling on the pitch where the footballers were making their way out. I put my hand on her thigh, stroking my fingers along her jeans. Touching her soothed me a fraction. I was still riled up from Mason and the fact I’d seen his father and Stuart.

“It’s nothing, Scar.”

“If you call male posturing, nothing.”

Clearly, she wasn't inclined to let this go.

"You think I'm going to be nice to a man who hurt you?"

Her eyes met mine.

"Well, no, but I don't think this is just about that."

Leaning closer, I captured her chin between my fingers with my free hand.

"You're mine. He thinks otherwise."

Her eyebrow shot up.

"What?"

My eyes went to Stuart's box situated above us to the left. The man himself was standing by the windows looking out. His eyes were on me and Scarlett. I could see the irritation in them. No longer giving a fuck about his opinion nor the fact I was likely thoroughly antagonising him, I turned my attention back to Scarlett.

"I don't know if you've noticed, Scar, but he wants more than just friendship from you. And I'll be fucking damned if he touches you again in any capacity."

"You're beginning to sound like West."

I ran my thumb along her bottom lip.

"If I didn't already make it very clear, anyone, and I mean fucking anyone who tries to touch you or hurt you in any way shape or form, I will end them."

Scarlett swallowed. It was lucky no one else was sitting near us because no doubt if they heard me saying something like that, they'd probably think I was a psycho. And they wouldn't exactly be wrong. Not sure all of those normal people out there enjoyed killing and torture the way me and the others did.

"Now you do sound like West," she whispered.

"You're ours, Scar. We protect what's ours."

She reached up and curled her hand around mine.

"I don't think knowing you'll kill for me should turn me on."

My other hand moved higher on her thigh, making her let out a harsh breath.

"How long is this game?"

"Ninety minutes, not including half-time."

"And we have to stay for the whole thing?"

She nodded. I leant even closer and brushed my lips over hers.

"When we get back, I'll deal with your little... issue."

"Frankie..."

“You telling me you don’t want me to bury my tongue in your wet pussy and make you scream, my little whore?”

She shuddered, her fingers tightening on my hand.

“You can’t say stuff like that,” she whimpered. “My parents are like right over there.”

“I don’t care. If it wasn’t considered indecent, I’d bury my face in your pussy right now.”

“Oh my god, Francis!”

My fingers brushed over her crotch before I kissed her. I kept my eyes open, staring up at the box. The hatred in Stuart’s eyes made me smile in Scarlett’s mouth.

Look at me all you want, Stuart, I don’t care. You tried to take her away from us, but she’s ours. She will always be ours.

If Drake found out about this, no doubt I would get a lecture, but fuck it. I wanted the cunt to know.

When I released her, Scarlett’s face was bright red. I smiled as I sat back. My hand went to her thigh again. Scarlett looked around, her eyes frantic. She faltered when she saw Stuart watching us from the box.

“I... I didn’t want him to know about us.”

“No?”

She turned back to me, her face paling slightly.

“No! You’re technically my boss, Frankie. All of you are. What if he thinks you’re taking advantage of me?”

I licked my lip.

“I’ve taken many liberties when it comes to you, Scar. And I’m going to take a whole lot more later.”

She scowled, crossed her arms over her chest and turned away to look at the game. It had already started while I was busy kissing her. I squeezed her thigh, glad she’d not tried to pry my hand off her.

“Are you angry?”

“Maybe.”

I couldn’t help leaning into her and pressing my face into her hair.

“I’m sorry.”

“No, you’re not.”

“I’ll make it up to you.”

She ran her teeth over her bottom lip.

“I know you will.”

“Is that right?”

She turned her head slightly towards mine.

“Yeah, it is. I’ve soaked my knickers and it’s all your fault. So you better make good on your threat to bury your face between my legs.”

“Trust me, I plan on more than that, my little whore.”

She shivered but didn’t respond. I turned my attention to the game we were meant to be watching. A bunch of men running around a pitch kicking a ball was not my idea of a good evening out, but it couldn’t be helped. At least I was here with Scarlett. And I could tease her all I wanted until she was squirming in her seat. I fully intended to make good on my threats.

Maybe I’d turned all my attention on her after seeing people I despised had rattled me. A part of me just wanted her too. To prove to her I could give her as much as the others did. I didn’t want to be complacent. And Drake fucking up so badly with Scarlett made me realise we had to be better to her. We needed to take care of our girl.

“You think any of them are attractive?” I asked, pointing down at the players.

Scarlett narrowed her eyes.

“Why?”

“Just asking.”

She made a show of looking down at the pitch. I wasn’t fishing for compliments, merely interested in how she would respond.

“I prefer my men to be a little more... sophisticated.”

“Oh?”

She sat back and gave me a wicked smile.

“They’re not bad looking, but a well-dressed man does it for me.”

I knew what she was doing, trying to pay me back for asking. I decided to humour her.

“I see. And do you have any examples of such men?”

My fingers dipped to her inner thigh.

“Yeah, I do.”

“Care to share?”

“You... you’re far more interesting than this lot.” She waved at the pitch.
“But you already knew that.”

I squeezed her thigh.

“I want to take you home.”

She blushed again.

“I wish you could.”

Fuck this game. Fuck being here. I had to be patient and wait. Soon, I could reap my damn reward. And it would be this woman naked, tied to my bed with nowhere else to go.

Just the way I liked her.

THIRTY FOUR

SCARLETT

The ninety-minute game went on for way too long. By the time it was done, I was ready to get out of there. Not to mention after Francis had outed our relationship to my dad, I wanted to avoid saying goodbye to my parents. Didn't matter anyway. Dad had told me what he wanted. Told me what I was expected to do. And I wasn't looking forward to it.

As we hadn't eaten, Francis took me to dinner. He spent the entire meal sending me lust-filled looks and playing footsie under the table. Well, he was rubbing my leg with his foot the whole time as if he couldn't stop touching me. Or perhaps he was teasing me on purpose. Either way, I was ready to get back home and get naked with him.

After he parked up, we walked into the lift together. I stood next to him, reminded of the first time I'd stepped into Fortuity. I'd been in this very lift with Francis. Glancing at him, I couldn't help smiling.

"What?" he asked, his silver-grey eyes dark with desire and a hint of curiosity.

"Just thinking about the first day I was here. When I met you."

He smirked.

"Oh yeah, when you wanted to kiss me."

I could feel my face growing hot. He turned to me, digging his hand in his pocket. The other he brushed across his mouth. I took a step back as he stepped towards me. Soon I was backed up against the mirrored wall with Francis staring down at me. He placed a hand above my head and leant closer.

"Going somewhere, Scar?"

I shook my head.

"Good."

He took my chin between his fingers and kissed me. My lips parted, allowing his tongue to delve between them. I whimpered when it curled with mine. My fingers speared into his hair, dragging him closer so his body was flush with mine. I was practically throbbing between my legs, desperate for the feel of him against me.

“Frankie,” I gasped when he kissed down my neck.

His hand dropped from the wall and curled around my behind, pressing me ever closer. I couldn’t stop myself from grinding my body into his. The past couple of hours of being close to him after he’d told me he was going to eat my pussy had been torture. I wanted his tongue on me.

“Please.”

“My needy little whore.”

I shuddered, feeling hot all over. My desire suffocated me. I dragged my fingers down his neck, curling them into the collar of his shirt before rolling my hips into his. His cock dug into my stomach. I wanted it in me. I wanted him on top of me. I wanted to be at Francis’ mercy. And for him to have none for me.

“I want you so fucking bad.”

The words left my lips in a high-pitched breathy voice full of unrepressed desire.

“My tongue or my dick?”

“Both.”

“So greedy.”

He grazed his teeth along my throat. I didn’t care if it was. If I didn’t have him soon, I would lose my damn mind.

The lift doors opened. We’d reached the penthouse. Francis pulled back only to pick me up. I wrapped my legs around him as he carried me out. My eyes were on his, utterly engrossed by the way his silver eyes glinted with deviancy and mischief. As we reached the stairs, my eyes flicked to the three people standing near the kitchen watching us. It looked like Drake was about to say something but Prescott slapped his chest, signalling for him to keep quiet.

Honestly, I was grateful. If he made us stop to chat, I would have thrown something at his head. Probably my trainer. The man would be pussy-blocking me. And if he ever wanted to earn my forgiveness, preventing me from getting cock from Francis would not be the way to go about it.

My attention went back to the man himself. My fingers went to his dark brown hair again, stroking through the soft strands. He hadn't gelled it tonight. I loved the way it felt against my skin.

"I could stare at you all day," I whispered as he took me down the hallway after reaching the top of the stairs.

"I already told you I'm going to feast on your pussy, there's no need to butter me up."

"I wasn't."

He cocked a brow.

"No? You really find me that attractive?"

Francis entered his bedroom, not bothering to shut the door and brought me over to his bed.

"Yeah, I really do."

He set me down and licked his lip.

"Stay."

As if I would be going anywhere. I needed this man too much to leave.

He took my bag from me, carrying it over to his bedside table before setting it down. He emptied his pockets out too. The next thing he did was open a drawer and pulled a few things out, dumping them on the bed next to me. He kicked off his shoes and padded back around to me. I watched him kneel on the floor in between my legs and take hold of my foot. He unlaced my black trainers and pulled them off along with my socks. The anticipation was absolutely killing me by the time he undid my jeans and tugged those off, along with my drenched knickers.

His big palms spread my legs wider as his head lowered and he kissed his way up my inner thigh.

"Frankie," I whimpered as his tongue met my slit.

"Don't worry, little whore, I'll take very good care of your pretty pussy."

His hand slid up my chest and he pushed me back on the bed, pinning me there. Why did I like him calling me that so much? It only made me throb harder. Then his tongue was on my clit and I couldn't fucking breathe any longer. I put my hand over my eyes and tried to suck in air while Francis sucked my clit into his mouth and slid his fingers into my empty pussy.

"Oh god," I whispered, my fingers curling into the sheets.

He was making good on his threat, and I couldn't get enough. My hips bucked into his face with the thrust of his fingers. There was no doubt about it. Francis knew his way around pussy. I was already close and he'd barely got started. When you'd spent the last couple of hours being teased by the very man who was now between your legs, it wasn't any wonder I was on the verge of exploding. It was too much. All of it. My need. His words. The way he was licking my clit.

"Fuck, Frankie," I cried out, cresting the wave and coming all over his face. I couldn't help myself. He'd mastered the art of seduction and I was a fucking slave to his tongue.

He raised his head as my hand fell away from my eyes. I stared at him. The way his mouth glistened with my cum and the satisfied glint in his grey eyes. Reaching out, he grabbed something from next to me before he pushed both my legs up onto the bed, exposing more of my intimate parts to his gaze.

"I'm not remotely done with you yet," he murmured, flipping the cap of the tube he held.

He bowed his head to me again. I panted when his tongue met my sensitive clit. And again when his wet fingers dipped lower to my back entrance. He circled it a few times. It only made me press myself against him, wanting him to penetrate me. Wanting his fingers inside me any way I could have them. And when he obliged, pressing one into me, I moaned, my fingers gripping the covers harder.

"You taste so good," he murmured. "I could stay here all night."

His eyes were on me, making this whole thing ten times hotter.

"But I need your cock," I whimpered, desperate for him to fuck me.

The way he chuckled made me tremble, especially when he slid another finger inside me, stretching me out further.

"I'll give my whore whatever she needs."

Francis took his time tonguing my clit while his fingers plunged in and out of me. Then he added a third and I lost it again. By the time I came down, I had to push his head away. My clit couldn't take any more torture. He grinned, pulling his fingers from me and using a tissue to clean them off.

"Sit up against the headboard."

I was slow to obey as he rose to his feet because his hands were at his shirt,

unbuttoning it. Crawling backwards, I watched him undress, practically drooling over the man. He was nothing short of a fucking masterpiece. All hard muscle and beautiful edges. The happy trail leading to his hard cock made me want to lick him all over. I wasn't lying. I could stare at Francis all day. Gorgeous didn't cut it. He was perfect.

He crawled onto the bed, picking up the rope he'd left on it as he went. First, he removed my blouse and bra. Then he took my wrists and secured them above my head to one of the metal rings on his wall. When he was satisfied I wasn't going anywhere, he picked me up by my hips so he could sit behind me and placed me in his lap. Taking the bottle of lube, he squirted it into his palm before I could feel him rubbing it all over his cock behind me. He lifted me up again and angled me on his cock. A choked breath escaped my lips when his cock pressed against me. I had been expecting regular sex, but apparently, he had other ideas.

His cock slid into my tight entrance with some resistance no matter how much I tried to relax. He was slow to work it up inside me, giving me ample time to adjust as he held my hip to control the pace. I was at his mercy with the way I was tied to the damn wall.

I let out a long breath when he was seated inside me. The stretch and sensation of him filling me was intense. And I loved everything about it.

"I thought you said you were going to take care of my pussy," I whispered, leaning back into him.

He popped his chin on my shoulder and raised a hand to my breast, stroking my nipple.

"Mmm, does your pretty pussy still need filling? I can get someone to take care of that for you."

Francis started to move inside me, making me moan.

"Really?"

"In case you hadn't noticed, we like to share."

I nodded, shifting in my restraints as he continued to fuck me with shallow thrusts, directing my hip with his free hand. He paused, reaching out to grab his phone. A moment later, he threw it back down and started thrusting again, gripping both my hips. This time it was harder. My pussy throbbed and I clenched around him, making him grunt.

“Fuck, you’re so tight,” he ground out. “You feel so fucking good. My whore. Mine.”

The possessive note to his voice had me whimpering. I’d discovered a whole new side of Francis tonight. He took no prisoners and I couldn’t deny I found it incredibly alluring.

My eyes went to the open doorway, my ears pricking up at the sound of footsteps. A moment later, Prescott appeared, his blue eyes widening slightly at the sight in front of him. He leant up against the doorframe and gave us a wicked grin.

“What do we have here?”

“You asked Pres?” I whispered to Francis.

“Did you expect me to ask West?”

“No!”

I wasn’t sure I could deal with him right now. Not when I was trussed up with Francis’ dick buried in my arse.

“Well then, I know he’ll take care of your pussy, isn’t that right, Pres?”

Prescott pushed off the doorframe and walked into the room.

“Is that why you asked me up here?”

“Are you complaining?”

His hand went to his shirt, tugging at the buttons.

“Fuck no.”

Prescott got naked in record quick time while Francis continued to fuck me from behind. I was squirming in his lap in anticipation of Prescott’s cock inside me. He got on the bed and was kneeling between our spread legs seconds later. Prescott gripped my chin and stared down at me.

“My little lamb, is your poor pussy empty?”

I nodded, biting down on my lip. He leant closer, pulling my lip from my teeth before he replaced them with his own. I moaned in his mouth, about ready to combust on the spot. Before I came here, I would have never thought I’d want two men fucking me at the same time. And yet I was desperate now.

“Please,” I cried into his mouth. “Pres, please fuck me.”

His chuckle and the soft touch of his fingers along my jaw made me wriggle in my restraints.

“So impatient, sweetness.”

“Probably my fault,” Francis put in. “I teased her the whole time we were out.”

Prescott pulled back and raised his eyebrow.

“Please tell me you did not do that in front of anyone else.”

I couldn’t see Francis’ expression, but judging by the way Prescott’s eyes darkened, I figured he hadn’t denied it.

“Well, I’m definitely not getting in the middle of you and Drake when you tell him.”

“We can talk about it tomorrow. Right now, I think Scar’s going to cry if you don’t fill her pussy with cock.”

Francis wasn’t wrong. I wanted both of them and I wasn’t ashamed of it.

“I like it when she cries.”

Prescott pinched my nipple for good measure, making me whine and arch into him.

“Make her cry on our dicks then.”

I watched Prescott take hold of his very hard cock and rub it against my pussy, dragging it through my wet folds.

“Pres, please,” I moaned. “Please.”

His eyes were dark as he slid inside me, making me cry out from the stretch. A tear leaked out of my eye. It hurt even as it felt good at the same time. I liked the pain of it. The way both of them worked in tandem inside me. Prescott leant closer and licked the tear from my cheek.

“Such a good little lamb. You cry so sweetly.”

I couldn’t put my hands on him as my arms were secured over my head. All I could do was let them pleasure me. Prescott was taking very good care of my pussy while Francis fucked me from behind. I might not always want this, but right now, it was perfect, especially after Francis teasing the shit out of me all evening. Making me want him so badly, I was breathless with my need. He hadn’t hesitated to get Prescott involved when he realised I wanted more. It made my heart tighten. Francis did everything in his power to take care of me. He made me feel... special. Like he really gave a shit about me. It only strengthened my budding feelings for the man. Made me want to explore this thing between us and learn more about him.

“Harder,” I panted. “Please, make me come again.”

Francis gripped my hips tighter, rocking me on them as Prescott increased the strength behind his thrusts. He pressed his hand against the wall to give him more leverage, grinding into me without mercy. I was lost in them. In the way they fucked me. And when Prescott kissed me, I fell off the edge, my body already over sensitised from Francis' exploration earlier.

"Fuck," Prescott grunted as Francis let out a groan.

They didn't let up as I came all over both their dicks. It was everything I needed and so much more. Both of them followed soon after me, filling me up with their cum and making me twitch around them again.

Prescott was the first to pull out. He loosened the knots around my wrists, allowing me to put my arms down before Francis lifted me off him. Prescott flopped down next to me and stroked my shoulder with his fingers.

"Satisfied, my little lamb?"

I nodded, curling into Francis' side and wrapping my arm around his waist when he shifted lower on the bed. He kissed the top of my head, letting me rest it in the crook of his shoulder.

"Do you want me to stay?"

"If it's okay with Frankie."

Prescott kissed my shoulder and curled himself around my back.

"I don't mind," Francis said, stroking my face with his fingers.

It would make what I had to do once they fell asleep risky as hell, but it couldn't be helped. I wanted them with me. Both of them.

After a few minutes of us being curled up together in silence, I got up and went to the bathroom to clean up and un-braid my hair. When I came back, I shut the door, hoping Francis would forget it needed to be locked. Then I curled up under the sheets with the two men who'd rocked my world who both held me close, sandwiching me between them. We made quiet small talk until they drifted off to sleep.

I lay there, staring up at the ceiling, urging my eyes to stay open. They'd exhausted me, but if I was to do what my father asked, I needed to stay awake and try not to hate myself for what I was about to do.

THIRTY FIVE

SCARLETT

Slipping out from Prescott and Francis' arms was a lot harder than I anticipated. The two of them were pressed so tightly against me, I was sure I would wake them up. It was a fucking miracle I wriggled out and dropped off the end of the bed in relative silence. Straightening, I looked back at them. They were both fast asleep, their breathing steady and even.

Thank fuck.

I crept over to the bedside table and fished out what I needed from my bag. Then I picked up one of their discarded shirts and slipped it on. It smelt of cinnamon and apples so I knew it belonged to Francis. Buttoning it up, I forwent underwear, considering I'd drenched it earlier. If I went rummaging around in Francis' wardrobe for more clothes, I would end up waking them.

I slid my feet into my slippers before padding over to the door and opening it with gentle care. My eyes went back to the boys in bed but neither of them had moved. I darted out of the bedroom and along the hallway, my feet light on the carpet. When I got to the stairs, I ducked down behind the glass when I noticed a figure standing by the window. I froze in place, hoping he hadn't heard me.

For a minute, he did nothing. Then he let out a sigh and walked towards the stairs. I was about to get up and run when he went under them instead. He opened the door to the stairwell and stepped through, shutting it behind him.

What the hell is Drake doing up at this time and where is he going?

I tucked the memory stick my dad had given me into Francis' shirt pocket before descending the stairs. It probably wasn't a good idea for me to use the lift but Drake was in the stairwell.

Fuck!

This wasn't going to plan at all. I'd have to take a chance. It was my only hope. Not that I wanted to do this, but I was mad enough at Drake to consider doing what my father asked of me... or was I?

He'd fucked up with me, no doubt about that, but my anger had lessened. Especially when he didn't complain about me not wanting to see him at work. In the penthouse, it couldn't entirely be helped, but I avoided being near him as much as I could. The man was a damn menace. Well, I could try telling it to my fucking feelings, but I wasn't talking to them. They kept betraying me.

I steeled myself, trying to hold on to my annoyance at his actions. At the way he'd used and punished me. I wanted to hate him so fucking bad, but a part of me wondered why. What possessed him to take it so far? Our relationship had soured before it had even started. I wanted him to talk to me, yet all I'd done was push his buttons and piss him off. Not a great start. But it didn't mean I would let him off the hook. Nor would I allow him a fucking inch. He would take a damn mile if I did.

I walked underneath the stairs and opened the stairwell door slowly. There were no sounds of footsteps so he must've already left. Creeping into it, I shivered. Sneaking around their building in just a shirt and slippers wasn't my best plan, but I had little choice. It was now or never. I wouldn't get another chance. They were careful about locking the doors behind them at night. My distraction tactic had worked. Didn't mean I felt any less shit about doing it.

Sighing, I descended the stairs to the floor below the penthouse and pushed open the door. I crept out into the lobby and along the hallway towards Drake's office.

Please don't be down here.

There were no lights on anywhere so I could only hope he'd gone somewhere else. When I reached his office, I pushed the door open and found it empty. Breathing out a sigh of relief, I walked in and went right over to his desk. It felt odd to sit in his chair. I'd sat in his lap in it before. All it did was remind me of the way he'd punished me in here. My cheeks heated. I pressed my fingers to them.

Now wasn't the time to be thinking about it. I dragged the chair closer to his desk and moved the mouse. The screen lit up. By some kind of miracle, it wasn't locked. I sat back, staring in disbelief. I thought I might have to break into the

system, but no, it was wide open for me.

Sickness coiled in my stomach as I took the memory stick out of the shirt pocket I'd stashed it in and placed it on the glass desk in front of me. This was huge for me. It would be declaring war on the Horsemen. At least, that's what it felt like. If I went through with this, I would be giving my father access to data he should never see. Access to things to help us bring them down.

What do you want to do? Do you really want to hurt them this much?

I shook my head, trying to stop my conscience from rearing its ugly head. It did it anyway. How could I do this without solid irrefutable proof they'd done what my father said they had? No one had proof. It was all conjecture and fucking theories. The truth was tangled up in the web of lies all of us had weaved together.

I dragged my fingers across the glass remembering the way he'd pinned me down on here. When he'd spanked me and how I'd secretly liked it but would never admit it to him. I didn't hate Drake. No matter what he'd done to me, I wanted to know what went on inside that damn head of his. He was a sickness in me. A toxicity. A desperate, all-consuming desire to tear him wide open and rip out all the secrets he was hiding.

You're fucked up.

Perhaps I was. Maybe I was too far gone to care how low I'd sunk. Christ, I was in love with a man who was lying to me. I was falling for another who had outed my relationship with him to my father. One of them had permanently marked himself on my skin, making me his and I'd let him. And the last... he'd infected me in the worst way possible. They all had.

I put my fists to my eyes and dug them into the sockets before slamming my head against the back of Drake's chair. No matter how hard I tried to justify all of this to myself, I couldn't. I didn't want to hurt any of them. Not really. But if they'd done what my father kept telling me they had... didn't it make them monsters?

You like monsters. Don't lie to yourself.

Dropping my hands, I groaned and shook myself. I had to stay strong. If I didn't do what my father asked then I would land myself in more shit. But if I did, then I would hurt the men my heart told me I could trust even when my head told me I shouldn't.

Which one did I believe?

Which one did I fucking trust in?

It only took me a second's more thought before I stood and snatched up the memory stick, stuffing it back into my shirt pocket. I couldn't do this. Not to them. Not when I didn't have proof of their crimes. Not when I didn't know the truth.

I set Drake's chair back to the way it had been before I came in here and crept out, shutting the door behind me. Leaning back against it, I tried not to allow myself to fall apart. I'd almost done it. Almost gone ahead with sticking the damn memory stick into Drake's computer to give my father access to everything. But my conscience had won out in the end. It wouldn't allow me to hurt Prescott, West, Francis and Drake.

You're an idiot.

But I was the idiot who'd fallen in love.

I straightened and walked back down the hallway towards the lobby. Entering the stairwell, I paused on the first step. If Drake hadn't come down here, where had he gone? I shouldn't be curious about it, but I was.

No, it doesn't matter. You need to get back to bed.

I walked up the stairs and reached the door to the penthouse when I stopped dead. There was a faint sound echoing down the stairwell... music of some kind. Turning my head, I looked up at the stairs. My feet carried me towards them and before I knew it, I was walking up the next two flights of stairs to the roof. The music got louder as I went. It sounded like a guitar, but I couldn't be sure.

When I got to the top, I found the emergency exit door wide open. Did I really walk out there in a shirt and slippers? It would be cold. And yet the sound of music made me want to find the source. I stepped out onto the roof, looking back to find the door had been secured to the wall behind it. In front of me, there was a structure with all sorts of equipment surrounding it. I couldn't see anyone else up here.

The music was louder now. I could recognise it as an acoustic guitar playing. If I turned back, I would never know who was strumming it. The wind blew, giving me goosebumps all over my bare legs. I pulled the shirt lower on my thighs, but it was futile.

Unable to help myself, I skirted around the structure and stopped dead in my tracks. Behind it, there was a rooftop garden. Neat rows of wooden planters sat with flowers and other plants spilling out of them. There was a seating area with a couple of sun loungers, a bench, a small table and a few wooden armchairs. While all of that stuff stuck out to me because I wasn't expecting it, it wasn't what drew my eyes. No, it was the glass structure beyond the planters.

I walked towards it down the middle of the planters. On all four sides, it was glass with a white roof. Two glass sliding doors were open and the music spilt out from there. There was a large grey sofa and two armchairs with a low table. And right in the middle of the room sat in the comfiest armchair I'd ever seen in my life was the man who'd become the bane of my fucking existence since the day he'd landed in it. In his lap sat a black acoustic guitar. His fingers worked over the strings with practised expertise. The melody he played was utterly tragic and haunting.

Drake had his eyes closed, his dark hair flopping over them as he played. I'd never seen him look so... unkempt. His shirt buttons were undone and his sleeves rolled up. His feet were bare. And the backdrop of him against the cityscape under the dark sky with stars twinkling above him was more than I could take. He looked utterly tortured as he played a tune that spoke to my soul. A song of death, terror and loss rang through the notes.

I found myself drawn to him even knowing I shouldn't be here intruding on this moment. I leant against the glass door, watching him play, unable to leave because this was the first time I'd seen Drake display real emotion. He played the guitar like he was purging himself of his feelings. And holy fuck, he was beautiful. A fallen god.

After everything that had happened between us, seeing him this way made my heart burn in my chest. What had hurt him so much to make him like this? Closed off to everything. And then there was this, him all alone up here in the middle of the night, playing like his life depended on it. I didn't know what to make of it or him.

The last note rang through the air, making me freeze in place. If he found me here, I would be in serious shit, but I couldn't move, far too captivated by the sight in front of me.

Drake raised his head and opened his eyes, staring right at me. It's as if he'd

known I was there and it hadn't come as a surprise to see me. His lip twitched, making me swallow. For a long moment, he said nothing as his fingers brushed along the strings.

“What are you doing up here, Scarlett?”

He didn't sound annoyed. In fact, his voice was gravelly as if his throat was clogged with too much emotion.

“I don't know,” I all but whispered.

He let out a sigh and placed the guitar down next to him, leaning it up against the armchair before he sat back. His long fingers dragged along his face. Those beautiful hands I'd admired from basically day one. Now I knew why his fingertips were calloused. He played an instrument. And it was almost more than I could take.

Drake's eyes were still on me. His gaze made me tremble as I stood there unsure if I should stay or go. Then he reached out a hand to me. I looked at it. It felt like a peace offering. I was hesitant to walk over to him after everything that had gone on between us.

“Will you please come and sit with me?” he asked in a quiet voice.

Drake didn't ask or request. He ordered. And knowing this wasn't a demand made the decision of what to do... easy.

THIRTY SIX

DRAKE

I didn't expect to open my eyes and find Scarlett up here in my safe space. The place I came to when the world was dark and I couldn't sleep. It was far more often than I liked to admit. And I knew exactly what Francis would tell me if I told him the truth. To take my damn sleeping pills and stop acting like I was a fucking impenetrable tower.

I'd felt her when she approached, but I was so lost in the music, I didn't look at her until I'd finished the song. Now she was staring at my outstretched hand like it would physically harm her. I had no intention of doing anything to hurt her tonight. Weariness had sunk into my bones. All I wanted was to hold her against my chest and breathe her in. I wanted to tell her I was sorry for the way I'd behaved. I just plain wanted her near me.

Little wisp, I don't want to fight anymore.

“Scarlett, please.”

I sounded so fucking desperate. It was pathetic. I was at her mercy and I hated everything about it. And yet I was too damn tired to stop it happening. Too fucking done with it all.

She took a tentative step towards me, making my heart slam against my ribcage. Another brought her closer. Two more closed the distance. Her hand slid into mine. The coldness of it made me want to warm her up. She must be freezing considering she was only wearing a thin shirt.

Her hazel-green eyes were guarded as she looked down at me. I didn't blame her for being suspicious. I wasn't going to ask her to sit with me again. She knew what I wanted. Whether she would oblige me was up to her. After everything, I had no right to order her into my lap. Besides, my walls were

down. I didn't have the energy to keep them up and hide how I felt.

Her thumb rubbed over the back of my hand. I bit the inside of my cheek to stop myself from responding to her touch. Her skin was so fucking soft. She was delicate. A little wisp of a thing who haunted my every waking moment. The girl from my past had come back. The one who had always seen me. And I couldn't deny I wanted her to see me again.

Scarlett didn't say a word as she lowered herself into my lap and curled up against me. She rested her head on my chest, her hand splayed out over my heart and my whole body shook with the effort of trying to remain calm. I wrapped one arm around her while the other stroked her hair, holding her close. Fuck, she was so small. So fucking fragile.

Lowering my face, I pressed a kiss to her forehead.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, my lips dusting over her skin.

She let out a breath and tucked her fingers beneath my shirt where I'd left the buttons open. Her cold hand on my warm skin made me shiver.

"The song you were playing, did you write that?"

Her question was asked so softly like she was afraid to break the silence.

"Yes."

"What made you write something so haunting?"

You. You did.

I couldn't tell her. Admitting she was the source of my torment felt like I'd open up the floodgates. There was too much at stake here. Too many secrets I had to keep. Letting her in right now when things were so precarious wasn't an option. But if I didn't give her something, a small piece of me, I might ruin everything between us for good. We may not come back from it.

"It's the only way I know how to express my feelings."

She peered up at me. Our faces were far too close, but I didn't move back. The intimacy of the moment had me holding my breath, wondering what she would say.

"Is it lonely in your iron fortress?"

Fuck. Me.

"Yes."

How could I say no? The truth was I'd felt alone since the day she was torn away from us. I had the boys, but without her, none of us felt complete. Not to

mention how my fucking life imploded because of my piece of shit father. And keeping West from doing something to hurt himself was a whole other mission in itself. His reckless behaviour made him a danger to himself. We were sixteen. No fucking sixteen-year-old should ever have had to deal with the events of that night. What we'd done. It was fucked up on every level imaginable.

“What happened to you, Drake? Why are you so cold?”

Her hand was on my fucking heart. She could feel my warmth seeping out of me. But she was also right. I was cold. I'd buried all of my feelings so deep, I didn't know how to find them again. Scarlett had forced them out into the open and no matter how much I struggled against the tide, I was drowning in them. In her.

My hand left her waist and cupped her face, my thumb running along her cheek. She didn't stop me. Scarlett was waiting for my answer. I leant closer, pressing my forehead to hers. Our lips almost met. We breathed the same fucking air and still, she didn't stop me.

“Something happened to us when we were younger and nothing was ever the same afterwards.”

“To us?”

“The four of us. We all have invisible scars.”

They're there because of you, Scarlett. Because of what we did.

I didn't think any of us were ever going to be able to make it up to her. And yet, we would keep her all the same. Even if she hated us. Even if she never wanted to see our faces again. We couldn't live without her. We weren't okay. We weren't fucking okay.

Dropping my hand from her face, I stroked my fingers across her shirt where I knew the scars West had given her lay. They weren't her only scars from us. The rest were down to our actions. The things we'd done.

Fuck, I'm sorry. I'm so fucking sorry for what we did to you.

But I wasn't sorry for everything. Some of the things we did that night were necessary. I wouldn't take them back. Not under any circumstances. I wish we hadn't hurt her. Our best friend. The girl who stood by us through thick and thin. Who we protected with our lives.

“But it's not just because of that, is it? Not for you.”

I shook my head, hating how she could see right through me. My walls

weren't there to protect me from this.

"No, it's not, but I don't want to talk about it."

"It hurts too much."

I nodded against her head, my lips brushing over hers. I hated how much I wanted to kiss her. To show her I wasn't cold. To prove I had emotions. She brought them out in me. She was the key. I wished I could be free to show her affection and care like Prescott and Francis did. But I was way too fucked up and keeping far too many secrets.

She trembled as she held onto me. I was shaking too, but mine was with anger rather than the fear she was experiencing.

"Drake, what... what if you hadn't..."

"Shh, I know, I'm here, Little Nyx. I'm not leaving you, I promise."

If I hadn't been there, fuck knows what would have happened to her. It had gone way too far this time. Way too fucking far. I was done with this shit. We weren't going to stand for it any longer. When I told the others, they would agree with me.

"I can't. I can't do this."

I could feel her tears soaking into my t-shirt, but I didn't care. I'd hold her for as long as it took. I'd be right here for her. Scarlett needed me and the others now more than ever.

When she calmed down, I would go to them. And we would do something about this once and for all. Nothing, and I mean nothing, would stop us from protecting our best friend from any and all threats. And this shit? Well, it was the worst fucking threat of all.

I shuddered at the memory. That horrifying day. The one that had set all this into motion. And then I shut it down, locking it away before it could decimate me all over again.

"Will you play me something else?"

Her question made me pull back slightly, breaking our close contact. Those hazel-green eyes of hers were full of emotions, but she looked tired too. Like staying awake had become a chore.

"If you want me to."

She nodded and tucked her face into my neck while keeping her hand on my chest. I adjusted her in my lap, shifting her legs up onto the arm of the chair so I had room to pop my guitar on my knee. I learnt how to play a long time ago, having begged my parents to buy me one. And I'd taught myself, practising for

hours to get it right. It wasn't until Scarlett was ripped from us when I started to write my own melodies. There were never any lyrics, just the music.

I picked my guitar, set it on my knee and fit my arms around it while still having Scarlet plastered to my chest.

“Do you want me to play you a lullaby?”

“Play me something you've never played for anyone else.”

I didn't tend to play when others were around, though the other three had heard me. Partly why I had this room and the garden built so I didn't disturb them at night.

“None of my songs are happy.”

“You wouldn't be you if they were.”

Why the hell did she have to be so damn... perceptive?

“Okay, an unhappy tune it is.”

My fingers went to the strings, knowing exactly the song I wanted her to hear. The one I wrote about the day we lost her. Probably fucked up of me to play it to her, but I couldn't think of anything more apt than this.

Playing with her in my lap wasn't exactly easy, but I didn't want her to go anywhere. The fact she was allowing this closeness between us had my heart burning for her. It reminded me far too much of when we were younger. When we were free of all these burdens, secrets and lies.

I hummed along to the tune even though there were no words. And when I felt her tears soaking my skin where she was pressed against it, I tried not to falter. The song made me want to cry too, but I wouldn't. I didn't allow tears. I couldn't afford to.

Slowly, but surely Scarlett's breathing evened out until I was sure she'd fallen asleep. I brought the song to a close and set my guitar down. My eyes went to her face as her head had fallen on my shoulder. I stroked her cheek, wiping away the dried tears there.

“I wish you knew how truly sorry I am for everything, my little wisp.”

I pressed a kiss to her forehead then gathered her up in my arms as I got up only to pop her back in the chair. I set about closing up my hideaway, putting my guitar on its stand before I picked her up again and carried her back downstairs. Scarlett didn't stir and for that, I was glad. She needed to rest.

When I got to Francis' room, I found both him and Prescott in his bed. I

shook my head and smiled, setting Scarlett down on the end of the bed and unbuttoning the shirt she was wearing. As I did it, I felt something brush against my hand. Digging my fingers into the pocket, I drew out a small memory stick. This was why she was out of bed.

I slid it into my pocket, discarded the shirt and then placed Scarlett between Francis and Prescott, tucking her up under the covers. Making my way over to the door, I closed it behind me.

Was I pissed about the device?

Yes.

Did it mean I was going to say something to her?

No.

I'd asked Francis to allow this evening to play out. It meant seeing if she would go through with whatever her father had tasked her with. Now I'd intercepted it, perhaps I could use it to my advantage. Tomorrow, I'd discuss with Francis what happened at the game. And we would make a plan going forward.

As I walked back to my bedroom, I tried not to remember the way she'd cried in my arms as I played her a song I wrote about her. About the loss of her. The woman was already under my skin in the worst way possible. I loved witnessing the last moments of a person's life drain from their eyes... but my little wisp might well end up being the harbinger of my downfall. She was making me feel for her in ways I never wanted to. And I couldn't bring myself to hate her for any of it.

THIRTY SEVEN

SCARLETT

I was woken up by soft kisses across the back of my neck. A warm hand cupped my breast. Another was curled around my back, stroking my skin. Opening my eyes, I stared into Francis' grey ones. He smiled at me in such a heart-stopping way, my breath caught. Behind me, Prescott was rubbing up against me, making it very clear he wanted playtime before work. After I'd got fucked by both of them last night, I wasn't entirely on board with the idea. Besides, my brain was already running at a million miles an hour.

I sat up, making their hands drop from me.

"Little lamb?"

I looked down at Prescott whose brow had furrowed with concern.

"I need the loo."

Before either of them could say another word, I'd jumped out of the covers and off the bed. I shut the door behind me when I got into the bathroom and sunk down on the side of the bathtub. The memory of finding Drake on the roof last night flooded my brain, making me put a hand to my mouth. The strange intimacy of the whole thing had me in absolute knots. He'd apologised to me. He'd actually talked to me. He wasn't... cold. I didn't know what the hell to think. This side of Drake was unexpected and completely at odds with what I knew of him.

My fingers dropped to my heart, steadily beating in my chest. Why did he have to make me feel something for him other than anger and frustration?

I looked down at my naked body realising not only had he brought me down from the roof after I'd fallen asleep, but he'd undressed me. I'd left the memory stick in Francis' shirt. If I rushed out there and searched the pocket, it would

make them suspicious.

I got up and did my business before quickly brushing my teeth. As casually as possible, I strolled back out finding both of them sitting up in bed talking. I went over to our clothes and started picking them up, separating them into piles for each of us. My fingers went to the pocket of Francis' shirt as I turned away from the two men in his bed. And my stomach dropped when I found the device missing. My eyes darted around the floor, but I couldn't see it anywhere.

Fuck. Fuck. This is really bad!

It couldn't have fallen out. I didn't think either Prescott or Francis had even touched these since they'd taken them off. It left me with only one explanation. And it was the absolute worst outcome of all.

"Are you okay, Scar?" Francis asked.

I looked at him, plastering on a smile.

"Yeah, I'm good."

His eyes were narrowed, indicating he didn't believe me. I didn't know what else to say as I put his shirt on the pile I'd made at the end of his bed.

"Come here."

"I'm up now, I might as well grab a shower. Not sure my boss would appreciate me coming to work smelling of sex."

We all knew Drake wouldn't give a shit since I hadn't gone near him this entire week. After last night, I didn't think I could avoid him any further.

I dashed back to the bathroom, ignoring the way both of them called my name. I was totally acting weird and now they were suspicious. Hopefully, this fucking shower would calm me down. My heart was racing and my body tense. I flipped it on and stepped under the spray. The water did nothing to help my racing mind.

Drake took it. I know he took it. Fuck. What am I going to do?

He'd rattled me last night when I found him playing the guitar on the roof. Especially the way he'd held me against his chest and looked at me. The sadness in his indigo eyes broke something inside me when he said something happened to all four of them when they were younger. He wouldn't trust me with what, but knowing they'd suffered through something devastating made me feel for the four men. It cemented my decision not to go through with my father's plan. And now I was fucked because Drake had the damn device. I couldn't get rid of

it.

I washed my hair and my body, hating the fact I was still on edge. When I came out of the bathroom after drying my hair, I found Francis was alone. He came over to me and put his hands on my shoulders. I tried not to flinch at his expression.

“You’re a little jumpy this morning.”

Reaching up, I stroked his face and gave him what I hoped was a real smile.

“I’m okay, honestly.”

He leant closer, pressing a kiss to my forehead.

“You’d tell me if you weren’t, right?”

I nodded even though it was a lie. I wasn’t okay at all. How could I be when I might well be getting a talking to by Drake? I should not have fallen asleep in his lap.

Francis let me go and walked around me into the bathroom. I went to the wardrobes and pulled out an outfit before putting it on. Then I did my makeup in front of one of Francis’ mirrors before making my way downstairs while he was still in the bathroom.

Prescott was in the kitchen with a mug in his hand. Drake sat on the sofa with his morning coffee and his tablet. I swallowed as I walked into the kitchen, trying to appear normal, but clearly, it wasn’t working judging by the way Prescott raised his eyebrows. Making a beeline for him, I wrapped my arms around his waist and stared up into his beautiful blue eyes.

“You feeling better?” he murmured as he stroked my arm.

I went up on my tiptoes and kissed his cheek.

“A little. Just tired is all.”

“You can sleep in tomorrow when your boss over there doesn’t expect you to be up for work.”

I shook my head as I dropped back down to my feet. Even in heels, all of them were taller than me.

I let go of Prescott and walked over to the kettle, flipping it on. After I’d knocked myself up some breakfast and tea, I took it over to the dining table and ate. My eyes kept darting to Drake who hadn’t once looked at me. It was almost as if last night didn’t happen. But it had. I remembered the music he’d played. The sorrow and pain in it. There was no doubt in my mind Drake was hurting

inside, but as to why, I didn't yet know. Would he ever tell me?

By the time I was done, Francis had joined us. West was nowhere to be seen, but I'd learnt he had a habit of not turning up to work at least once or twice a week. I never asked why, just assumed he had his own reasons.

I decided I wasn't going to let Drake pretend like I hadn't found him up on the roof last night. Besides, I wanted to know for sure he'd taken the damn memory stick. The only way I could do that was if I talked to him. Both Francis and Prescott watched me as I walked over to the sofa and stood in front of the stoic man himself.

"Morning."

Drake was slow to look up at me from his tablet. And when he did, I had to stop myself from swallowing. His eyes bore no recognition of what had happened between us last night.

"Hello, Scarlett. Did you want something?"

"I was wondering if you needed me to organise that lunch meeting with Mr Sinclair for next week. I forgot to ask you yesterday."

"Yes. Thursday would be best."

"Okay, great. Consider it done."

I gave him my brightest smile. The way his lip twitched told me everything. He knew that I knew he had the device. I wouldn't say anything as it would give me away. He wasn't going to bring it up either. We were at a fucking impasse yet again. I didn't want to fall back into this hate-lust cycle between the two of us, but this wasn't helping either.

"Since when did Scar start talking to Drake again?" I heard from behind me.

"Fuck knows."

Glancing back, I could see Francis and Prescott with their heads bowed together. They had no idea I'd disappeared for a while last night. I turned back to Drake and leant closer to him, bending at the waist slightly.

"Thank you for putting me to bed last night," I murmured, keeping my voice low. "I appreciated it."

"You're welcome."

"I can't help wondering why you put me in Francis' bed."

He set his tablet down in his lap.

"Where else would I put you?"

I didn't answer. He knew what I was getting at, but he'd decided to be obtuse. I wanted to know why he didn't take me with him. The only bedroom I hadn't seen in the penthouse was his. And I couldn't help my curiosity. After seeing his rooftop garden, I wanted to know what style he'd gone for. The boys had unique decorative tastes.

Drake was about to open his mouth when a hand wrapped around my throat and I was pressed against a solid body. Looking up, I found West staring at me with a manic smile on his face.

"West," Drake ground out, "what are you doing?"

"My little Scar needs her scars checked."

Before I could say a word, he dragged me onto the other sofa and sat me in his lap. His fingers went to my blouse, unbuttoning the first couple before pulling it to the side and exposing the word 'war' carved on my skin. I winced when he stroked the word. It was still fucking sore because he kept picking off the damn scabs to make sure it would scar my skin.

"Beautiful," he murmured.

"It hurts."

"I know."

He leant closer and pressed a kiss to it. When West was tender, it made my heart ache so damn badly. Like a part of me craved this side of him. And then he had to go put his hand between my legs, cupping my pussy as if it belonged to him. Well, he'd told me enough times it did, so I suppose in his mind, he wasn't wrong.

"I'm taking you out later," he whispered against my skin.

"You are?"

This was news to me. Then again, West did things on his own schedule and rarely informed anyone else of his plans. I'd learnt as much from Francis and Prescott.

"Mmm."

"Where?"

"It's a surprise."

"Then how will I know what to wear?"

He straightened, his amber eyes glinting with mischief.

"I'll pick something for you."

“If you think I’m going to let—”

He put a finger over my lips.

“What I say goes.”

I glared at him, batting his finger away. I didn’t stop him when he buttoned my blouse back up.

“It’s a good surprise, Scar. I promise.”

I wasn’t sure I believed him, but I decided not to press the issue. After all the times I’d set him off, I was wary about doing it again. West’s ability to blow hot and cold was terrifying, to say the least.

“Fine.”

He gave me a boyish smile before encouraging me to get to my feet again. He got up himself and strolled away towards the lift. I looked over at Drake who was eyeing West with no small amount of suspicion. Deciding maybe it was best I didn’t push him any further about the whole putting me in Francis’ bed thing, I went after West and joined him in the lift. He looked down at me with a grin as if he was pleased I’d decided to go with him instead of waiting for one of the others. When the doors closed, I bit my lip.

“Are you sure you won’t tell me what we’re going to do later?”

He wrapped an arm around my waist.

“It’d ruin the surprise, Scar.”

“Is it that or do you not want the others to know?”

The way his eyes glinted told me the answer.

“Drake wouldn’t approve.”

I couldn’t help the smile forming on my lips.

“If that’s the case, I promise not to breathe a word.”

West winked.

“That’s my girl.”

And the way my heart swelled at his praise had me disconcerted. Maybe it was the morning’s events, but I was nervous about where West was taking me no matter how much the idea of spending time alone with him excited me. West was dangerous. The fact Drake wouldn’t like it had me feeling like we might end up in trouble.

But when did these men ever not get me in any?

The answer to that was... never.

THIRTY EIGHT

FRANCIS

“Is it just me or has Scarlett been acting weird this morning?” Prescott said when the lift doors closed.

Scarlett had gone downstairs with West. Given I needed to talk to Drake about last night, I wasn’t upset about it. But I did want to ask her what the hell was up with her. She’d been acting suspiciously since the moment she’d woken up.

“Yeah, not just you, I don’t know what’s up with her.”

There was no reason for it. She’d been happy last night... well, except for the part where I’d exposed her relationship with me to Stuart. Otherwise, she hadn’t been out of sorts. This morning was another matter.

“That’s easy. She knows I have the memory stick Stuart must have given her yesterday and thinks I’m going to do something about it,” Drake said.

Both Prescott and I looked at him.

“Memory stick? So that’s what he was passing her.”

I hadn’t forgotten I’d watched him press something into Scarlett’s hand.

“Tell me what happened.”

I picked up my mug and sipped, wanting to avoid telling Drake I’d fucked up for as long as I possibly could. Prescott gave me a look. He knew too, just not the details. If I was honest, I didn’t care about the fact I’d pissed Stuart off by publicly staking my claim on Scarlett. She belonged to us. He needed taking down a peg or two. The fucker was far too confident.

“Stuart may be aware of my... relationship with Scarlett.”

I swear the sheer disbelief on Drake’s face was unlike anything I’d seen directed at me before. West and Prescott had got their fair share of Drake’s

disapproving looks, but I mostly avoided them by not creating trouble.

“I sent you with her because you’re the fucking sensible one, Francis. What the hell happened?”

He had no idea what I had to deal with last night. Drake wouldn’t cut me any slack, but the situation wasn’t what any of us had anticipated. Guess maybe I was a little more possessive of Scarlett than I realised. And I wanted the world to fucking well know it. She was mine. Being around the girl I’d grown up with brought out all my protective instincts. The need to brand myself all over her got stronger with each passing day.

I own Scarlett just as much as the rest of them do. She’s my little whore. Mine.

“I went into his box with her and waited by the door, right, then Mason turns up. I warned him to stay away from Scarlett, but he wasn’t there for her.”

Prescott’s eyes darkened.

“That fuck. I swear I want to rip his face off.”

Drake sent Prescott a warning look. We all knew we couldn’t touch Mason no matter how much we wanted to destroy the piece of shit for everything he’d done.

“Who was he there for?” he asked a moment later.

If Drake had any fucking common sense, he wouldn’t have asked the question. He knew exactly who Stuart’s best friend was. Knew the person who could and would send us all to prison if he ever found out the truth. He would make a fucking example of us.

“Who do you think?”

His eyebrows shot up.

“You serious?”

“Yeah, I am.”

“Fuck.”

I set my mug down on the counter. Seeing not one but two men who definitely had it out for us was unsettling. To be honest, it rattled me. And I couldn’t help but stake my claim all over Scarlett because of it.

“Did he see you?”

I shrugged.

“Don’t think so. I hope not. Anyway, Mason was acting like a dick and it pissed me off.”

“Sounds like Mason,” Prescott muttered. “He’s always been a cunt.”

“I made it clear Scarlett is ours. Then I may have also kissed her when we were in the stands in full view of Stuart. I saw him watching us and I couldn’t help myself.”

There was no point lying to them about what happened. They would find out one way or another. Besides, keeping secrets wouldn’t do me any favours.

“Jesus Christ,” Drake exclaimed.

Prescott smirked.

“I bet he was pissed.”

I nodded. Stuart looked incensed. Like he wanted to rip my face off for daring to touch Scarlett. And it reminded me of something else.

“What do you think Mason told Stuart about her moving out?”

“I think the better question is why didn’t he tell Stuart she’s sleeping with all of us,” Drake said, rubbing his chin with his fingers.

“He knows?”

Drake gave me a sharp nod before he sat back and looked up at the ceiling.

“That’s the real reason he was angry with her the day he hurt her. Well, likely angry and jealous.”

Prescott scowled and crossed his arms over his chest.

“He wants her for himself. Always fucking has... even when we were younger.”

Mason was older than us, but we’d known him since we were teenagers. I wished he was anyone other than the fucking Police Commissioner’s son. We would have got rid of him a long time ago if it wasn’t for that. And who knew why he hadn’t told Stuart about her real relationship with us. If Drake was right and Stuart had hurt Scarlett, no doubt Mason knew about it. And in his own fucked up way, he was trying to protect her. Too bad he was protecting her from the wrong fucking people. We were her safety, not him. Us. We’d fight for Scarlett for the rest of our lives.

“He’s not having her no matter what he does,” Drake said. “Over my fucking dead body.”

He dropped his head back down. I could see the dark look in his indigo eyes. The one telling me he would unleash his inner beast on Mason if he could. I watched Prescott smile at Drake’s reaction.

“Oh, so you do care, huh?”

“She’s *ours*.”

Prescott’s smile got wider.

“And what, pray tell, caused this sudden possessiveness?”

Drake gave Prescott a dark look.

“Nothing.”

“Oh no, you don’t get to do that, Drake.” Prescott wagged his finger. “How exactly did you get a hold of this memory stick of Stuart’s, hmm? I think me and Francis deserve to know. Do you even know what’s on it?”

It took a long minute for Drake to say a word. A haunted look crossed over his features, telling me something had gone on last night none of us were privy to.

“She found me in my hideaway and when I put her to bed afterwards, I found the memory stick in her pocket. And no, I haven’t plugged it into anything because I’m wary of what’s on it. This shit is not our field of expertise.”

Prescott dropped his hands from his chest and dug them into his pockets instead.

“We should get West to contact Penn, he’ll know someone who can deal with it safely.”

“We already owe him one favour.”

“So? He’s useful and this time we can just pay him. Not like we’re asking him to give us another randomer to off or anything.”

Drake looked pensive for a moment. We didn’t want to owe the Fixer more favours. One was enough. West trusted him even though he had ties to Zayn Villetti, the mafia kingpin, Gennaro’s son. The whole Villetti family was involved in a lot of shady shit. Gennaro Villetti was the head of the mafia here in London. And one person we avoided like the plague. He was ruthless and unforgiving. Not a man you wanted to have a vendetta against you under any circumstances.

“You’re right. We need to know what’s on it and if she’s actually gone through with what Stuart wanted or not. Perhaps we can use this situation to our advantage. I’ll speak to West when we go downstairs.”

I raised an eyebrow at Drake.

“How did she end up on the roof with you?” I was fucking curious about

what the hell had gone on between them. “Does this mean she’s forgiven you for fucking up?”

Drake scowled before letting out a sigh and looking away.

“I don’t know if she has. And she found me up there, probably heard me playing and came to investigate.”

“Did she give you a hard time?”

“No. She didn’t. And before you ask, I did apologise for what happened... sort of.”

Prescott snorted.

“Sort of? So it was a half-arsed apology then?”

Drake didn’t look back at us.

“All of us are going to spend a lifetime making up for what we did. Don’t give me shit for attempting to apologise to her. We’ve all fucked up with her.”

The three of us fell silent at his words. It wasn’t anything new for me. We were always going to have to make up for the shit we’d put her through. For her accident. For ruining her life. That night was on us, but what happened next? Well, it was on the Carvers. We had nothing to do with what they’d put her through. I wished we knew what had gone on in their household for the past ten years. What they’d done to her.

“She knows you play then,” I said after the silence had gone on for too long.

Drake finally met my eyes.

“Yes. I don’t know how I feel about it.” He leant forward, resting his arms on his knees. “The old Scarlett knew, but she’s not that girl... at least, I don’t think she will ever be exactly the same. Maybe it’s why I’m so conflicted about her remembering who we are. We’ve been separated for ten years. She’s not our Little Nyx any longer. She’s grown up and fuck knows what she’s been through without us.”

The sombre notes to his voice made my chest ache. He was right. She wasn’t the girl from our youth, but it didn’t make her any less magnificent. Any less beautiful and alluring. If anything, she was so much more now. And the only way we’d set Scarlett free was by restoring what she’d lost. By giving her back the girl she’d been so she could be the woman she was now. The one who wanted out of the cage in her mind.

“She needs to remember, Drake. We’re running out of options here. What if

you hadn't intercepted the memory stick? I know you told me to allow everything to play out, but it's one close call after another right now. I mean, anything could have happened last night. Me going to the game was a huge gamble in the first place, knowing it's his stadium. His people surrounding me and her. Not to mention Garrett being there. It could have all gone to hell."

Drake dropped his head and stared at the floor.

"Anything to do with Stuart is always a risk, but you're right. We can't keep hiding it from her, but we need to get an agreement from West first before we move forward. We make decisions together or not at all, remember?"

It had always been our way ever since we were kids. The five of us had been a democracy in a sense. Only the four of us had gone behind Scarlett's back and changed everything for good by our reckless actions.

"We'll meet after work then... talk about it then."

Drake nodded. I glanced at Prescott who was also nodding. It was decided. We were going to have to do something to accelerate the process. Find a way to restore Scarlett's memories for her. Whatever it took. It was something we all had to face up to. And our demons were about to be exposed in the worst way. The night that haunted each and every one of us, including Scarlett. Especially her, as she couldn't remember a single damn thing.

"Well, let's get going before we're all late and make a bad impression, eh?" Prescott said, waving a hand at us. "We'll deal with this shit later when we're all together."

As the three of us walked towards the lift, I couldn't help feeling a sense of impending dread. This was the right thing to do, but it didn't stop nausea from coiling in my stomach. And I wasn't sure why my senses were on fire with the knowledge we were walking headlong into the worst fucking shitshow of our lives.

THIRTY NINE

WEST

Despite the fact I'd had a text from Drake telling me we needed a meeting this evening, it didn't stop me whisking Scarlett upstairs to change after work before anyone else came up to our penthouse. They could fucking wait. My plans couldn't. And so what if I'd turned off my phone so they couldn't give me any shit? Not like they weren't used to me disappearing off for hours on end. Though, I suppose this time was different as I had our girl with me, but whatever. Those three could just deal.

I'd bought Scarlett new clothes specifically for this evening. She'd raised an eyebrow when I'd presented them to her but put them on without complaint. When she stood there in the black ripped skinny jeans, trainers, a black t-shirt with a red skull on the front of it and a little black and red cropped jacket, it was all I could do to not pin her down on my bed and ravage her little body until she screamed for me. It didn't stop me from running my fingers over the scar I'd given her. It made my fucking heart swell every time I saw it. My brand on her perfect skin.

My little Scar belongs to me. She's my little warrior. She'll go to war with me.

I'd taken her hand and dragged her to the lift, hitting the button for the ground floor. It was a miracle we hadn't been caught by Francis, Drake or Prescott. No doubt I would get an earful over not responding to their demand, but I really didn't give a shit. Tonight wasn't about them. It was about me and Scarlett.

She looked up at me with those beautiful hazel-green eyes but didn't say a thing as we rode down. She was nervous. Her fingers trembled in mine and she kept worrying at the zip of her jacket with her other hand. Some things never

changed. Her nervous habits had always made me smile. And I'd soothed her nerves every single time when we'd been teenagers.

Now, things were different. We were different. I couldn't be the boy she'd been close to all those years ago. I wasn't him any longer. Ten years had twisted me into someone the old Scarlett wouldn't recognise. And there was no way of bringing him back. Not after what happened. We'd forge a new path together. We were meant to fucking well be, and I wouldn't accept any other answer. Scarlett wasn't going to leave me again. I wouldn't allow it to happen under any circumstances.

"Do you like what I bought you?" I asked as we walked out into the lobby and along to the front doors.

Scarlett looked down at herself. Her hand brushed over her t-shirt, her fingers lingering on the skull.

"I do," she whispered, almost as if she was afraid to admit it. "Thank you, West."

I squeezed her hand, trying not to allow emotion to clog my throat. She sounded like my Scarlett. My girl. The one who appreciated everything I did for her.

I miss you, Scar. I miss everything about the girl you were. Fuck. I want you back. Every part of you. Especially your heart.

I pushed open the front doors, guiding her out into the cool early evening air. She followed me along to the tube station. I could have driven, but I wanted her to experience the city the way we used to when we were younger, when none of us had driving licences.

"You still not telling me where we're going?" she asked when we stood together in the packed carriage.

I rested my hand on her lower back, pulling her closer. I wanted her near. Needed her like fucking air. This woman was my entire life. She always had been. Always would be. I could never let Scarlett go, no matter how many years had gone by. There was nothing I wouldn't do for her, even if she was shit scared of me now. My girl had always been fearless. She kept standing up to me no matter how much I pushed her. No matter how many times I made her tremble. She tried to hide it, but she liked it. She liked when I made her scared. It got her wet and ready for me.

“No. You’ll have to be patient.”

The pout she gave me was adorable as fuck. Tonight, I wasn’t in the mood to argue or get up in her damn face. This was my way of taking her out on a date. Most people would probably say it was fucked up. I didn’t want to think about what Drake would say to me right now. What all of them would. If they knew where I was taking her, they would probably have lost their shit.

It was the first time since she’d returned to us I had a hard time not wanting to kiss her. For all the times I’d told her I didn’t kiss, it was a lie. The only woman I wanted to kiss was her. I wanted to ravage that mouth of hers until she bled for me. Until she cried and begged for more. I would never be done with her. Never.

The tube lurched, forcing me to hold Scarlett closer as I clutched the bar above us. She gripped my coat in her tiny fists to stay upright. Fuck me, she was the cutest damn thing I’d ever seen in my life. Even when she was giving me attitude. If only she knew how much I adored her tenacious little soul. But the last ten years without her held me back. The secrets between us. The lies. And most of all, my guilt.

The night of her accident tortured me because of what happened. How it happened. And how nothing was ever the same again. It’s why I didn’t think about it. Only seeing her made it play out in my mind over and over on fucking repeat. I couldn’t escape it nor her.

“Are we going to eat first?” she murmured, releasing my coat to wrap her hands around my waist.

“Is my little Scar hungry?”

She nodded. I gave her a smile, my fingers stroking lower down her back, across her perfect little pert arse. Her eyes widened at my touch but she didn’t tell me to stop.

“Don’t worry, I’ll make sure you’re well-fed.”

I watched her brow furrow slightly as if she was trying to work out whether I was telling her I’d take her out to eat or intending to feed her my cock. Maybe I’d do both. She’d just have to wait and see. I did want her mouth wrapped around it all over again. Her hot, wet little mouth I couldn’t stop staring at. The one I craved with every fucking inch of my being.

We got off at the next stop. I gripped Scarlett’s hand tight to make sure she

didn't escape me or get lost in the crowd of people. When we were out in the open again, I led her towards a gourmet burger place I liked to frequent. Scarlett seemed rather happy with my choice and wolfed down her fully loaded burger with sweet potato fries. They were all the fucking rage these days. She gave me a sheepish look when she was done, as if the way she'd devoured her burger was completely unladylike. I smirked. She had no idea how much watching her eat with such gusto turned me on. Everything she did had an effect on me. It made me want to keep her forever. And I fucking well would.

"Did that satisfy you enough, little Scar, or did you want something else?" I asked, leaning closer to her. I'd finished my food minutes before she did.

Her cheeks flamed. My hand clamped down around her leg and I ran my fingers along her inner thigh. Fuck, I wanted her little pussy wrapped around my dick after she'd been face fucked so hard, she cried. It was all I could think about. Having her. Especially in that outfit. It was the exact style Scarlett used to have when she was younger. Ripped jeans were her favourites and she was always in a pair of beat-up Converse. I'd loved the way she was so unashamedly herself, refusing to go with the crowd or bow to societal pressure to dress a certain way. Scarlett didn't care. She had us and we always lifted her up. Always encouraged her to be herself just as she did us.

"You're asking me? I thought you took what you wanted."

"Tonight is about you."

Scarlett bit her lip while I ran my fingers higher.

"Take what you want, West."

I pressed my fingers into the seam of her jeans, pushing the fabric against her pussy. She let out a little pant.

"What I want, little Scar, is for you to worship me on your fucking knees," I whispered, my mouth close to hers. "And I want you to do it with this defiant mouth of yours."

I raised my other hand and brushed her lips with my fingertips. Then I shoved two of them in her mouth. Her eyes went wide but her tongue curled around them as if showing me exactly how she would pleasure my dick with it.

"Are you going to be my good girl or my bad one?"

Her tongue swirled around the tips of my fingers. I smiled wider, my fingers digging harder into her jeans, stroking her through the fabric and making her

hips jerk under my touch.

“You want to be both, don’t you. You want me so fucking bad, you can’t stand it. You’d let me fuck you right here.”

She let out a little whimper around my fingers, too quiet for anyone else to hear. My eyes darted around the room, taking in the rather shocked faces of the people next to us. The couple nearest to us was giving me a disgusted look.

“You like what you see, huh?” I said to them. “You going to get up and leave if I make her get on her knees under the table for me?”

The woman spluttered and the guy she was with looked as though he was torn between being horrified and wanting me to go ahead with it. If I did, I would likely get us kicked out of the place. Didn’t matter since we’d finished our meals. However, it wasn’t part of my plans to get arrested for public indecency.

I looked over the couple again.

“Too bad for you, me and my little pet have places to be. And yes, she will be getting her throat battered later in case you were wondering.”

I pulled my fingers from Scarlett’s mouth, gave the couple a wink and got up from the table, pulling her with me. As I took her hand and walked her over to the counter to pay, I could hear the woman muttering behind us, “What a disgusting man.”

I laughed, not giving two shits about her opinion. Scarlett’s face was bright red, but I could see the little smirk playing on her lips as if she’d found it amusing too. We’d always shared the same sense of humour and had never given a shit about what other people thought.

After I’d paid, Scarlett and I walked out into the twilight and back towards the tube.

“You’re shameless,” she murmured, pressing herself into my side. I let go of her hand to wrap my arm around her.

“Those stuck-up fucks deserved it. Her husband clearly wanted us to give them a little show. He was trying to hide his dick getting hard over the thought of it, whilst she was sitting there looking at us like we were the fucking antichrist or something.”

She snorted and gave me a bright smile.

“Probably the most action she’s got in a long while.”

That made me laugh out loud and Scarlett joined in. Fuck this felt good.

Being with her like this. As if we were normal again. As if the last ten years hadn't fucking existed. Just me and my girl, doing whatever the fuck we wanted.

In those moments, I forgot to be worried about where I was taking her. About her potential reaction to it. All I could see and feel was Scarlett, my fucking girl. My whole damn world. My life. She was my home. My family. The only person who had ever given me peace, hope and tranquillity.

I love you, Scarlett Nyx. You're my soulmate. My one and only. Now and forever.

FORTY

SCARLETT

The side to West he'd shown me this evening was unlike anything I'd ever imagined. He was playful, funny and, as always, took exactly what he wanted without fear of the consequences. With him, I felt free. Unrestricted. Able to do whatever the hell I wanted. And what I really wanted was this man who was holding my hand as we walked from the bus stop, and his dick down my throat. It was all I could think about since he'd told me to worship him on my knees. All I could focus on. I needed him with a desperation that threatened to turn me as psychotic and reckless as the man himself.

We'd taken a tube and two buses to get to our destination. Now we were walking up a rather run-down looking street towards fuck knows what. West hadn't told me where we were going. My curiosity had almost got the better of me, but I'd asked him enough times already.

My eyes were fixed on him as we walked, taking in every inch of this absolutely gorgeous but fucked up man beside me. His amber eyes glinted in the fading light. I'd never met anyone with the shade before. It tugged at my memories in an unsettling way I tried hard to ignore. As much as I wanted to remember, I didn't want the past to ruin this time I had with him away from the others.

He was dressed head to toe in black, from his trainers to his jeans that clung to his muscular legs. The black t-shirt he wore bore a red axe on it dripping with blood. And to top it off, he had a black canvas military-style coat on. The man carried himself as if he knew he was a god amongst mortals. And I found it alluring even though he scared the shit out of me most of the time.

“West.”

“Mmm?”

He didn't glance at me, only squeezed my hand tighter in his. He already had a death grip on it as if he was worried I'd run from him. No fucking way. I barely even knew where we were. I had no reason to leave his side. Besides, I wanted him to shove me up against one of these houses, force me on my knees and let me wrap my lips around him.

Dare I ask him for it? He said tonight was about me. And he'd already told me he wanted me to worship him.

“I want something from you,” I said in a small voice that didn't make me sound particularly confident.

He glanced at me with a wicked glint in those beautiful but deadly eyes of his.

“And what's that, my little Scar?”

I had to swallow first before I gathered my courage. Reaching out with my other hand, I drew us to a halt halfway down the street. My fingers ran down his front until I reached the top of his jeans. I traced a line under his t-shirt, brushing the pads over the fabric of his boxers where they peeked out from his jeans.

“Let me worship you.”

The slow upwards curl of his lip made me tremble.

“Say please.”

“Please, West.”

He chuckled, the darkness swelling in his eyes making me want to throw myself at him. My pussy throbbed with the anticipation of him wrapping my hair in his fist and the other around my neck. The way he'd make me take him in my mouth. I knew he could be rough and I wanted it. I needed it so fucking badly.

“Come with me.”

He pulled my hand away from his jeans and tugged me further down the street. I hoped it meant he was taking me somewhere less open to let me wrap my lips around his cock. Abruptly, he stopped and pulled me through a small gap between two fences. It was overgrown with grass and weeds, but it didn't stop West from dragging me along it. My eyes darted around, finding the fence to our right was wooden while the one to our left was metal and beyond it seemed to be a building site. Except it looked as if it had been untouched for

years with paint crumbling from the parked JCBs, which included a bulldozer, a digger and an excavator, and stacks of abandoned building materials. Something about it sent a horrible wave of familiarity racing down my spine.

West stopped by a pole and let go of my hand to pull at the metal fencing. It rolled back slightly, allowing him to slip through the gap. He held it for me to dart through as well, before setting it back in place.

He didn't allow me any time to look around, dragging me towards one of the abandoned JCBs. The bulldozer had been fitted with a loader that sat off the ground, its bucket hanging in the air. West let go of my hand to haul himself up into the bucket. It was huge, so he fit there with his legs hanging down. He reached out and dragged me between his legs before placing my hands on his crotch. I could feel his dick and it made my body shiver. Then his fingers went to my hair, tangling in the strands as he stared down at me.

“Do you want to worship me or do you want me to make you?”

His voice was low and gravelly.

“Make me.”

The moment my words were out of my mouth, I was pulling at the zipper of his jeans, having flipped the button open. He ran his teeth over his lip as if it was the answer he wanted out of me. When I got his dick free, he pushed my head down, making me bend at the waist. My hands went to his thighs as my face came level with his hard cock.

“Lick it.”

The demand in his voice made me flick out my tongue, tasting the tip of his cock and the pre-cum beading there. He growled in response, his fingers digging into my scalp. Then he gathered my long wavy hair up in his fist, pulling it away from my face. His eyes were dark in the low light and full of heat.

“You going to show me how much you love this dick, Scar?”

I nodded, tracing my tongue around the crown to demonstrate my acquiescence. The rumble of his chest had me doing it again.

“Open.”

My lips parted, allowing him to push his dick into my mouth. The thickness of it had me opening wider to give him better access. Using my hair in his fist, he shoved me down on it until the tip hit the back of my mouth, making me choke a little around his length.

“Fuck,” he groaned. “Let me in, swallow my cock.”

I did as he asked, swallowing, and his dick sunk into my throat, causing me to gag, but I kept taking it. My hands curled harder around his thighs, my nails digging into the fabric of his jeans.

“My bad little Scar taking my dick so well. Fuck. That’s it, all of it. You’re a dirty girl.”

I couldn’t help but obey him and take the whole thing. Breathing around his length and girth was practically impossible, but I didn’t let it stop me. He only held me there for a few seconds. Tugging me back off it, my saliva covered his dick and dribbled down my lip. The way he smiled at me set my whole world on fire as I tried to catch my breath.

A minute later, I was back on his dick, taking it the way he wanted. He let out another groan as he worked my head by my hair. I let him fuck my throat without any resistance. Let him use me and revelled in the way he couldn’t help the grunts and groans echoing around the bucket he sat in. For the first time, West didn’t hold back his pleasure. He didn’t hide the way I made him feel with my mouth around his cock. He showed me how much he wanted this. Needed my tongue wrapped around him, stroking his length.

His fist tightened in my hair, pushing me down further until he was lodged in my throat again.

“Mine,” he growled.

Then he emptied himself down my throat, the violence of it making my pussy clench. I couldn’t do anything else but hold myself there, feeling his cock pulse in my mouth. He pulled me off when he was spent, letting me swallow before I sucked in air to my deprived lungs. He wrapped his free hand around my throat, stroking it with his thumb. He used my hair to pull me up, allowing me to straighten and stand between his legs again. The glint of those amber eyes had my heart pumping wildly in my chest.

“My beautiful little Scar,” he murmured. “Such a good girl.”

“My War,” I whispered.

He stroked my throat again, telling me without words how he felt. This man would destroy the world for me. He would chase me to the ends of the earth. He would do anything to keep me by his side. And I had no idea why he was so devoted to me.

Leaning closer, he rested his forehead against mine, staring down into my eyes like they were the window to my soul. The intimacy of the moment had me sucking in air. The thickness of the tension between us was almost suffocating.

“What do your tattoos mean?” I blurted out without thinking about it.

He grinned, keeping his head pressed to mine.

“Which ones?”

“The ones on your fingers.”

“Every time I kill, I have Penn tattoo a memento of it on my skin.”

My eyes flicked down to his hand around my neck. The one on his forefinger was the symbol for the Gemini zodiac sign. It made me wonder what it was about, but I didn't ask. The one on his middle finger was a teardrop. And the next one along was a series of small lines with another diagonally across it, representing five. Finally, he had a little sword on his pinkie.

I reached up and traced a line across the skull on the back of his hand.

“Penn? You mean the Fixer guy... he did these?”

“Mmm.”

“He's very talented for a man who also gets rid of people for a living.”

West snorted.

“People are not the only thing he fixes. Penn is a crazy motherfucker. He might come across as charming, but he's got a few screws loose. The dude is literally obsessed with some girl he's barely spoken to. He talks about her every time I see him.”

“Is that why you get on with him?”

He barked with laughter, pulling his head back as his hand tightened around my throat. When he settled down, he smiled at me.

“Probably.”

His hand slid from my hair and traced down my back.

“You're a little obsessed with me,” I whispered, leaning closer and pressing myself against his body the best I could.

“Not a little... you consume my every waking moment and my dreams. You're my girl, little Scar. All mine. I'll never let you go.”

The fingers around my neck tightened, punctuating his words.

“I don't want you to.”

His hand roamed from my back to in between our bodies and lower. He

cupped my pussy in a possessive manner. I couldn't stop myself grinding into his hand. It made him smirk.

"I think you want me to stick my fingers in your pussy and make you come."

I bit my lip, staring up at him and trying to convey all my need and desperation for him. What I wanted was for him to fuck me with his perfect dick, but he'd just come and I had no idea how long it would take him to recover.

"Mmm, Scar, you want more than that, don't you?" He rubbed my pussy. "It's written all over your face. You want me to bend you over that fucking stack of bricks over there, rip your jeans down and make you scream on my dick."

I didn't know how he'd read my thoughts, but he pushed me back and jumped out of the bucket, landing on his feet with a thud. He guided me backwards with his hand wrapped around my throat until I hit something solid.

"Wrap your hand around my dick, Scar."

I did as he asked, finding it half hard already.

"Stroke it. Make me believe you want it inside your dripping pussy, the one soaking your fucking knickers with your need. I can almost fucking smell your arousal."

I was squirming inside at his dirty words. At the way he didn't give a shit what came out of his mouth and how it made me tremble. And I almost melted in a puddle before him when he unbuttoned my jeans with one hand and slid his fingers inside my underwear. He smiled wider when he found me wet with need.

"West," I whimpered when his fingers circled my clit. It throbbed at his touch.

"Don't worry, my needy little girl, I take care of my possessions. Your pussy belongs to me."

FORTY ONE

SCARLETT

I was dying. I swear to fucking god I was. West's amber eyes were almost black as he stared down at me, his fingers mastering my clit with absolute precision as I stroked his cock back to full mast. There was something about the fear I felt around West. It made my pussy gush with need for him. And right now, I was shit scared of the man towering over me, telling me he owned my pussy. I was terrified because he saw right through me. He knew me on a level I didn't even know myself on. Like I was intrinsically tied to him.

"This little pussy is so wet for me. So fucking wet and ready for my cock."

The only sound I could make was a high-pitched whine in agreement. My other hand wrapped around his waist, pulling him closer. Wanting him to fuck me until I cried and came all over his dick. I wanted to feel myself clench around his length, show him how much I needed his beautiful cock inside me.

He let go of my neck so he could pull my jeans off my hips, dragging my underwear with it. Turning me around, he forced me against the stack of bricks behind us, pressing my face into them. My hips were tugged back, meeting his body as his cock slid between my wet folds. I moaned, my palms flattening against the bricks.

West didn't enter me, content to rub his dick along my slit and coat it in my arousal. The more he did it, the more I whimpered, my nails scraping along the bricks.

"I want you," I cried out, not caring about how much noise I was making. "Please, West. Fuck me."

He leant over me, wrapping his hand around the back of my neck to keep me in place.

“Do you need this dick? Need it so bad, it’s making you crazy, hmm?”

“Yes, fuck, please.”

“You told me you need more than good dick, Scar. Has that changed?”

I trembled, trying to push back against him.

“You’re more than that to me,” I whispered. “I want all of you.”

I was tired of lying to myself about my attraction to West. Tired of pretending something about him didn’t make my soul sing. Maybe I was crazy, but I was crazy for him. My psycho. The man who’d branded his horseman persona on my skin. He was fucking well mine.

“Take what you want then, Scar. You told me I’m yours, so fucking take me.”

My hand dropped from the bricks and reached between us. His cock was slippery from my essence, but I pressed it to my entrance and pushed myself back against him. A low moan sounded in the back of my throat. Fuck, he felt so good. Everything about him.

He took over from me then, thrusting deep and impaling me on the whole fucking thing. My knees threatened to buckle, but he kept me upright with his hand on my hip and the other around the back of my neck.

West took me with brutal thrusts, our skin slapping together in time with each of our grunts of pleasure. Neither of us spoke. We didn’t have to. Need had taken over. It consumed the two of us. I didn’t care if we were out in the open on a building site. Didn’t give a shit if someone stumbled upon us. All I could think about was West. All I could feel was him. His body hammering into mine. And when he pressed his face into my shoulder, his teeth gripping my jacket, I knew he was as affected as me by the experience.

My fingers slipped over my clit, stroking myself into a fucking frenzy as he kept pounding into me. The angle of his cock was almost too much, brushing right up against the right spot and making my vision blur.

“Don’t stop,” I gasped, trying to gulp down oxygen into my lungs. “Please, fuck.”

“Scream for me, Scar. Let the whole damn world know how much you need me.”

“I don’t want the world to know. Just you... only you.”

He shuddered against me at my words, like he was barely holding onto his fucking sanity. Mine was already shot to pieces. Fractured by the events of my

life and the way he was fucking me. The way he was owning my body and my pleasure.

“I need you,” he whispered. “Don’t leave me again. Never leave me.”

I didn’t know what he meant by again, but I couldn’t ask him. I was too overwhelmed by the way his dick kept slamming into my pussy with such brutality, it bordered on painful. But I loved it. I needed it. All of it. All of him.

“Fuck, West!”

I shattered, my world splintering into a thousand tiny specs of dust. My eyes closed and I let bliss wash over me. Allowed myself to be carried away. Nothing mattered but him. I could feel him inside me, drawing out my climax while my fingers continued to brush over my clit. The moment it became too much, my hand fell away, but he didn’t stop. He kept pounding my pussy, his dick swelling inside me as I clenched around him.

“My little Scar,” he groaned in my ear. “My beautiful girl.”

It was everything. This moment between us as he emptied himself inside me, owning me with his cock. Claiming me as his own. I surrendered myself to him. It was my only choice. I couldn’t keep fighting against the tidal wave. West drowned me. And I let him.

We were both panting when our bodies finally settled together. West wrapped his arms around me and buried his face in my neck, holding me to him as if his life depended on it. If only I could stay with him like this forever. If only I didn’t have to face up to the fact my heart recognised the four of these men. It yearned for them despite everything they’d done. And it wanted West to write his name all over it. It wanted me to brand myself all over his in return.

When he finally pulled away and tugged my clothes up, along with his own, my breathing had returned to normal and my legs were no longer shaking. It wasn’t like I could clean myself up, so I would have to deal with his cum dripping from me for the rest of the evening. It was worth it for the experience I’d shared with him.

“I didn’t bring you here to fuck you,” he murmured, stroking my hair back from my face.

“Then why did you?”

He smiled.

“I’ll show you.”

He took my hand and we picked our way through the building materials until we came to the shell of a building. It was clearly abandoned, or at least, it must be on a normal night. Graffiti marred the walls. Years old ripped plastic sheeting flapped in the cool breeze. And yet the sounds of people could be heard inside along with music.

I don't know why I got a sick feeling in my stomach seeing this place. It felt almost... ominous. A part of me wanted to recoil from it, but West dragged me towards the opening and inside before I could say a word. There was a large crowd of people gathered. They were cheering and shouting at something happening in the middle of the room.

"What's going on?" I asked West.

He pulled me past the crowd towards the stairwell. We walked up a couple of the steps so I could see above the heads of the crowd. They were in a ring around two bare-chested men with their hands up. One of them snapped his fist out, catching the other one around the jaw.

West had brought me to what I assumed was a bare-knuckle fight, and I had no idea how I felt about it. He wrapped an arm around me, pulling me closer to his body. I watched the two men go at each other. I could feel him vibrating with excitement next to me as if watching this got him going. It shouldn't surprise me. Violence was his thing.

"Is this even legal?" I asked, looking up at him.

"Nope. Underground fights never are, it's why they do it here. No one gives a shit about this place. It was left to rot years ago."

"Why?"

West shrugged even as his body tensed. It made me suspicious about the real reason he'd brought me here, but I didn't comment on it. This place felt wrong to me. So fucking wrong. And I had no idea why. A cold sweat beaded at the back of my neck. I tried to ignore it, tried to focus on the fight in front of me, but the feeling grew and grew until it was almost too much. As if sensing my unease, West pulled me against his front, wrapping his arms around my waist and rested his chin on my shoulder.

"Do you come to these often?"

I needed a distraction. Anything to keep my mind off my unease.

"I used to participate until Drake got me banned. To be fair, I did almost kill

a man, but he doesn't like me coming here. He'll be angry when he finds out I brought you."

"You don't care what he thinks."

"Not really."

I did wonder at West's friendship with the other three sometimes. They seemed to tolerate his insanity to a point until he crossed some sort of invisible line. Then all bets were off.

"Why are you all friends?"

"Who? Me, Pres, Drake and Frankie?"

I nodded.

"Just are, Scar."

"That's not an answer."

He chuckled, holding me tighter.

"We've been together through thick and thin. They're my family and I'm theirs, no matter how much they want to punch me in the face at times."

I looked at his face. There was tension lining his brow. Somehow, I didn't think he liked me asking these questions.

"You're just so different from each other."

"And? Does that prevent us from being friends?"

"Well, no, but Drake told me last night that something happened to you when you were younger. Something that changed you all."

West stiffened. I knew probing him was probably a bad idea, but my curiosity got the better of me.

"It did."

"Will you tell me what—"

"Hey, I know you," came a voice from nearby.

I turned my head back towards the crowd, finding a guy standing at the bottom of the stairs staring right at West.

"You shouldn't be here."

West released me before pressing me behind him.

"Says who?"

The guy tipped his chin.

"Says fucking everyone. Bennett banned you from coming back here."

"Bennett doesn't have a fucking say in what I do."

I didn't know who the hell Bennett was, but I didn't like the way the guy was eyeing West, nor the way my man's muscles tensed and his fists clenched.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah."

And with that, West jumped down from the stairs and raised his fist, smashing it into the guy's face. His head snapped back as my hand went to my mouth. West hit the guy again before he hit back, catching West around the jaw. The crowd noticed the commotion behind them. The fight was forgotten as West and this guy beat on each other.

I stumbled down the stairs, wanting to intervene even though watching West lose his shit was kind of hot. The way he ducked the guy's attempts to hit him further with a weird sort of grace. The crack of the guy's nose shattering under the impact of West's fist.

"West!"

He glanced over at me and grinned before getting back into the fray. Two other people had joined in, trying to drag the guy away from my man. It was useless. West hit one of them in the face and caught the other in the stomach. I watched in horror as the crowd started to cheer him. He smacked the mouthy guy down on the ground and kicked him in the stomach for good measure. The other two were still trying to stop West, but they couldn't get a good grip on him.

The whole thing was utterly crazy. Then it was over as two much bigger guys dragged West off the one he had pinned down on the ground.

"Dude, chill the fuck out, Jesus!" one of them said as West shrugged them off.

He put his bloody knuckles up in surrender before cracking his neck. Without a glance at the man he'd almost beaten to a pulp groaning on the floor, he stalked over to me. There didn't look like there was a scratch on him. And the blood on his hands wasn't his.

"Let's go," he said, taking my hand and pulling me up the staircase.

He didn't care to deal with the mess he'd left behind. West was carefully controlled chaos contained inside a man who wielded it with maximum efficiency.

On the first floor, there were people everywhere chatting and a few making

out by the pillars holding the building up. West ignored them and took me up two more flights. There was no one on this level. He led me over to the other side of the building from the stairs, stopping near the edge and turning to me. His amber eyes were full of emotions I didn't understand.

I stepped closer and took both of his hands in mine, looking them over to make sure he wasn't hurt.

"It's not mine," he murmured.

"Was that necessary?"

He smiled, but it was sad.

"Probably not, but..."

"You're not very appropriate."

"Exactly."

I don't know why I wasn't scared of him for what he'd done. Why it made me want to hold him close and take away the demons circling behind his eyes. West could go from zero to a hundred at the drop of a hat. And yeah, it did terrify the crap out of me, but it also made me want to understand him. Want to know the man hiding inside.

I wanted to know his heart.

"Who is Bennett?"

"Bennett Jerome Michaelson. Head of a gang in Hackney, but he runs this underground ring."

"And you don't care if he banned you."

"Nope. This isn't his land, anyway. I can be here if I want to."

The wind blew, ruffling his light brown hair. An image of him became clear in my mind. He stood in this exact place except he was younger. I shook myself. It couldn't be real. Yet this place was too familiar in a way I couldn't put my finger on. And I wanted to dispel the feeling. I wanted it to go away. I wanted the magic of the two of us locked together in ecstasy back. I needed it so fucking badly, I could hardly think straight.

Stepping closer, I let go of his hands and wrapped my hands around his neck.

"West..."

"Yes, my little Scar?"

A tiny furrow appeared between his knitted brows as he looked at me. As if he was worried about what I was planning. Well, he should be after all the times

he'd told me this wasn't something he did.

“I'm going to kiss you and if you don't want me to... you have to stop me.”

FORTY TWO

WEST

TEN YEARS AGO

The persistent knocking at my door made me let out a huff as I approached it. My parents had gone out somewhere. Fuck knows where. Who gave a shit. They certainly didn't give one about me, but whatever. I didn't want to think about them.

I pulled the door open only to find Scarlett standing there, her eyes full of tears and her body trembling. My hands went to her, pulling her inside, shutting the door and wrapping my arms around her.

"West," she sobbed. "Oh god, I can't. I keep remembering it over and over."

I held her tighter. My best friend had been through an ordeal last week. And only now was it finally hitting her.

"Shh, I've got you, Little Nyx. I've got you."

She gripped my t-shirt in an iron hold, clutching me to her as if her life depended on it. This girl was my universe. I would die for her if I could. So right now, I was going to hold her while she cried. While she sobbed her heart out all over my chest because she'd been assaulted. Drake had saved her from the fuckers in time, but it didn't make it any easier on her. Didn't mean she was okay. She'd told me so last night when we were on the phone with each other.

"They almost... I can't... I don't want them to have that from me."

"They didn't, Scar. Drake stopped them, remember? He stopped them."

She shook in my arms. I wished I could make her pain go away. I wanted to soothe her damn soul. Not just because Scarlett was my best friend. I was in

love with her. I had been since the day she'd stomped into the classroom on the first day of primary school, her light brown wavy hair wild and her hazel-green eyes full of determination. Especially when she walked right up to me and broke out into a smile as she put out her hand. This five-year-old girl was fearless as she introduced herself to me as Scarlett Nyx. And she'd captivated me ever since.

Her tiny fists gripped my t-shirt harder. My heart fucking broke. We couldn't stay standing here in the hallway. I wanted her to be comfortable. Pulling back, I took her tear-streaked face between my palms, wiping away her still falling tears with my thumbs.

"What can I do?"

"Just be here for me."

I dropped my hands from her face and took her hand, leading her upstairs to my bedroom. She'd been in here a thousand times before, but something about today felt different. She'd sought me out directly without informing the others. Without even texting me beforehand.

I left her by my bed as I grabbed the box of tissues sitting on my desk and brought them over to her. Scarlett took them from me, giving me a sad smile as she wiped her face. No matter whether she was crying, happy, angry or sad, she was always beautiful to me. The most radiant being I'd ever encountered in this universe.

She sniffled and threw the used tissues in the bin, setting the box down on my bedside table before looking at me.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

She'd told me exactly what happened. She'd explained it to all of us even though Drake had been there. He didn't see them grab her and take her behind the building at school. He didn't see when they'd tried to stick their hands up her skirt nor when she'd made an attempt to push them off. But he did get there right before they tore her knickers down her legs. He did tell them to fuck off and leave her alone. Then he'd held Scarlett while she cried and made sure she was okay.

I didn't care what anyone else said. We were going to make those cunts pay for what they did to her. What they kept getting away with because of who they were. Drake, Prescott, Francis and I weren't going to stand for it any longer.

Not now they'd hurt our best friend. Not when they'd tried to do to Scarlett what they'd done to other girls, the fuckers.

"No. I don't want to think about it. I can't. It hurts too much."

I reached out and cupped her shoulder, giving it a squeeze.

"Should I invite the others over? We can break into Henry's drinking cabinet again."

I don't know when I stopped calling Henry, Dad. Maybe when I realised he was an absolute cunt. Didn't call my mother that title either. She was Cynthia. I think she hated it, but I didn't care. The woman always gave me a hard fucking time for no reason.

"Your parents aren't here?"

"No, thank fuck."

Scarlett gave me a sad smile. She didn't like them much either. And they thought she was a bad influence on me. To be honest, they hated the boys too. We were troublemakers as far as they were concerned. Didn't give a shit what they thought. The boys and Scarlett were my best friends, more like family to me than my parents had ever been. I wouldn't give them up for anything.

"I don't want you to invite the others over."

"Then what do you want to do?"

She stepped closer to me. There was something in her eyes. Something that told me she was about to change everything.

"I want you to erase their memory from my skin."

For a long minute as I tried to work out what the fuck she meant, I stared at her as she looked at me. Her eyes betrayed her feelings. I couldn't believe what I was hearing and seeing. My heart raced out of control. It beat so damn hard in my chest, I thought it was going to burst.

"You want what?"

Another step brought her even closer.

"West, don't you know how I feel about you?"

I shook my head. Never once had I guessed she might reciprocate my feelings towards her. We were super fucking close, but as friends. I'd always thought we were friends.

Scarlett stepped right up into my personal space and placed her hand on my heart. It pounded harder against my chest. I was sure she could feel it.

“I love you.”

Those words. Those fucking words had me struggling to draw air into my lungs.

She feels the same way. She fucking feels the same way.

“You love me?” I whispered.

She nodded as her other hand found mine and brought it up so she could entwine our fingers together.

“I’ve always loved you, ever since the moment I saw you.” She let out a little sigh. “That’s why I went up to you. I was drawn to you. I’ve always been drawn to all of you, but I saw you first, West. It’s always been you.”

Never in a million fucking years did I ever imagine she’d come over today and declare her love for me. I didn’t know what to do with myself. All I could think about was her. This was fate. Destiny had spun its web and brought us together.

“Why me? Why not one of the others?”

She shook her head and leant closer to me.

“What kind of question is that? You’re you. There’s no one else like you.”

“Scar...”

“There shouldn’t be any questions. I love you. That’s it. You’re the whole world to me, West. I don’t know why you can’t see that.”

I didn’t know why I couldn’t either. It was insane, wasn’t it? The girl I’d loved my whole life had secretly loved me too. How didn’t I see it when I knew her like the back of my hand? And why the hell was I questioning it? Fuck, I loved her too. I loved her so much, I thought I might die if I was ever without her.

“Scar, I... I...”

She didn’t let me speak. Instead, she went up on her tiptoes and pressed her mouth against mine. She took a kiss from me without permission, but she didn’t need it. I’d grant her everything she wanted if she didn’t stop pressing her mouth against mine. My fingers went to her waist, tugging her against me as my mouth parted and allowed her in. It was a clumsy kiss because neither of us had done it before, but I didn’t care. She tasted like fucking magic.

We eventually found our natural rhythm, neither of us wanting to let the other go. This was everything and nothing like I’d imagined. And I thought about kissing Scarlett more than a thousand times over the years. I was in fucking heaven, never wanting it to end, but I had to. There was something I

needed to say to her.

Pulling away, I dropped her hand so I could cup her face in both my hands again. She stared up at me, her beautiful eyes full of affection. Full of fucking love.

“I love you too, Scar. I’m so fucking in love with you it hurts. From the moment you stepped into the classroom all those years ago, I knew deep in my heart, you are it for me. I didn’t dare hope you’d ever feel the same way.”

She pressed another kiss to my mouth, a tear spilling down her cheek.

“I do. I really do. And I meant it... I want you to erase them from my skin. I want it to be you. Please, make love to me, West. I don’t care if neither of us knows what we’re doing. I trust you with my body, heart and soul.”

I hesitated, unsure if now was the right time to do this. But when the fuck had timing ever been right? She’d told me she loved me. This girl loved me and I loved her. Scarlett Nyx was the world to me just as I was to her.

“Okay, though I don’t have protection or anything because I didn’t think...”

She smiled and shook her head.

“I do.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“Did you come here to seduce me?”

She laughed, the beautiful sound tinkling from her lips and making my heart swell.

“Yeah, I kind of did.”

I drew her down onto my bed, pressing her flat on her back before I fit myself between her legs.

“Well, consider me seduced.”

“That was easy.”

I smiled, leaning down to brush my lips against hers.

“With you, everything is easy, Scar. I’d do anything you asked.”

Taking her hand, I pressed it against my chest.

“I love you. My heart is yours. Take care of it for me.”

“I will, West. I promise.”

And with that, I kissed her, allowing her tongue to meld with mine because I was never letting Scarlett Nyx go again. Not when she was mine... and I was hers.

FORTY THREE

WEST

The memory of the night past Scarlett told me she loved me dissipated, leaving me staring down at my present-day Scarlett who'd warned me she was going to kiss me. I stood there, utterly frozen and captivated by the look in her hazel-green eyes.

None of what happened this evening had gone to plan. I hadn't meant to fuck her here amongst the abandoned diggers and bricks in the place where everything went to shit ten years ago. I hadn't meant to beat the shit out of some guy for giving me attitude, but then again, it was hardly a surprise. I refused to allow anyone to disrespect me or tell me what the fuck I could and couldn't do. This place meant something to me. No one was going to tell me I couldn't be here.

Drake would probably tell me I was torturing myself by coming back here again and again, but I couldn't help it. It was the place where everything ended. And I was drawn back here, replaying the event in my mind like it was stuck on fucking repeat.

We shouldn't be up on this floor. She shouldn't be looking at me the way she was. It was hell. Pure fucking agony. And yet I was powerless at this moment. I couldn't stop it. Not when I wanted her. Not when my chest fucking caved in with all my memories of Scarlett from the past. And now when she wanted to kiss me.

I was losing it. Completely. It messed with my fucking head.

Scarlett pressed closer, going up on her tiptoes to reach me. She'd told me to stop her if I didn't want this. I was so fucking torn between needing her to take the decision away from me and pushing her away because she didn't remember

me. She didn't remember us. She didn't know she loved me.

"Scarlett."

She paused, her mouth so damn close to mine. There was disappointment in her eyes, but I couldn't do this. She couldn't kiss me when she didn't know who I was to her. It was a fucking step too far. It shouldn't be, considering I'd been deep inside her several times, but kissing to me meant something far more than just fucking. Kissing her was about love. And her heart wasn't mine again yet. It couldn't be when she was living in a world full of lies and deceit.

"I didn't think you'd say no," she whispered.

My hands curled around her shoulders, pulling her away from my body and forcing her to drop down to her feet again. Her words made my heart fucking crack wide open.

I couldn't do this any longer. Couldn't keep pretending and acting like I didn't know who she was. Who we'd been to each other when we were together. Tonight had proven to me it was damaging all of us further. We were caught up in the web of our own making and I was fucking done.

No wonder Prescott had broken so damn fast. The thought of hurting her further after everything we'd done made me crazy. I didn't want to destroy my girl. I wanted to put her broken parts back together. And the only way I could do that was by reminding her who the fuck she was. I needed to give Scarlett back her memories.

I removed her hands from around my neck and held her in place by her biceps. My eyes darted around the floor. This was the place where it had happened. The place where everything had gone to shit.

You shouldn't have come here with her. This was a mistake.

But was it?

Why would it be a mistake when I could show her the truth?

This was where it all began. If she couldn't remember what happened, then this was where I needed to start. Right at the place that had caused her memory loss in the first place.

"Why are you trying to kiss me?"

She blinked as if the question was unexpected. Then she looked around, taking in our surroundings.

"This place feels... wrong." Her eyes met mine again. "It feels like I shouldn't

be here. And I want to focus on something else. On you. You don't feel wrong, West. You feel right."

As if she couldn't fucking torment me any further with the memories of us. This hurt way worse than it was supposed to.

"Do you know why I feel right? Do you know why the fuck that is, Scar?"

I shook her a little, wanting her to understand why this was fucked up.

"No."

"Because you know me and I know you."

She frowned but didn't stop me from gripping her harder.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

I growled, my frustration overflowing. She needed to get it. I didn't want to take drastic measures, but maybe I would have to.

"You know me, Scarlett. Look at me. Fucking look and see."

The girl stared up at me but there was no recognition there. Not the type I wanted to see.

"I see you, West, but I don't understand."

I let her go and paced away, dragging my fingers through my hair. How the hell would I get her to see it?

"This place. You know why it feels wrong. It feels wrong because you know what happened here, you just can't remember it."

When I turned to look at her, she'd taken a step back, her eyes widening.

"What?"

"You can't remember what happened and I hate it. I hate that you don't remember me. You don't remember any of us."

Scarlett took another step back. Her body shook and her face started to pale.

"What are you saying right now?"

I didn't want her running from me. Not when I needed her to see me. Closing the distance between us again, I grabbed hold of her arm and pulled her closer. There was fear in her eyes. True, unadulterated fear.

"I'm saying you forgot who I am but I never forgot you, my little Scar. I could never forget you."

Her bottom lip trembled.

"I don't understand."

I cupped her cheek, feeling her soft skin against mine and wishing everything

was different. Wishing she'd never lost who she was. But I would get her back. I would stop at nothing to get her to recognise me. I had no choice left. Not now I'd told her I knew who she was.

"You're mine, Scar. You've been mine since we were kids."

Her little gasp hurt my soul.

"I need you back. I need my Scarlett back."

She swallowed, staring up at me with tears in her eyes. Tears, worry and fear.

"Are you... are you saying... you know me? You knew me before I lost myself?"

"Yes."

I swear the dam broke inside her. She let out a little whimper, a cross between terror and pain.

"What the fuck? What... I don't understand, I don't... West, please don't fuck with me. It's not funny. It's not okay."

I shook my head, my hand tightening around her face.

"I'm not fucking with you."

"No, you have to be... otherwise... otherwise you've all lied to me."

We had. It was the truth. We'd been lying from day one.

"Please, I can't... you aren't telling the truth! You're lying to me."

Leaning down, I pressed my forehead to hers.

"I'm not lying to you, my little Scar. I would do anything to see you look at me the way you did when we were sixteen. I would fucking move mountains to make you remember me."

She hiccupped on a sob, her body trembling all over.

"West, I can't..."

I let go of her arm to wrap mine around her, cradling her to my chest as I kept a hold on her jaw.

"You can. Let me show you the truth. You see this place. You've been here. You came here with us so many fucking times. This was our place. Ours."

She shook her head. She didn't want to remember even though I could see in her eyes she knew I wasn't lying to her. Why the fuck would I tell her I knew her if it wasn't the truth? I had no reason to fuck with her. Well, she probably thought I did, but I wasn't that heartless. Not about this. Not when it came to her knowing who I was.

“This isn’t a joke and I’m not lying. You told Pres and Frankie you’ve remembered things, Scar. Tell me what you’ve seen. Did you see us? Did you hear us?”

I could see she was breaking apart on the inside, but I couldn’t stop.

“Tell. Me.”

“I don’t know! I don’t know what I’ve seen because I can’t remember.”

“You can.”

She didn’t struggle in my embrace. Her expression was fucking heart-breaking, but she didn’t try and escape.

“You. I saw you here. A younger version of you. I’ve seen younger versions of all of you, but I can’t trust my own fucking mind, West. I can’t. It’s all so mixed up.”

It gave me a small sliver of hope. A tiny piece to hold onto. If she’d seen me in her memories, then she could find the rest. She could tug on the fucking threads and unravel it all.

“You saw me because I was here when we were sixteen. We were here together. You’ve seen the rest of them. It’s real. All of it.”

She shook her head.

“No,” she whispered. “No, it can’t be real. It can’t because why would you hide it? Why wouldn’t you tell me?”

“We had to and when you remember, you’ll understand why.”

She let out a small whimper of pain like I was breaking her open with the truth. I was wrecking my girl.

“I can’t remember!”

I didn’t have it in me to keep going around in circles. It was now or fucking never. Dropping my hands from her, I took her hand and dragged her closer to the edge. I pointed down at the drop.

“This is where it happened, Scarlett. There’s a reason this place makes you afraid. It makes me fucking sick too, but I kept coming back here because it’s the only piece of you I had left.”

She stared down at the ground. Her body shook all over. Her face was drained of all colour, making me wonder if she was finally getting it. Then she backed away, trying to tug her hand out of mine.

“No. No. I don’t remember, West. I don’t remember a single goddamn thing

and you can't make me."

I don't know why I snapped, but I lost control of the situation when she said it. When she told me I couldn't make her remember. I was fucking damned if I couldn't make her. She was going to see the truth for herself.

My hand wrapped around her forearm and I dragged her back towards me, staring down at the girl who had stolen my heart the day she walked into my life.

"I can make you remember who you are, Scarlett. And I fucking well will."

Making sure my grip on her was as tight as possible, my other hand bracing against the pillar next to us, I pulled her over the edge. Scarlett let out a scream as she fell but came to an abrupt halt. I grunted with the effort, but I held onto her, gripping my girl so she wouldn't fall.

"What the fuck are you doing?" she screamed at me a moment later when she realised I wasn't going to drop her.

"I'm showing you the truth."

She looked around us, her eyes frantic.

"You are fucking insane."

"That may be, but I'm doing this for your own good."

"How the fuck is dangling me off a fucking building for my own good? What the fuck, West? Pull me back up!"

"No. Not until you fucking remember what happened."

This wasn't rational. In fact, it was probably the worst fucking idea I'd ever had, but I'd run out of options. She didn't want to listen to reason, so perhaps she'd listen to insanity instead.

"Remember what!"

"Me! You need to fucking well remember me."

Scarlett wasn't exactly light. I held onto her and the pillar, knowing if I dropped her, it would be the end of everything.

She stared up at me. Her pupils were dilated. She was scared out of her fucking mind hanging there with only me to keep her from falling.

"Look at me, Scarlett. Just fucking look at me."

And she did. She kept looking until her eyes filled with tears and her bottom lip trembled.

"Let me back up," she whimpered. "Please, West."

She reached up with her other hand and gripped my arm.

“Please!”

“You remember, don’t you? Tell me you fucking remember, Scar! Because you need to. You have to remember what happened that night.”

“Please stop this!”

I shook my head. I couldn’t stop. Nothing would ever make me stop. Not now. There was no going back.

“West! I will fucking kill you if you don’t let me back up!”

I stared at her. My girl, the fire-breathing queen of my whole damn soul.

“Yeah, Scar, you will kill me because the real Scarlett wouldn’t let me get away with shit.”

She blinked, her hand tightening around my arm. Then she looked down at the ground and her face paled all over again. When her eyes met mine, I could see the cogs turning in her head. I could see it in her eyes. And I knew everything was about to change.

“Do you remember now, Scar? Do you fucking remember who I am?”

She blinked once and I took a deep breath.

“Do. You. Remember?”

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CORRODE

FOUR HORSEMEN
BOOK THREE

SARAH BAILEY

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Please note the spelling throughout is British English.

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PLAYLIST

Spotify Playlist

War – Tedy
atrophy – E. Alvin
Kill Our Way To Heaven – Michl
Cage – Phantom Head
Monsters – Lucy Daydream
Hourglass – Hex Cougar, AWAY, josh pan
Chemical – KRANE, Lemay, Ahsha, Hex Cougar
Burn – Hex Cougar, Pauline Herr
Sing To Me – MISSIO
Dead To Me – Besomorph, Neoni, M.I.M.E
Liar – Hurts
Come Back for Me – Jaymes Young
Losing My Mind – MISSIO
How Villains Are Made – Madelen Duke
Twisted – The People's Theives
Sweat – ZAYN
Heal Me – FARR
Coming Undone – Korn
Choke – Royal & the Serpent
King of the Damned – Barren Gates, Alter.
bad kids – Royal & the Serpent, Yoshi Flower
Medulla – Hollow
Fuck You – Silent Child
Freak – Silent Child
IDGAF – Besomorph, Silent Child
Liar – Mood Monroe

Therapy – Kyan Palmer
Playing with Fire – Graffiti Ghosts
I'll Make You Love Me – Kat Leon
Addicted – One True God
Heavy Rain – Solence
Animal In Me – Solence
Death Do Us Part – Solence
Bite Marks – Au/Ra
Truth Comes out – Willyecho
VILLAIN – MePemuro
Look Who's Cryin' Now – Jessie Murph
Hopeless – Always Never
Like I Wanna Die – Kev Ghost
Animal – EMELINE
Can't Forget You – NEVR KNØW
Coquette – Kuoga., Ivy
Can't Lie – Ali Gatie
lie to me – Tate McRae, Ali Gatie
Wrong – MAX, Lil Uzi Vert
Venom – Icon For Hire
Blind – St. Mary, Misdøm
Do Me – Kim Petras
Bad Intentions – Marina Kaye
Alone – Marina Kaye
idontevenknowmyself – CHENDA
i love you but i don't like you – Molly Moore
Infected Extended – Sickick
i can't get high – Royal & the Serpent
Hummingbird – Run River North
Love and Lies – Anthony Ramos
The Killing Kind – Alex Vargas
Fire Up The Night – New Medicine
Wait – NF
PSYCHO – DREAMDNVR, Boy In Space

Broken – Lund
Villain – Halflives
PRIDE & MISERY – Hahlweg, Silent Child
Mind Games – Sickick
Eyes on You – Twenty7
Love You Twice – Lilla Vargen
Hate Me! – MASN
AI – Heuse, NUVILICES
Eye For An Eye – 8 Graves
Masochist – E. Alvin
Angry Too – Lola Blanc
nuh uh – Jades Goudreault
Part I – Gracchus
Chains – Once Monsters
Throne – Rival, Neoni
WONDER – morgx, PVRIS
Human Enough – ONR
The Very Last Time – Bullet For My Valentine
Straight For The Kill – UNSECRET, Anna Renee
Tear It All Apart – UNSECRET, Matthew Perryman Jones
Hit You Where It Hurts – UNSECRET, Cameron James
Body – Rosenfeld
Dies Irea – náttúra, Vila
No Games – Sickick
Screw Feelings – Au/Ra
Nasty – Bryce Fox
Shadows (Acoustic) – Seven Lions, Wooli, Amidy
I Don't Know You Anymore – Sody

To all the ladies with dark little hearts craving violence, passion and lust

ONE

SCARLETT

TEN YEARS AGO

The number of times I'd tried to convince myself I shouldn't go after them couldn't be quantified. Ever since Francis told me what they intended to do, I'd told myself it was okay. But a part of me couldn't stomach the idea of them being only sixteen and going this far. Doing something they couldn't ever take back. The boys and I had done so many reckless things together over the years, but there were lines you didn't cross. Things no teenager or adult, for that matter, should ever consider doing.

This... this was one of them.

It was why I'd followed them despite Francis warning me to stay away. They didn't want me involved, even though this affected me too. They were doing it for me. And I didn't want them to.

The night sky was cloudless, making it cold as hell. The chill seeped into my bones as I made my way through the gap in the fence of the silent building site. A couple of developers were putting up some new blocks of flats in the area. Some of the local residents had contested it, but the council had granted planning permission anyway. We needed new housing.

The boys and I came out here at night to hang out and drink despite the fact we were underage, so I knew my way around. My feet crunched along the gravel as I weaved through the JCB diggers and excavators and made my way over to the skeleton of the first block. The plastic sheeting flapped in the wind. Otherwise, it was eerily quiet.

It didn't feel right being here without my four protectors. The boys and I had been friends since primary school. We were a close-knit group and rarely kept secrets from each other. It's why Francis had told me. He didn't feel right about not including me, even though they'd agreed to this plan of theirs behind my back.

I walked into the ground floor of the skeleton building. None of the outer walls had been built yet. No one was around. I climbed the first set of concrete stairs and found the floor I arrived on empty too. I knew exactly where they'd be if they weren't here. I mounted two more sets of stairs and walked towards the other side of the third floor, where a lone figure stood staring out at the night's sky.

"West?"

I would recognise his bulk anywhere. The boy I knew on an intimate level. The one I'd fallen irrevocably in love with from the moment I'd laid eyes on him and had only confessed the truth to recently. It was only because of what almost happened to me I'd had the courage to tell him how I felt. And that almost event was part of the reason the boys had come out here tonight to do something nefarious.

West turned and stared at me across the expanse of the floor.

"You shouldn't be here, Little Nyx."

My heart lurched as it always did when he called me that. It had been my nickname for as long as I could remember. Drake had started it by winding me up about my height compared to them. Little Scarlett Nyx, their best friend and the only girl any of them ever hung out with.

I approached him, not wanting to listen to his warning. West's warm amber eyes came into view the closer I got. No matter what he did, he couldn't hide the way he felt about me. His eyes gave him away. When I stood before him, I could see the tension lining his face.

"Where are the others?"

West reached up and stroked his fingers along my jaw.

"Around."

I swallowed. Something about his demeanour was off. I had a feeling I was too late. Much too late.

"Frankie told me. Did... did you do it?"

West's eyes turned dark.

"He shouldn't have said anything to you. We didn't want you involved."

"West, did you do it?"

His hand slid along my face and into my hair. He tugged me closer to him, wrapping his other hand around my waist.

"Do you really want to know?"

His face lowered to mine. I couldn't stop myself from reacting. The way my body heated from being so close to his had me trembling with need. It reminded me of when we'd been together last week. When he'd made love to me for the first time. His gentleness. The way he'd watched me, cared for me and made me feel special. He'd erased the pain and gave me a new memory to hold on to. This boy had given me everything I'd ever asked for. And I appreciated him more than words could ever express.

West kissed me before I could respond, parting my lips with his tongue and taking my ability to think straight from me. My hands curled around his body, one wrapping around his neck to get even closer.

"Scar," he murmured against my lips, "remember I love you."

Then he released me. I rested my cheek on his chest, breathing him in as he held me.

"I love you too."

West and I had always shared this deep-seated bond with each other. We were connected on a level I couldn't explain. The five of us were, but the attraction between West and me was different. We wanted each other on a physical level. A desperate gnawing urge to be as close as possible. To be one.

"What did you do?" I whispered.

I needed to know the truth. Needed to hear the words from his mouth.

He held me against him as if he never wanted me to leave his body again.

"What we had to."

"West—"

"They tried to hurt you. They were going to rape you."

The anger and hatred in his voice made me flinch. I hadn't forgotten what the twins had tried to do to me. Ryan and Ray were two years older than us. They were sick, twisted and enjoyed hurting people. West, Drake, Francis, and Prescott had been trying to get them to stop harassing the girls in our class for

months. Not to mention the things they'd got away with. The twins thought they were all-powerful because of who their father was, but everyone hated them.

“What did you do?”

He let out a long sigh, nuzzled my hair with his nose, and rested his chin on the top of my head.

“We shoved them into the foundations on the other site.”

The builders had only recently started to lay the foundations for the second block. It was being built by a different developer and had a separate crew on site. They were months behind the first building. The one we were standing in.

“And?” I whispered, scared of what he would say next. Terrified of what the boys I'd grown up with were capable of. I knew the four of them like the back of my hand, but we were sixteen. None of us should be even considering this.

“We poured concrete over them.”

I swallowed the bile rising in my throat. My worst fears had come true.

“You killed them.”

“Yeah, Scar, we did. They can't hurt you or anyone else again.”

While I wanted to stay in West's arms and pretend he hadn't just admitted to me he'd murdered two people with our three other best friends, I couldn't. The boy I loved was a killer at fucking sixteen years old.

Extracting myself from his grasp, I stared up into West's amber eyes. The ones that had the power to rip me to shreds.

“You drowned them in concrete?”

“We knocked them out first, so they couldn't struggle.”

His statement was so matter of fact like there was nothing wrong with murder. They had planned to murder two people tonight. They'd carried it out.

“What the hell, West? That's not okay. You killed two people. The four of you. How could you?”

His eyes darkened.

“We did it to protect you and everyone else from them, considering Daddy is constantly covering up their shit for them. They raped Gillian, Becca, and Yvette and got away with it. You could have been next. If Drake hadn't been there, I fucking dread to think what they'd have done to you, Scar.” He stabbed a finger towards where the other building would be constructed in the distance.

“They’re dead and the world is a better place for it.”

I waved a hand around, feeling frustrated by his answer.

“How the hell do you think they aren’t going to tie this back to you when their bodies are found, huh? Their parents know who you are. They know you hate the twins.”

West took a step back and stared out at the night’s sky.

“Their bodies won’t be found. Who is going to check? We barely disturbed the equipment and they literally just started pouring that area today. All we did was make it a little higher than it had been before. They aren’t going to notice.”

I shook my head. The four of them were crazy. How could they think they wouldn’t get caught? We weren’t criminal masterminds, we were kids. Teenagers.

“They’re going to investigate it. You can’t kill the kids of a man like Stuart Carver and not expect him to do something about it! The man is famous. Did you lot even think this through?”

“Of course we fucking well did. We’re not stupid. Nothing is ever foolproof, but this is the safest place to hide a body. When the building is finished, no one will ever know.”

I paced away. I couldn’t even look at him any longer. By insisting he tell me, I’d made myself a part of this when they hadn’t wanted me to be here. They’d wanted to protect me. My four guardians had done this for me. And I hated myself for it. What the twins had done wasn’t my fault, but I bore the responsibility of their deaths alongside the boys.

“I can’t believe you did this. I can’t... this is wrong, West. I know they were crazy, but you didn’t have to kill them. No one needed to take it this far.”

I felt him approach me, and when his hand landed on my shoulder, I shoved him off. Turning around, I could see the hurt in his eyes. I’d never once stopped him from touching me.

“Scar, we did it to protect everyone.”

I shook my head and took a step back.

“How is this protecting people? You’ve put a target on all of our backs. They’re going to find out and you’ll all go to prison. I can’t... I can’t live without you. I can’t. You are my world. All of you are. How can I ever live without you by my side?”

West stepped closer, but he didn't reach for me.

"No one is going to find out."

"They will! When they realise the twins are missing, they'll know."

"Scar—"

His hand came up. I took another step back to avoid him.

"No! Don't touch me!"

"Scarlett!"

Another step and my foot slipped. I looked back, finding I'd got way too close to the edge. My eyes went to West just as I fell. He lunged forward, grabbing my arm. I screamed. My arm was almost wrenched out of its socket when West slammed himself down on the floor and held on to me. I was dangling off the fucking third floor of the building with only my boyfriend keeping me from falling.

"West!"

"I've got you, Scar. I've got you, just reach up and grab the edge."

He sounded calm, even though I could see the frantic panic in his eyes. I was frozen in place, terrified by the drop below me. And scared he wouldn't be able to pull me back up.

"I can't."

"You can. I can't pull you up otherwise."

His other hand was braced on the floor to keep himself from sliding off too. West was trying to be brave for both of us. The least I could do was try back. I reached up with my free hand, but I couldn't stretch far enough.

"I can't!"

"God-fucking-damn-it, Scarlett."

He let go of the floor and tried to grab my other hand, but I was now swinging. Another scream erupted from my lips as we helplessly tried to grasp each other.

"West, I'm going to fall."

"No! You're not going to. I won't let you."

The problem was my grip on him was slipping. Tears blurred my vision. My breathing was out of control, along with my heart.

"West, I love you. Remember I love you, okay? Never forget that."

He shook his head, still trying to grasp me with his other hand.

“No, don’t say stuff like that, Scar. I’m going to get you back up.”

My hand slipped down his arm a fraction. He couldn’t lean further out or we’d both fall. This was an impossible situation.

“I can’t hold on.”

“You have to. I need you. I can’t live without you, please. I love you.”

Tears fell down my cheeks. I knew it was too late. There was no one else around to save us. Whether the others had heard me scream was immaterial. They couldn’t get here in time.

My hand slid from his arm. He tried to keep a hold of me, but he couldn’t. Gravity dragged me lower. The last thing I felt from the boy I love was his fingertips grazing mine as I fell to my doom. The scream from my lips echoed around my skull, as did his shout.

“NO! Scarlett!”

It felt like it took forever for me to fall, even though it must have only been seconds. I stared up at West’s horrified face, taking in every one of his features to brand them into my memory. And when I hit the ground with an almighty thud, all I could see was him.

“I love you, West, forever,” I whispered before the pain sunk in and the world went black.

TWO

WEST

TEN YEARS AGO

My entire world shattered into a tiny million pieces. The girl I loved lay there on the ground, unmoving. I stared at her in complete and utter disbelief. She'd fallen three storeys. I hadn't been able to keep her safe. She'd fucking slipped and I couldn't get her back up.

“Scarlett!”

I had to get to her. And I needed the others.

Scrambling up to my feet, I ran like the fucking wind towards the stairs. My hand went to my pocket, digging out my phone. I mindlessly dialled Drake's number. I should call an ambulance, but I needed the boys more.

My feet carried me down the first set of stairs. I jumped down the last few steps in my haste to get to Scarlett.

“West?”

“Scarlett fell. Get the fuck over here.”

“What do you mean, she fell? Is that why we heard screaming?”

“She fucking fell off the third floor. I'm scared she's fucking dead, okay? Get here. Now!”

I hung up. I was halfway down the third lot of stairs. I leapt down the rest of the way and ran towards her body. My heart raced at a hundred miles an hour.

You have to be alive, Scarlett. You have to be. I need you. I can't live without you.

My knees slammed down in the dirt when I reached her. Her body was at an odd angle. There was no escaping the fact she'd likely broken a leg. I couldn't

deal with that right now. The only thing I could do was touch my fingers to her chest and see if she was breathing. I didn't want to move her, scared of injuring her further.

I let out a hoarse cry of pain when I felt her chest moving. It was sluggish, but she was breathing.

"Scar, I'm sorry. I'm so fucking sorry."

Tears I didn't want to fall started welling in my eyes as I felt for her pulse at her neck next. It was there. She was alive. But for how long? She'd fallen so fucking far. How could she be okay after this?

My hands went to the back of her head and came away slightly sticky. Oh fuck, she was bleeding. This could not be good. This was the worst fucking thing to have ever happened to us. To her. She shouldn't have come here. Francis shouldn't have told her what we planned to do.

"Scarlett," I whispered, stroking her face, "you're okay. You're going to be okay."

I didn't know that, but I had to reassure myself. I needed her to be okay.

Footsteps sounded, followed by a shout. I looked up, finding Prescott, Drake and Francis running towards us. They looked horrified.

"What happened?" Prescott said, reaching us first.

"She slipped... I couldn't hold on to her. I couldn't. She's hurt. She's fucking bleeding! You need to phone an ambulance."

Drake was already pulling his phone out when he got to us. Prescott knelt down beside Scarlett and looked her over, his face pale as he stared at our best friend. Francis joined us a moment later, his face stricken.

"How bad is it?"

"I don't fucking know!"

He knelt beside me and checked her visible injuries. The blood at the back of her head worried me the most. Had she cracked her skull? Fuck, there were too many possibilities. Too many options. And none of them were good.

Scar, please, you have to make it. I can't live without you in my life.

I couldn't stop stroking her cheek, reassuring myself she was still here. Her eyes were closed and her breathing was laboured, but she was alive.

"Scar, please, you have to live. You have to make it."

Drake put his hand over the phone.

“Where did she fall from, West?”

“The third floor.”

He resumed talking to the emergency services, his voice too low for me to make out the words. All I could focus on was Scarlett. Leaning closer, I stared down at her unconscious face, the most beautiful face I’d ever beheld.

“You have to make it,” I whispered to her. “You have to.”

I couldn’t imagine my world without her in it. She was the thing keeping me going. The one person who brought light into my life. Fuck knows I had enough shit to deal with. My parents were cunts who didn’t give a shit about me. Not when they saw me as one big fuck up. I couldn’t help the way I was.

Tears fell down my cheeks. I didn’t care if I was crying in front of the boys. They had no idea what had happened between me and her.

“Why the fuck was she here?” Prescott asked.

“You can direct that question towards him.” I jerked my thumb at Francis. “He told her what we were doing here.”

“What the fuck, Francis?”

Our friend looked between us before concentrating back on Scarlett.

“She deserved to know. We killed them for her, so don’t act like this had nothing to do with Little Nyx.”

Rationally, I knew he was right, but I couldn’t think like a sane person right now. The girl I loved had life-threatening injuries. She was all I could see and feel. I needed her to be okay.

Drake moved closer.

“They’ll be here soon, okay?” he said to the three of us before getting back to the operator.

Tonight had already been fucking taxing enough without this. It’s not like any of us had wanted to kill Ray and Ryan, but they were rapist scum. They didn’t give a shit about who they hurt. We’d had far too many run-ins with them. And no doubt it’s why they’d tried something with Scarlett. They hated the four of us with a passion, but we never took any of their shit. So they’d gone after our best friend to prove a point. To show us they were untouchable. Well, they weren’t. We’d proven that tonight.

“How did she fall?” Francis asked.

“We were arguing over what the four of us did. She’s not happy we killed the

twins. Kept going on about us getting caught.”

Our argument was a blur in my mind. All I could think about was how she'd fallen. How I hadn't been able to hold on to her.

“She kept backing away and got too close to the edge. I tried to stop her, but it was too late. And fucking trust me, I tried to get her back up, but she slipped out of my grasp. I couldn't stop her, she... she fucking fell before my eyes and her fucking body lay there motionless. I... oh fuck, I can't.”

I gasped and more tears fell. Francis reached out and put a hand on my arm as I dissolved into a mess. The tears dripped down on Scarlett, but I wouldn't move. I wouldn't leave her.

You can't leave me, Scar. You just can't!

In the distance, I could hear sirens. It didn't fill me with relief. If anything, I dreaded the moment they got here. We were going to get asked questions about why we'd been trespassing on the site.

“We need to get our story straight,” Francis said, breaking the silence between us.

“We were out here messing around. That's all they need to know,” Prescott said. “We're teenagers. They're not going to know what we really came here for.”

They looked at each other before eyeing Drake. He could hear us and he gave them a sharp nod. There was no way he would give anything away. I could see the worry in his eyes as they flicked down to Scarlett.

“No one mentions the twins under any circumstances, okay?”

“I'm not fucking mentioning them. As if I want any of us to get into shit. Fuck, Francis, we're not stupid.”

I'd left not long after Drake had hit the button to pour the concrete because I couldn't handle it. A part of me wanted to hurt the twins more. I couldn't stay and watch it without feeling rage building inside me. The others would deal with the rest. It's why I'd gone up to the other building to calm down. And then she found me there. Now everything had gone to utter shit.

I was trying not to lose it. I had to be strong for Scarlett. She'd need me when she woke up... if she woke up. No, I couldn't think like that. She had to wake up. She had to. The doctors would save her. I had to believe in them. Had to believe they would keep her alive.

“We should be worrying more about him, anyway,” Prescott continued, pointing at me.

Francis looked at me. My tears had soaked Scarlett’s cheek. My eyes were on her chest, watching for signs she was still breathing. I needed her alive.

The sirens were close now. They were almost here. I couldn’t leave her. I needed to stay by her side so she’d know she wasn’t alone. My hand went to her face again, stroking my tears away from her cheek.

“Stay alive for me, Scar, please.”

The other two got up to go direct the emergency services, but I stayed with her. Kept staring at my beautiful girl who was so broken right now.

“Come back to me... please. I love you, Scarlett Nyx. You’re my one, remember? My only one.”

My voice was barely audible, but she had to know I was talking to her. Deep in her heart, she could feel me.

The next thing I knew, I was being pulled away by Prescott as the ambulance crew arrived. For a moment, I protested, trying to stay by her side. I didn’t want to leave her, but I knew they needed to work, so I relented.

The four of us huddled together, watching them. Prescott had his arm wrapped around my shoulder as if he thought I might fall to my knees or something. To be honest, I might well do at this rate. My body was trembling all over and I couldn’t control my thoughts. They were chaotic. I kept replaying the moment she fell over and over in my mind.

I didn’t save you, Scar. I didn’t fucking save you!

They worked quickly, assessing her injuries and strapping her up to lift her onto the gurney. Their faces betrayed the seriousness of the situation. One of them came over to us and asked what happened. I explained it again. Somehow I managed to, despite the fact I was a mess on the inside. Then he told us they were taking her to the hospital where it was likely she’d have to have surgery given her condition.

Scarlett had a suspected fractured pelvis, broken leg and arm. The thing they were most concerned about was her head injury.

“Can I come with you? Please, I need to be with her.” My voice sounded desperate and needy. “She’s our best friend.”

Not like I could tell them she was my girlfriend because Prescott, Drake, and

Francis didn't know about our relationship.

The guy gave me a sympathetic look but refused to relent, as I was underage and not family. At the very least, he told us where she was being taken.

I was going to lose my fucking mind as the police approached to ask us what happened. I needed to be with Scarlett. They asked us all sorts of questions and got Scarlett's mother's number from Drake, who was in a far more rational state of mind than I was. Lylah was going to lose her shit when she found out what happened to her daughter. Scarlett was the only thing she had in this world. Scarlett's father died before she was born, leaving Lylah alone to raise their daughter.

By the time the police were done talking to us, I was completely at my wit's end. A cold sweat beaded all over my body. Scarlett had been taken away in the ambulance. None of us knew if she was going to be okay. We stood together, not talking, not saying a word.

What if she didn't survive? What if her injuries killed her?

Drake put his arm around me, pulling us all closer together. I would have collapsed if he didn't have a hold of me.

"She's going to be okay. She has to be."

"You don't know that," I replied, my voice shaking on all of my words.

"I know our girl is strong as fuck."

Scarlett was the strongest girl I knew. But none of us could predict what would happen next, nor whether she would survive the fall. And my heart was breaking into a tiny million pieces, knowing I was the one who couldn't keep her safe.

She'd fallen because of me.

THREE

WEST

“I remember!”

Her words echoed around my brain. Did she? Had Scarlett truly remembered who I was? Who we were? Did she remember the night she’d fallen? How this was almost the exact situation we’d been in, only this time I wouldn’t let her go. Scarlett was mine for life.

“I fucking remember, okay? Please, don’t let me fall again. Please!”

Her voice was desperate now. Scarlett’s eyes were wide with terror.

She knew.

She fucking knew.

I didn’t hesitate, gripping the pillar tighter and dragging her back up. I almost fell backwards as she hurtled towards me. Letting go of the pillar, I caught her up in both my arms and took several steps back. Scarlett clung to me, her breathing erratic and her little fists clutching my coat. A sob erupted from her lips.

“I’ve got you, my little Scar. I’m never letting you go again. I promise. I fucking promise,” I murmured in her ear.

There was nothing on this earth that would stop me from getting to my girl. My woman. No one would stand in my way.

The way she trembled had me holding onto her tighter, keeping her against my body so she could regain her equilibrium. I’d keep her upright until she could stand on her own two feet again.

A minute later, she released my coat and slapped my back with her hand.

“I can’t believe you fucking did that to me. What the hell is wrong with you!”

Her words came out all shaky and her body was still trembling. The fact she’d

told me off even when she was terrified had me smiling. There was my strong, vibrant girl who never cowered in the face of fear. Who always gave the four of us hell when she didn't approve of our actions.

"I've done a lot of things to you, Scar. Not sure how this is the worst."

She hit me again.

"Fuck you. You're the worst."

My smile grew wider.

"So you do remember me?"

She struggled in my grasp, but I wouldn't let her go. I couldn't. My Scarlett was here. My beautiful girl. The one who held my damn heart in her hands.

"Let me go!"

"Not until you answer me."

"Jesus fucking Christ, I remember you, West Greer." She stopped struggling and let out a shaky breath. "I remember that night."

I released her. Scarlett stared up at me. Then she clutched her head as if she was in pain. I wrapped an arm around her and drew her further away from the edge, scared of the same thing happening again. A moment later she shoved me off, then she was leaning down and throwing up the contents of her stomach. I gathered up her hair, keeping it from getting splashed by the sick. She moaned and threw up again, putting her hands on her knees.

I rubbed her back with my other hand, wanting to soothe her. I'd known forcing her to remember would cause her pain, but we couldn't go on like this. None of us could. It was killing me. I knew it was destroying Prescott. Even Francis hated it. Drake was just being a little bitch. He knew we needed her to remember us. He didn't want to face up to the consequences. Me? I was done hiding.

"Fuck," she hissed, straightening and wiping her mouth with the back of her hand.

"You done?"

She gave me a quick nod, so I helped her step over the sick and drew her away from it. Neither of us needed to stand too close. Not when I was worried she might throw up all over again. Her body was still trembling. My hand stayed on her arm, making sure she didn't fall over.

Scarlett tipped her head up to mine, staring at me with recognition in her

hazel-green eyes. Finally, after all this time, she knew who I was. And when she reached up and touched my face, I shuddered under her fingertips. It was as if she was reminding herself of the boy I'd been. But that boy was dead. He'd fallen off the edge of the building alongside her. And he'd died the day she was taken away from us.

"West." Her voice was shaky and full of emotion. "I... I can't believe I forgot who you are."

I swallowed, trying to hold back from crushing her to me. From reminding her exactly how much I fucking well loved her. I didn't want to scare her away. I needed her to keep seeing me, even if it was only for a minute. Even if it was only for one more second.

Her fingers fell from my face and touched the space over my heart. It hammered away in my chest. The heart belonging to her. She knew it did. My girl knew. And it fucking hurt beyond belief, because then she dropped her hand and frowned. Her whole demeanour turned sour. I almost told her no. Told her she had to keep seeing me. But it was much too late.

My little Scar, please don't hate me for this. I tried to save you. I tried so fucking hard.

"You lied to me," she whispered before her eyes darkened. "You all lied to me."

There wasn't anything I could say. We had lied to her. It was for her own fucking good and ours. We couldn't trust her. Not after those fucks had stolen her from us and brainwashed her. They'd sent her here to get rid of us, but we were smarter than that. We weren't going to allow Stuart Carver to take us down.

"You... you, oh god, you did it. All of you... you did what... fuck."

She shook her head as if she was trying to remember more. As if her memories hadn't yet completely returned. I was sure it would take time.

"But they're not... how did I... oh god, I don't understand."

She took a step back from me, her hand going to her mouth. Her eyes were wide and full of shock. For the first time in a long time, I felt like a selfish piece of shit. I'd forced this on her. Made her remember the worst night of our lives. I didn't regret it even if I'd gone about it in the most unorthodox way I could think of. It wasn't exactly smart to make her relive the experience. It was the only thing capable of breaking through the barrier in her mind. The one keeping

her from remembering everything.

I'd done what I did best. Taken a sledgehammer to the situation. Smashed through the glass ceiling and now the shards were raining down hell upon us all.

"I've always known they're not my real parents, but how... what... I..."

How could I explain it to her? Tell her the Carvers had taken her to punish us. To use her against us because they suspected we killed their sons. I mean, we had, but they didn't know for sure it was us. The bodies had never been found. They were missing, presumed dead. No one except the four of us knew what happened the night they died. And her. But Scarlett couldn't remember... until now.

She shook her head again. I could see the horror in her eyes. It was as if that night was playing out in her mind over and over. The realisation we'd destroyed everything because we were trying to keep her safe. We were trying to protect her and instead, she'd got into an accident and lost who she was.

"Why... why did you lie to me?"

What a fucking question. I took a step towards her, but she backed away.

"I should take you back to Fortuity."

I needed the others. They would help me explain it. We'd made these decisions together. We should tell her together. Besides, I was scarcely holding it together right now. Seeing the look in her eyes, knowing she recognised me, but her mind was too full of the past. Too full of memories. She was hurt and afraid. I'd already fucked it up by forcing her into remembering. If I did any further damage to Scarlett's mind, I might never forgive myself. I already felt far too guilty for not being able to save her in the first place.

"No! I don't want to go back there. You all lied! You're liars!"

"Scar..."

"No. Don't you come near me. You just fucking well dangled me off the building."

If this had been any other time, I would have grabbed her and taken her against her will. Right now, I couldn't stop replaying the night she fell over and over in my mind. I'd blocked it out when I'd made her relive it, but I couldn't any longer. We were both lost in that fucking night and it killed me. Fucking crippled me.

"I needed you to remember."

“By putting my life in danger again? You are crazy, you know that? Absolutely fucking insane.”

She'd told me I was crazy before, but this time it hurt to hear it. Her remembering me and still feeling that way? It broke something inside me. And I was already broken enough as it was.

“You're no son of mine.”

His words echoed around my skull, making me bleed on the inside. My cunt of a father had sent me off to a fucking psychiatrist a year after Scarlett disappeared. After I broke. They slapped me with an antisocial personality disorder when I turned eighteen. And that was it. They didn't want a son who was as fucked in the head as they thought I was.

Well, fuck him. Fuck his bullshit. I wanted to kill the cunt. I wanted him dead. Didn't care if he was my father. I didn't even care about my mother either. She could burn with him. They weren't worth my fucking time. The only people in my life who cared about me unconditionally, no matter how much I pissed them off, were Prescott, Drake and Francis. That number had included Scarlett once upon a time, but the way she was looking at me... it spoke volumes. She couldn't see me the same way she did when we were teenagers.

“Yeah, I am fucking crazy.” I took a step towards her. “Doesn't change the fact you're coming with me. You're coming home, Scar. You're coming because you're mine.”

“Home? I don't have a home. I don't belong to you.” She waved a hand around. “I don't belong anywhere.”

I gritted my teeth. It was the shock and anger talking. She knew she was mine. It hadn't changed. It would never fucking change. Scarlett had been mine since the day she was born. She was our fucking destiny. Fate had brought us together from the beginning of our lives and it would keep us together until the end.

“You are mine, Scarlett Nyx. You will always be mine. And you know why.”

For a long moment, she looked at me as if she was trying to work out what I meant. Maybe she hadn't remembered everything yet. Maybe it's why she didn't understand, but she would. Eventually, she'd know why we all belonged to each other. There was no fighting it.

“I. Am. Not. Yours.”

Then she turned and ran towards the stairs. It took me a second too long to react. She was almost at the stairs when I started after her. Scarlett didn't get to run from me now. I wouldn't let her.

“Scarlett!”

“No, you stay the fuck away from me.”

She disappeared into the stairwell. I cursed, chasing after her. Down the stairs we both went, me calling her name and her not answering. She was determined to get away from me, but I wouldn't let her. I couldn't lose Scarlett again. I wouldn't survive it. Not after the last time she disappeared. It would annihilate me.

By the time I reached the ground floor, I could see her running into the crowd surrounding the boxers, who were a different set to the ones who'd been fighting when we'd arrived.

“Don't you fucking dare, Scarlett!”

I pushed through the crowd, trying to follow her light brown head of wavy hair, but there were too many fucking people. More had arrived in the intervening period. By the time I'd got to the other side of them, she was nowhere to be seen. I dragged my hands through my hair, desperately searching for her with my eyes.

“Fuck!” I dragged my hands down my face. “FUCK!”

I wanted to kick the shit out of something, but finding Scarlett was far too important. If I had to search this entire site, I would. I'd go to the ends of the earth to find my girl. Didn't matter if she couldn't see me the way she had all those years ago. I would track that damn woman down.

Scarlett Nyx belonged with us. And I was never allowing her to disappear from our lives again.

FOUR

SCARLETT

Huddling inside the cab of the abandoned digger, I tried to make myself as small as possible. I could hear him calling my name, and it fucking terrified me. What if he found me? What if he took me back there with them?

I couldn't face it. None of it. It was too much for me to handle. The memory of the night of my accident had slammed into me like a ton of bricks. It was all I could do to keep upright.

A tear slid down my cheek, knowing I'd run away from West. The boy who'd been my best friend as a teenager. The problem was, the man West was a full-on psychopath. He did whatever the hell he wanted. He went from normal to crazy in the blink of an eye. He fucking well dangled me off the damn building to get me to remember the night I'd almost died. If they weren't the actions of a crazy person, I didn't know what was.

To be honest... I didn't know what was up or down any longer. My whole life felt like one giant lie. Everyone I knew had been dishonest with me. They'd outright fucking told me lie after lie after lie.

I don't know who I am any longer. I don't know anything.

It was too confusing. All of it. My memories were all tangled up in my head. I kept seeing them flash before my eyes. They were far stronger than they were before. And they weren't in order. The only clear thing I could see was that night. The night I'd argued with West and fell off the damn building he'd brought me to this evening. It's why I felt sick being here. Why everything felt so wrong. This was the place where I'd lost all my memories. Where everything had ended and my new life began.

I knew in my heart I shouldn't have run from West. He was my connection to

the past. All of them were. And yet they'd lied. They'd pretended we didn't know each other. The four boys who'd protected me as teens had ruined me as adults. The things they'd done since I'd arrived back in their lives made no sense. Why would they treat me with such little care now after everything we'd been to each other?

Another tear fell. I held back a sob. My heart was broken. My mind was shattered. I had nothing. Literally nothing. No family. No friends. Nothing.

Well, I had the Horsemen, but considering the way they'd behaved, I was inclined to stay the hell away from them. But no... they weren't the Horsemen to me. They were my best friends. At least, they had been ten years ago.

Why now? Why did we find each other again now?

The logical answer was I'd been locked away until now. And it only led to more questions. Why did the Carvers have me? How did they get hold of me? What really happened when I was in a coma?

I shook myself. Those were things I couldn't answer on my own. However, there was no way in hell I was going back to my father. But he wasn't my father, was he? I'd spent ten years believing it, but it was another lie. Where did they end and the truth begin? I didn't know any longer.

My goal right now was to escape West. To get away from this building site where I'd had my accident. To attempt to cope with the biggest revelation of my life. And the memories flooding my brain.

Raising myself up, I peered out of the window of the cab. I could see the skeleton building with its occupants, but little else. It'd got dark and the glow of the streetlights didn't penetrate this far. It made me curious why the building never got completed, but the thought was fleeting. The coast looked to be clear, so I needed to get out of here. Who the fuck knew where I would go, only it needed to be away from everyone I knew.

I climbed out of the cab, trying to stay as silent as possible. Then I crept towards where I thought the gap in the fence was. It was almost instinctive, like I'd done this hundreds of times before. And I had. This site had been somewhere we'd hung out many times as teenagers. When it was a wasteland. When they announced they'd be building a new block of flats there. Then when the developers started building works. It was within walking distance from where we all lived, but far enough away, none of our parents knew about it.

I pulled back the fence and slipped through. Instead of going back the way we came, I continued on between the two fences until I reached the end. Things had changed in the intervening years, but I could still jump the fence here and land on another street behind the building site.

I remembered once Drake and me had been running away from this group of boys who lived two streets over. They claimed we looked at them the wrong way. Drake had given me a foot up to get over the fence and I'd had to drag him over too. We'd landed in a heap in the gap between the two fences, our limbs tangled, both of us trying not to piss ourselves laughing. We didn't want to get caught by the boys. I'd clung to him as we heard them go past before we dissolved into a fit of giggles.

My heart burnt. He'd been so full of life and expressive when we'd been kids. And now? Drake was cold and unfeeling. Some of the why was clear to me now. The accident. It was the event he'd told me about last night. The one that changed all of them.

My hand went to my face, wiping away the tears falling. It hurt me so fucking much. The whole thing. The memory. Knowing I'd been torn away from the four boys who promised me we'd be friends forever. This place was a fucking graveyard of my mind, and I needed to be away from it.

Jumping the fence, I landed with a thud and took off toward the nearest bus stop. I'd find somewhere to stay tonight and deal with everything in the morning. Right now, my mind was too erratic. I didn't know how much longer I could keep going. I wanted to collapse into a heap. The flood of the past was threatening to burst through the dam in my mind. The one West had taken a fucking sledgehammer to. The cracks were wide. The water was leaking through the glass. Soon, it would shatter and I would break.

I jumped on the first bus that arrived, not caring about the direction. Digging a tissue out of my bag, I dabbed my eyes. It was lucky it hadn't fallen off my body when West flung me over the side of the damn building. I looked through the contents. My phone. My purse. I had money. Maybe I should get a hotel room for the night. I could fall apart alone there without anyone knowing where I was. It was the only plan I had. I couldn't think past that. Not when I had lost everything this evening. It forced me to focus and check where I was.

There were a few missed calls on my phone from Francis, Drake, and

Prescott. I ignored them and plotted a route to the nearest place I could stay. Then I turned it off so they couldn't contact me again.

By the time I got to the hotel, I was barely hanging on. The dam was breaking. And I had to be alone when it happened. No one could know. I was on my own now.

It was lucky they had rooms available. The place was kind of fancy, but I didn't care about the cost. I had enough money of my own with what they were paying me, considering I had no bills. The thought of using the money I'd earned from them made me sick, but I had no other choice.

It was a relief to get into the room. I shut the door behind me, threw my bag onto a side table, and collapsed on the bed. Then the tears started again. A hoarse wail erupted from my mouth, muffled by the covers, and my hands went to my head. The pain driving through it was far too intense. Like someone had taken an ice pick and dug it into my temple.

The glass shattered. The flood made my vision blur. White-hot pain echoed around my skull. I held my head between my hands and tried not to make a sound. The images were vivid, full of sounds and scents. They passed by too quickly for me to make most of them out. Flashes of the boys and our lives together were the clearest ones. And losing them consumed me. It was all I could do to lie there, tears streaming down my cheeks and let it all wash over me.

When the pain lessened, I undressed, left my clothes in a pile on the floor and curled up under the covers in the foetal position. There was one single memory that kept echoing in my mind over and over as I drifted off from exhaustion. The last time I was truly happy before everything went to shit.

My naked limbs were tangled with his. My hands were in his light brown hair. And his amber eyes were on me, full of love and affection. They held my future and dreams. They were the eyes I could drown in for the rest of my life. And they belonged to the boy I'd promised it to.

"I love you," I whispered. "I love you forever, West Greer."

"I love you too, Scarlett Nyx."

It was the most devastating part of all. I'd loved West my whole life. And I didn't recognise the boy I'd fallen in love with in the man who had forced me to remember the worst night of my life.

FIVE

DRAKE

The moment I stepped out of the lift after I'd finished work, I knew something was wrong. The tension in the atmosphere between Prescott and Francis was palpable. They weren't talking, but neither of them looked particularly happy.

"Dare I even ask what's going on?"

Francis looked at me, his grey eyes full of irritation.

"West is gone."

I frowned, digging my hands in my pockets as I walked into the kitchen to grab a beer.

"What do you mean?"

"He's not here, Drake."

"And?"

I had told West we needed a meeting tonight regarding the memory stick and getting in contact with Penn. He'd not responded, but he rarely did. He usually showed up. I hadn't told him in the message what we would be talking about. Knowing West, he hadn't deemed it as important.

"You did tell him we wanted to talk. He should be here."

"This is West. He does whatever the fuck he wants when he wants. Did you call him?"

Francis and Prescott looked at each other.

"His phone is off."

I didn't know why they were so concerned. West had a tendency to disappear whenever he felt like it. Pulling open the fridge, I extracted a bottle and popped off the cap with the opener before putting it to my lips. I closed the fridge and looked at the boys again. They were both staring at me with expectant

expressions on their faces.

“What?”

“Did you forget who else should be here right now?” Prescott said, crossing his arms over his chest.

He and Francis were sitting on one of the sofas together. I scratched my head and set the bottle down on the kitchen island. Then my eyes darted about the place.

“Where’s Scarlett?”

“And there we go,” Francis muttered, rolling his eyes.

My first thought hadn’t been her. Today had been busy, and I didn’t have a chance to consider what we were going to do about her and the memory stick. We needed to find out what was on it first before making a plan.

“Where is she?”

“We assume she is with West, but we don’t know for sure,” Prescott said, raising his eyebrow.

I set my hands on the counter.

“Did you call her?”

“Yes. It went to voicemail.”

I pulled out my phone and tried her myself. Letting out a little sigh of frustration when it also went to voicemail, I stuffed my phone back in my pocket. I picked up my bottle and walked over to the living room, taking a seat on the sofa opposite the boys.

“What are we going to do?” Francis asked.

What the fuck could we even do when neither of them were answering?

As much as I wanted to lose my shit, we didn’t know what was happening. And I wanted to trust in West to a certain extent. He wouldn’t put Scarlett in danger. He loved her even if he’d not admitted it to any of us out loud.

“We’re going to assume she is with West.”

“Where do you think he took her?”

“I have no fucking idea.”

West was a law unto himself. In a way, I was happy he was making an effort to spend time with her. Fuck knows he needed to. We’d all seen what losing her had done to him. He’d kept his distance far too much, except for when he’d carved a damn brand on her skin. My annoyance over the whole thing had

lessened with the passing days. Scarlett hadn't complained about it to us. If anything, she'd accepted it. The girl took a lot of things in her stride. Even my shitty behaviour.

I sipped my beer, trying to work out how on earth I would fix all the shit between us. Last night had been a start, but it wasn't enough. When I was alone in my room, all I could think about was her. How I wanted her to see me. The real me. Perhaps her finding me playing on the roof had ignited something in me. I couldn't turn it off.

I wanted Scarlett to actually want me back. And it meant I would have to stop being such a dick to her. Stop acting like she wasn't exactly what I needed. Her fiery spirit and tenacious soul were so fucking intoxicating.

I miss the girl you were, little wisp. I miss confiding in you. I miss you so fucking much.

Yet even as I wanted to open up to her, there were so many things holding me back. Too many secrets we were both holding onto. How could I show her me when she didn't even know who I was before? When she didn't understand everything we'd done was to bring her back to us. It didn't change the fact we needed her to destroy Stuart Carver. She was the key to his destruction. She was the only person who had ever been on the inside. And while I was sure Scarlett couldn't tell us much, she had a way in. A way to get to him.

The problem was, everything changed when she came back here. When we all realised, we couldn't look at her as our friend any longer. When we wanted her so fucking badly, we'd gone to extreme lengths to have her. And I wasn't talking about when we'd bided our time until we could return her to us, although it had been extreme too. The desire we all felt towards Scarlett was fucking crazy. It consumed the four of us, making it impossible to do anything but give in.

Perhaps it was always meant to be this way or maybe now we were adults and we'd all changed, things were different. We'd undergone a huge transformation in the time she'd been missing. We'd turned to darkness and depravity without her. But when I thought about it, I knew Scarlett was as fucked up as we were. She was seduced by the corruption. And we'd debased her further. We drew her into our world and made her a part of it. She'd become a member the day she'd killed a man. The day we'd forced her to face her own perverse little soul. And what a kinky little thing she was. Desperate for discipline but with a need to disobey.

My little wisp. Our girl. Our queen. Our everything.

“I don’t like this,” Francis said, turning to look out of the window at the fading light. “I’ve felt off all day... like something fucked up is about to happen.”

“Same, something isn’t right,” Prescott muttered.

I don’t know why these two were acting so fucking superstitious, but then again, the whole thing with the memory stick and Scarlett finding me last night had thrown me for a loop. Maybe I was ignoring the signs. But what could go wrong between West and Scarlett?

“Well, you two can sit here acting like the world is about to fall apart,” I said, raising myself back to my feet. “I’ll do dinner.”

They watched me walk away. I could feel their eyes on my back. Probably wondering why I was acting so blasé about the situation. The truth was, I couldn’t afford to allow it to get to me. My mind was already way too full right now. Things regarding the business. Shit with Scarlett last night. It was occupying far too much space in my brain.

Making dinner helped focus my mind on something else, and it was a relatively silent affair between us. We sat watching TV while we ate rather than getting set up at the table. Prescott and Francis were agitated, and it showed. It was affecting me too.

Who the fuck decided we should put on a thriller show about some psycho guy who’d kidnapped a girl and made her into his sex slave?

It made me think of our own situation and hit a little too close to home. I mean, I didn’t regret anything we’d done, even so, I had to question what the fuck Prescott and Francis were thinking when they picked this out.

“Are you two serious with this?”

I waved at the TV.

“What do you mean?” Prescott asked, giving me a curious look.

I rolled my eyes and stared at Francis, who also glanced at me with a shrug like he didn’t know what I was getting at either. These two were getting on my last fucking nerve right now. I opened my mouth to reply when my eyes went to the lift, watching it light up. My jaw snapped shut as it arrived on our floor and the doors slid open.

I was not expecting West to stumble out of it, his amber eyes full of panic. He

looked between us and ran his hand through his hair.

“What’s wrong with you?” Prescott asked before I could.

West took another step towards us. A part of me wanted to question whether he was on something, but then my attention went back to the lift. No one else came out. My eyes narrowed.

“Where is Scarlett?”

The tension in the room ratcheted up a notch. The fact West hadn’t immediately responded put me on edge and I was already anxious as it was.

“She ran away from me,” West finally responded in a quiet voice.

Francis stood up and stepped towards our friend.

“What do you mean, she ran away from you? What the fuck did you do this time?”

West flinched, but he didn’t look angry with Francis. It was unusual. In fact, it made me even more concerned as to why he was acting so strangely.

“Do you want the good news or the bad news?”

“Is there any good news?”

He rubbed the back of his neck.

“Kind of.”

Francis threw up his hands.

“Just fucking tell us.”

West shuffled over to us and took a seat on the free sofa before putting his head in his hands.

“She remembers who we are.”

We all went very still, our eyes on West, who looked like his world had just fallen apart. I didn’t know what the fuck had gone down this evening, but clearly, it was nothing good. I cleared my throat.

“Dare I ask how she remembered?”

West dropped his hands but didn’t look up.

“I took her to the site... we went to go see the bare-knuckle boxing, but I got into a fight and... and then I took her up to the third floor.”

Prescott sucked in a breath while Francis sat down again, his silver eyes wide.

“She tried to kiss me and I got agitated by it. I can’t kiss her when she doesn’t remember who the fuck I am.”

He looked up at us then, his amber eyes full of unrepressed fear.

“You don’t understand. She kissed me the first time. She... she initiated it and there she was, doing it again. It didn’t feel right.”

He rubbed his hands along his thighs as if telling us this story was making him crazy. Well, crazier than usual.

“I needed her to remember. I told her we knew each other. I asked her if she’d remembered us. If she’d seen us in her memories... and she had. She fucking well had. All of us when we were younger, but you know, she didn’t want to believe it was real. I couldn’t take it. She was acting like remembering was impossible.”

I don’t think I’d seen West this emotional since the day Scarlett fell. In fact, it had been the day we found out she’d disappeared when West had lost it completely.

“What did you do?” I asked, unsure if I wanted to know what the fuck it was.

The fact West had taken her to the site of her accident made me angry as hell. I’d warned him about going back there, even going so far as to get him banned from the fucking fighting ring. But no, West didn’t want to listen to me. The idiot just wanted to torture himself because he held himself entirely responsible for her fall. We all knew it wasn’t his fault. There was nothing he could have done to change what happened, but the guilt? Well, it ate him up inside.

West’s eyes met mine, and I knew what he said next would not be good.

“I reminded her of that night... by dangling her off the building.”

SIX

FRANCIS

Drake was up and out of his seat the moment the words left West's lips. He crossed the distance between them before slamming his hands down on the back of the sofa, forcing West to sit back and look at him.

"What the actual fuck, West?"

For once in his life, West didn't give us one of his maniacal smiles. He didn't act like a cocky little shit either. He stared at Drake with abject misery written all over his features.

"She needed to remember," he whispered, his voice laced with pain.

"So what, you decided it was a good fucking idea to put her life in danger? Jesus fucking Christ." He gripped West's shirt in one hand and looked like he wanted to strangle our best friend. "What happened that night was an accident. We all know that, but this... you took her there and fucked with her head."

Drake paused, his voice coming out strained and full of anger. West hadn't moved. He was still staring up at Drake with too many emotions in his eyes.

"I begrudgingly accepted you branding her because of things I don't claim to understand about your relationship. Then you do this."

"Her memories came at a cost."

"A cost? What if you dropped her, West? Did you think about that? What if you fucking well killed her, huh?"

West flinched. The last thing he would ever want was Scarlett's death on his conscience.

"I didn't kill her. I would never. You know how I feel about her."

"How you feel? How you fucking feel?" Drake dropped West's shirt and waved his hand around. "What about the rest of us? Don't you think we feel

something for her too?”

West looked absolutely defeated, as if the evening had taxed him heavily. And judging by what he'd told us, it had. Then he steeled himself and glared at Drake.

“I needed her back. We all need her back. Pres wanted it. Frankie did too. You're the only one who was standing in our way. You didn't want to face the consequences of her finding out. And now she has, we all have to fucking face it.”

Drake straightened and put the fingers on the bridge of his nose.

West wasn't wrong. Prescott had been adamant about it for weeks. While I hadn't exactly voiced it in the same way, I'd wanted her to remember too. Drake was the one who'd stopped us. He slammed the brakes on it. And it was something we were supposed to be discussing tonight, on top of the damn memory stick. Now, I had no idea when we'd deal with that shit. Didn't matter when Scarlett was missing. She was far more important.

“What happened after you dangled her off the building?”

West didn't immediately answer. He looked out of the window and rubbed his thighs with his hands.

“I didn't drop her, not after she remembered. And she does. The way she looked at me when I hauled her up. She saw me. She recognised who I was. She knew me. And it was everything.”

He rose to his feet and shoved Drake away from him before walking to the window. Placing his hand on it above his head, he stared out at the dark city skyline.

“Only she ran away afterwards. She ran from me because we lied to her. Now she's out there all alone without us when she needs us the most.”

His words echoed around the room. I glanced at Prescott who looked like he wanted to break. My hand went to my heart, rubbing it absentmindedly as it ached in my chest. Scarlett needed us. And we weren't there for her... again.

Drake sat down heavily in West's vacated place and put his head in his hands.

“You've made a real fucking mess of this,” he said in a pained voice.

“That may well be, but I did what I had to. I made her remember us.”

And there was the West we all knew. The man who was unapologetic about his actions. To be honest, I wasn't sure I wanted him to apologise for what he'd

done, either. Fuck knows, we needed Scarlett back in our lives. The real Scarlett, who wasn't locked behind a glass wall in her mind. We wanted our girl back. The one who completed our family.

"Where would she go?" Prescott asked after a long moment of silence.

"She wouldn't have gone back to Stuart if she remembers that night," I said. "Did you tell her what they did to her?"

"No," West replied. "I didn't get a chance to. She didn't give me one. I couldn't explain."

Even though she remembered the past, there was still a chunk of it missing. After her surgery, she was in a coma, then they kidnapped her and she was never heard from again until she turned up here ten years later, a fully grown woman who didn't remember who we were. Scarlett needed context to understand why the Carvers weren't her family. They weren't who she belonged with.

"We need to find her."

West turned his head, his eyes full of darkness.

"I know that. Why do you think I came back here? I need you three to help me work out where the fuck she would have gone."

If the four of us put our heads together, we could come up with something. Scarlett wouldn't have gone far. She didn't have a ton of options.

"I'm guessing she's going to want to be alone for a while," Prescott said, glancing at me. "It's got to be a lot for her, remembering sixteen years of her life." His eyes turned sad. "I can't even imagine what that would be like." His hand went to his hair. "My poor little lamb."

We all knew Prescott was in love with Scarlett. He was the most affected by her pain. Her sadness. And yet knowing she was suffering made me want to hurl something at the wall. It forced me to admit my feelings for Scarlett ran deep.

The girl I'd known my whole life had dug her way inside me as an adult. She'd shown me her vulnerabilities just as she'd done when we were teenagers. She'd trusted me to keep her safe. Our woman might not have remembered who we were, but it hadn't changed her personality. She was still Scarlett, just not the complete version who knew us.

I got up and paced away, unable to take the emotions swirling in my gut. The image of her lost and alone was like a fucking knife to the chest. Those hazel-

green eyes full of confusion and misery. And how she'd be helpless against the tidal wave of her memories.

I didn't know what the fuck to do with myself. My feet carried me into the kitchen and the empty beer bottles sitting on the counter. I picked one up, stared at it before hurtling it halfway across the room. It smashed on the wooden floor, making everyone turn to look at it. Then their eyes went to me. I was too worked up to care about their disapproval. My hand went to the second bottle. I threw it. The sound of it breaking echoed around my skull.

"Francis."

Drake's voice was full of concern, but I ignored him, picking up the third bottle and tossing that one for good measure. I wanted to scream, but my voice was caught in my throat. It was getting hard to breathe. We were meant to be there for her when she remembered. All of us. We'd always taken care of Scarlett.

My hand went to the last bottle. I stared down at it in my hands. If I smashed this one too, would it make me feel better? Would it take away the agony? Would it stop hurting so fucking much?

For the past ten years, I'd tried to keep my emotions at bay. Tried to shove them down in a box. My denial had only worsened them. All it did was make me want to hurt everyone who'd wronged us. It made me crave violence and destruction the way West did. Yet my conscience was a ticking time bomb. It loved to rear its ugly head and remind me of all the blood on my hands. On all our hands. The stain that would never come off. And if I was honest, I didn't want it to.

I'd battled with my own inner nature my whole life. The two sides of me. The one who was kind and cared about those he loved. And the one who revelled in depriving people of things. Starving them of their last moments. Their dying breaths. I almost laughed. I'd always considered it a sickness inside of me. The part of me that related way too much to the damn name they'd branded us with. The man who wanted to live up to it. It wasn't a sickness or a curse. It was me. I should have accepted it long before now.

They say it's feast or famine... and it's time I embraced the latter.

I put the bottle back on the counter. Then my knees gave way. I slid down it, placing my head in my hands. It wasn't just my acceptance I craved, but hers

too. I missed her gentleness. The way she always understood.

The night we'd made her kill someone, she told me in the shower the fact I liked to kill and had no remorse for it didn't scare her. The way she'd stared at me had tipped my world upside down. And yet everything held me back as she didn't recognise me.

If Scarlett truly saw who I was, including the boy she remembered back when we were kids, could she love me?

The very last person I expected approached me and sat beside me, resting his head on my shoulder. I glanced at West, who looked as defeated as I felt. Clearly, he'd noticed I was having an existential crisis.

"I forgive you," he whispered. "For that night... I forgive you for telling her."

"You do?"

He nodded and stared down at his hands.

"Why? You've never wanted to forgive me before."

I had a hard time wrapping my head around it. West had always been angry at me over it. He held me responsible for Scarlett being there.

"Seeing her tonight, going through it again... it made me realise we should never have kept it from her. You were right to tell her, even if it led to this. She deserves the truth. It's why I wanted her to remember. I mean, yeah, I'm not going to lie. I was fucking selfish going about it the way I did. I was desperate, but it's what she wants, isn't it? To remember?"

I nodded.

"More than anything."

She'd basically told me as much. And Prescott, for that matter.

"I just wish she hadn't run."

"Me too."

Prescott peered over the back of the sofa at us. His blue eyes were sad.

"Are you thinking about the day we found out she disappeared? This reminds me of it."

West didn't look up at our friend, but I narrowed my eyes. That day was a breaking point for all of us. It was nothing like what we were experiencing now, but I could see what Prescott meant. The heavy atmosphere between us was suffocating.

"We're going to find her, Pres," I said, not wanting to consider the possibility

of her disappearing for good.

“I just don’t know where to start. It feels... hopeless.”

Drake stood and came closer. He stared at the three of us with a haunted look in his eyes.

“We are never going through that day again, Pres. Never.”

The conviction in his voice reminded me of Drake’s dogged pursuit of Scarlett after she went missing. He never gave up. He sent us all after lead after lead. And when we found out Stuart Carver had taken her, he devised a plan to get her back. Drake wasn’t going to let this faze him. And we shouldn’t either.

Drake came closer and squatted down in front of us. West looked at him. While Drake was pissed off with West for what he’d done, he understood why. And he wasn’t going to hold it against our friend.

“I promise you, West, we’ll find her and bring her back. We need her.”

Prescott got up and came over to us. He rested his hand on Drake’s shoulder.

“I promise too.”

West gave them a nod and stared down at his hands. I had a feeling all of us were now thinking about the day she’d disappeared now Prescott had brought it up. It was a memory I hated almost as much as the night Scarlett fell, because it was the day we all had to face up to the consequences of what we’d done. And how it had ruined everything.

SEVEN

PRESCOTT

TEN YEARS AGO

My eyes were fixed on the TV, but I wasn't paying attention to it. How could I when our best friend was lying in a hospital bed in a coma because of her head injury, and had been for the past couple of weeks? When she'd been through major surgery to pin her pelvis back together and had suffered a fractured arm and leg. Scarlett wasn't okay. And neither was I.

Not sure I had words to describe what happened that night. My three friends and I had become killers. We'd murdered two people to protect Scarlett. To make sure they never hurt her or anyone else ever again.

For as long as we'd been at secondary school, the Carver twins had terrorised everyone. And hated us. We never took their shit. Ray and Ryan had a vendetta against the five of us. It's why they took Scarlett and tried to hurt her. They were going to rape her. A day hadn't gone by since then when I didn't appreciate Drake's intervention. He'd stopped it before it could go too far. But now... now Scarlett might not wake up. And it hurt too fucking much to think about.

We couldn't lose her. She was our best friend. The person keeping us together. Scarlett was the beating heart of our group. Without her, we were at a loss for what to do next.

Drake, Francis, and West were at my place. Mum was out at work, but as it was the school holidays, none of us had anywhere else to be. A couple of weeks ago we'd been celebrating the end of exams. Now, we were all on edge, worrying about Scarlett's condition and whether she'd wake up.

West had been crashing on my sofa since the night of the accident. Mum didn't mind him being here, especially under the circumstances. Mum had always treated the boys and Scarlett like family.

West sat with his arms crossed over his chest, his amber eyes fixed on the window of my living room. Francis and Drake were next to me, having a quiet conversation about the latest bullshit with Drake's parents. Yesterday they had a shouting match in front of us when we were over at his place. I swear Drake's mum, May, was better off without his dad, Oscar. He had cheated on her and made no apologies for it. Drake was stuck in the middle of the two of them, though at this rate, he'd never want to go near his father again.

"Is it okay if I crash at yours again?" Drake asked, rolling his eyes.

"Yeah, course," Francis replied, giving him a nudge.

Francis and Drake lived next door to each other. May and Francis' mum, Eliza, were best friends, just like their sons. I'd met them at primary school, along with West and Scarlett. We'd become quickly inseparable, spending every moment we could together. There was magnetism between us, coupled with the fact we all shared an unbreakable bond forged long before we even met. Scarlett liked to call it destiny. She said we were meant to be. The thought of her made my chest ache.

West's phone rang, breaking through the tense atmosphere. He grunted and pulled it out of his pocket. I lowered the volume of the TV when his eyes widened and he shoved it against his ear.

"Lylah, how is she?"

His voice sounded gruff and was filled with desperation. West had taken her accident the hardest. He blamed himself for not saving her, but we all knew there was nothing more he could have done.

West's silence made me nervous as he listened to what Lylah had to say. His hand curled into a fist in his lap, the only sign something was wrong.

"Are the police involved?" he asked after a few minutes had gone by.

The way his eyes went black made me swallow.

"Yeah, we're okay, Lylah."

I could tell it was a lie to appease her. West wasn't okay at all. He was hardly coping. None of us had been since that night. It was bad enough we'd killed two people, but Scarlett's accident had taken a huge toll on all of us.

“I’ll talk to you soon ... okay ... bye.”

The phone dropped into his lap. Then his bottom lip trembled.

“What did she say?” Drake asked.

With slow, laboured movements, West stood up. His phone slid to the floor with a thump. Both his hands balled into fists.

“Someone took her from the hospital.”

“They moved her? Why?”

West’s head snapped to Drake.

“No, Drake, they took her... someone took her without them authorising it. They kidnapped Scarlett.” He sucked in a jagged breath. “The police are involved. Lylah sounded like she was barely holding it together. She’s missing... Scarlett’s gone.”

There was a rushing sound in my ears as his words settled into my bones.

Scarlett is gone. She’s gone. Gone.

“She’s been kidnapped?” Francis said, his voice shaky.

West nodded. His fists unclenched and clenched again at his sides. I could see the war brewing in his head. The agony and pain.

“Why would anyone do that? She didn’t do anything wrong.”

None of us spoke. We’d done something wrong, but no one knew about it. At least, they didn’t know we’d been involved in the twin’s disappearance. Three days after Scarlett’s accident, the news broke. Stuart Carver’s twins were missing. He was the owner of Rotherhithe United Football Club. We’d met him on a few occasions. We didn’t like him because he looked down at us. He sneered at me the most because I came from a single-parent household.

It was two days after the headlines broke when the police turned up on my doorstep to question me. The others had similar experiences. The man who’d interviewed each of us was Detective Inspector Garrett Jones. He creeped me the fuck out. All of us got a bad vibe from him. Not to mention he was the father of the twin’s dickhead best friend, Mason. He was older than them and had always been on the twins’ side whenever fights broke out between us. Not to mention his creepy as fuck crush on Scarlett. The guy was six years older than us. It was lucky she hadn’t noticed Mason watching her whenever he picked up the twins from school. A twenty-two-year-old staring at a schoolgirl was just plain fucked up, in my opinion.

We'd denied any knowledge of what happened to the twins to the police. They had nothing to go on. The four of us had been careful when we lured the twins to the building site. There was nothing to connect us to it other than Scarlett's accident. They didn't know the twins were dead, just missing. And they wouldn't find the bodies. We'd checked the site several times over the past couple of weeks. The foundations had finished being laid. We were in the clear so far.

"I don't fucking know, Frankie," West muttered, then paced away, his back radiating with tension and his hands still fisted at his sides. "But she's gone. I can't fucking believe she's gone."

He opened the patio doors leading out onto the back. Mum had a two-bed council flat on the ground floor. We were lucky to have a back garden even if it was tiny. I got up and followed him, worried about what he was about to do. And I was right to be.

The moment West got outside, he tipped his head back and let out a horrifying wail of pain. The next thing I knew, he was throwing the garden furniture around and kicking it in his frustration. Drake and Francis joined me by the door, watching West wreck the place, but none of us stopped him. How could we? All of us were suffering. All of us were in pain.

When he dropped to his knees and pounded the ground with his fists I moved, running over to him and falling to the floor too. I wrapped my arms around him from behind. West let out a choking sound of pain.

"I've got you," I whispered. "We're here."

Francis and Drake came over, both of them getting on the floor with us. They wrapped themselves around West and me. His body shook with the weight of his misery.

"She's gone," he sobbed, making me aware he was crying. "She's fucking gone."

It sunk in for all of us. I could hear the other two unable to hold it together. Francis was breathing heavily, and Drake let out a choked gasp. I bit my lip to stem the bleeding mess of pain left in the wake of knowing she had disappeared. My face dropped to West's spine. I allowed the tears to flow. There was no use holding back. The four of us had seen each other at our worst. We'd killed together. And none of us would be the same again. Not now we'd lost the one

person we'd fought so hard to protect. It turned out none of us could protect her from this. From the unknown.

"We'll get her back," Drake whispered. "We're going to get her back."

"How?" Francis asked. "We don't even know who took her."

"I don't know, but we will. I promise."

It was a crazy promise to make considering we were four sixteen-year-olds who didn't even know where to look, but I felt it deep in my soul. The four of us would find Scarlett.

"She belongs with us," West said, his voice hoarse.

Scarlett did belong with us. She was our best friend. The girl we'd kill for. And we wouldn't let anything keep her from us forever.

"If we stick together, we'll find her, no matter how long it takes," I said.

We all squeezed each other as if we were cementing our promise. No matter what happened, we would stick with each other. We'd make sure we found our best friend if it was the last thing we ever did.

EIGHT

DRAKE

The weekend had passed by without a word from Scarlett. Without a single fucking trace of her. And all four of us were on edge. I didn't know who was worse. West spending the entire time spaced out after smoking copious amounts of weed, Francis pacing the place like a caged tiger, or Prescott constantly coming up with very unhelpful suggestions of where she might have gone. The truth was, none of us knew where Scarlett had got to. And we didn't want to alert anyone to her disappearance.

Francis sat on the sofa in my office, his hand propped up on the arm as he stared out of the window. He'd come in here a few minutes ago and hadn't said a word, merely seated himself with a faraway look in his eyes. I didn't comment on it. If he wanted to say something, he would. I continued working, although my concentration was shot to pieces. All I could think about was her.

Scarlett remembered us. She knew who we were. And how we'd spent the past couple of months she'd been with us lying to her.

"What if she goes back to Stuart?"

I looked up. Francis was still staring out the window, but there was a furrow between his brows.

"She wouldn't."

There was one thing I was sure of. Scarlett was terrified of the man. Scared enough, she sought shelter with us when Mason hurt her. She was willing to kill to stay away from him. The power Stuart had over Scarlett concerned me. When she learnt the truth. He'd taken her to punish us for what he thought we'd done. She'd give up her own truths to us. At least, I hoped she would. I didn't know if we could restore her trust in the four of us now.

“You know I’m thinking we should have told her the truth from the start,” Francis said after a long moment.

“Have you been in West’s drug stash or something? I remember you saying it was imperative she didn’t know who we were until we were ready when we devised our plan.”

Francis shrugged.

“Maybe I was wrong.” His eyes flicked to me. “Maybe I’m realising our plan was flawed and would have never worked.”

The only thing we wanted was her back with us. None of us cared how we achieved it. But playing with Scarlett’s emotions and head was a heavy price to pay, given our current circumstances. The way we all wanted more from her. I’m not sure how it came to this. Our pull towards her had overtaken our common fucking sense. If we’d stuck to the original plan, then maybe none of this would have happened. If we’d done what we were supposed to and not given into desire. But it was futile thinking like that. Fucking pointless.

“Why? Because you want her?”

“No, Drake, because she’s a fucking human being.”

I flinched. It was easier to not think of her as a person, rather a tool we could use to take Stuart Carver down. He would never stop. Not when he suspected we’d killed his kids. We had, but there were only five people who knew about it. The four of us and Scarlett. And until now, she didn’t remember. The fact she did put us all in danger. It’s why we’d decided not to reveal the truth straight away. We needed time to work on her, so when she remembered, we wouldn’t be at risk. And yet West had fucked it all up by forcing her to remember. Then she’d run.

“We would have been fucked either way. It’s easy to put aside your feelings for someone when they’re not right in front of you. But her being right here... it changed everything.”

“Is that an admission she fucked with your head from the day she walked in here?”

I gripped the arm of my chair and gritted my teeth.

“Yes.”

Lying to Francis would be pointless. He knew me too well.

“She fucked with mine too. She did it to all of us.”

“Well, we all knew she would ruin West, but Pres? That was unexpected.”

He snorted.

“No, it wasn’t. You know as well as I do the only people he cares about outside of himself are Rosie, us and Scarlett.”

I smiled despite myself. We’d always been close to Rosie, Prescott’s mum. She was the type of person who welcomed anyone who was a friend of her son with open arms.

“Guess Pres had deeper feelings for Scarlett than we thought.”

“Pretty sure that applies to all of us, Drake.”

I wanted to scowl, but I didn’t. Francis was right. I’d never wanted to look at Scarlett that way because she was my friend, but a part of me had always held a torch for our best friend. And as an adult, it had only intensified. My thirst for her was unquenchable.

The things I wanted to do to her sinful little body would make most people raise their eyebrows and think I was some kind of sick deviant. They weren’t wrong, of course, but I didn’t care about other people’s opinions. However, right now, I would settle for having her curl up in my lap with my arms tight around her. I wanted to kiss away her pain and show her I cared.

“Regardless of all that, we need to find her.”

“Do you think she might try to find Lylah?”

My stomach roiled in protest at the thought of it.

“Maybe.”

None of us had considered she might want to search for her mother.

“It’s a strong possibility, Drake. She doesn’t know.”

“I know she doesn’t,” I snapped, slamming my hand down on my desk.

Francis raised his eyebrow but didn’t comment on my outburst. The very thought of telling Scarlett the truth of Lylah’s fate made me want to throw something at the fucking wall.

“Shouldn’t we try—”

A noise from outside the door made my head whip around and Francis shut his mouth. I got to my feet and strode across the room. My hand reached out and gripped a shoulder, pulling whoever was out there into my office. The moment I took in who it was, I gave them a hard look.

“What are you doing, Tonya?”

She looked startled, her eyes going wide.

“N-n-nothing.”

“Hmm, and why don’t I believe you?”

I had never liked my step-cousin. To be honest, I thought she was a conniving little bitch, but it wasn’t something I voiced to anyone else. The only reason I’d given her a job was to keep Fletch from realising I was using him for his fucking money. The guy was a bit of a cunt, not to mention I hated his sister with a passion for breaking up my parents’ marriage. Well, I also blamed my father for being a cheating piece of shit, but there we go. I’d gone to extreme lengths to make sure no one realised my true feelings towards my step-family. To be honest, they could all go fuck themselves. Fletch was useful because he was rich, but that was about the extent of my interest in him. I should have got rid of Tonya a long time ago, but she hadn’t become a real issue... until now.

“I noticed Scarlett wasn’t here today. Is she unwell?”

I glanced at Francis, who was frowning heavily at Tonya. Why the fuck did she care where Scarlett was?

“She’s fine,” I said a moment later. “Just taking the day off.”

“At such short notice?”

“What makes you think her schedule is any of your business?”

Tonya backed away a step.

“It’s not, I’m sorry, Drake.”

“I told you it’s Mr Ackley in the office. Did you forget that all of a sudden?”

She paled but tried to give me a smile. I’d never been harsh with her before. My patience was rather thin today, and she’d just pissed me off. After the way she’d treated Scarlett, the fact she was asking about her made me incredibly suspicious.

“No. My apologies. I’ll just go back to work.”

“You do that.”

Tonya dashed out of the room. I shut the door behind her before turning to Francis.

“Am I the only one who wants to know what the fuck that was about?”

“I’m more concerned about how much she heard.”

“I am too, but why does she care where Scarlett is?”

“She’s been asking too many questions about her recently.”

I took a step towards him.

“What?”

He waved a hand around.

“Ever since West threatened her, she’s been far too curious about our girl. I didn’t tell Tonya anything, but it’s suspicious.”

I rubbed my chin. Francis hadn’t told me, but then again, I’d been far too focused on other shit to spare a thought for my step-cousin.

“Hold that thought.”

I opened my office door and strode out. My steps slowed as I neared the lobby where Tonya’s desk was. Peering around the corner, I caught her on the phone, but her voice was low and I could only make out a little of what she said.

“They don’t know where she is.”

My skin prickled. It confirmed she’d overheard me and Francis talking about Scarlett having gone missing. Who the fuck she was talking to was the more important question. It must be why she was so interested in Scarlett.

I backed away down the hallway towards my office. No way I wanted her to catch me eavesdropping. Francis was still seated when I got back.

“She knows Scarlett is missing, and whoever she is reporting to knows too,” I said before he could get a word in.

His eyes went dark.

“Well, that’s going to be a problem.”

I nodded, sticking my hands in my pockets.

“Perhaps it’s one we can use to our advantage. After all, I have access to Fletch’s tracker on her phone.”

“He keeps tabs on his daughter?”

“No matter what his feelings about his kids are, they’re assets to him. Besides, he is probably monitoring me too through her.”

Francis raised an eyebrow.

“Why would he do that?”

“It’s the only way my father gets any information about me.”

“Why the fuck do you allow that?”

I shrugged.

“Oscar can do whatever the fuck he wants. He knows if he comes near me, I will end him.”

The last time I'd spoken to my father face to face, I'd told him as much. If he tried to come near me, I wouldn't hesitate in ruining his life.

"And you don't consider this interfering?"

"I find it funny he thinks he can worm his way back into my life without me knowing about it. He's a fool."

Francis snorted.

"He has no idea what you're truly capable of."

I cracked my knuckles and walked back over to my desk, seating myself behind it. It was time to find out what Tonya was really up to. If she left the office, I wanted to know where the fuck she was going.

"I don't think many people do. Pres gave me this mug for a reason."

I tapped the mug on my desk containing the coffee I'd made earlier, given Scarlett wasn't around to do it for me. While the words on the mug weren't the slightest bit amusing, they were apt when I considered what they called us. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. And I was the last one they ever expected when I came for them.

West was the violent one, but me? I was the executioner.

You cannot outrun Death.

No one could outrun me. They shouldn't bother trying. I found Scarlett after years of searching for her. And I would do it again. I would fucking tear down the world to find those who'd wronged me. Then I would end them all, my father included, if he dared try to fuck with me again.

"Is it wrong that I want him to go too far so I can watch you destroy him?"

I grinned as I clicked through my emails to find the link to the tracking site Fletch had sent me a while back.

"He will... eventually, so perhaps you'll get your wish."

Francis' grey eyes glinted with violence. It'd been a long time since I'd seen him look that way. Before everything with Chelsea, something I knew haunted him. Perhaps Scarlett's presence had encouraged Francis to get out of his own head. If so, good. He needed to get over it and be himself again. The fucked up deviant I knew he was inside.

My eyes scanned the screen. The little dot was located in our office building. Tonya was staying put... for now. I didn't trust it would remain so.

"If she leaves the building, I'll go after her with West. You and Pres can stay

here and man the fort.”

“Are you sure it’s a good idea to take West after he threatened Tonya?”

“That’s why I’m taking him.”

Francis shook his head and gave me a devious smile but didn’t comment on it.

“And what do we do about Scarlett?”

“That’s why you’re staying here with Pres... in case she turns up.”

He gave me a nod. I didn’t know what else we could do about our girl at this point. The only lead we had was the chance she might go looking for Lylah. And I hoped for Scarlett’s sake, she didn’t.

NINE

SCARLETT

Two days of hell lay behind me. Two days of memories flooding my brain. Two whole fucking days of tears, agony, and pain. All of it left me exhausted and listless, but I remembered.

I remembered everything.

And nothing about it made me feel any better.

There was no sense of relief knowing who I was. No sense of freedom from the locked cage in my mind having its door blasted open. No, my memories had only afforded me more questions than answers. And it fucking sucked.

Should I be grateful to West for shattering the glass wall in my mind?

Maybe.

In a lot of ways, I was. It might not have been the most orthodox way to go about it, but blunt force had been effective. And it was just his fucking style. The man was violence personified.

It didn't, however, stop me from being pissed as fuck at him.

Dangling me off the side of the building was just about the most screwed up thing he could have done. Especially given it was in the exact same place I'd had my accident, using the same method and having me fucking terrified for my life. But West wouldn't hurt me on purpose. At least, not the boy I'd known all those years ago.

West Greer had loved me.

Did he still love me?

Why did the thought of him not doing so hurt so much?

It made my heart bleed. And I hated myself for it.

Now I knew why the damn heart of mine kept telling me to trust them. It

knew them. It recognised the boys I'd grown up with. The four boys who'd promised me we'd be each other's best friends forever. My four guardians. Prescott Ellis, West Greer, Francis Beaufort, and Drake Ackley. They had been my family and me, theirs. But now... I couldn't reconcile the boys they were to the men they'd become. And why they'd treated me the way they had since I'd come back into their lives.

The only way I'd get answers to all the questions flooding my brain about what they'd done and why was by going back to them. By demanding they tell me the truth. And making them give me a fucking explanation for the past ten years.

First, I had something important to do.

I'd checked out of the hotel over an hour ago, having spent far too much money in the three nights I was there. I barely left the room and ordered room service rather than venture down to the restaurant. I couldn't face the world while my mind was all over the place. Having got my shit together, I was ready to do what was needed.

Now, I stood in front of the building I'd grown up in. The block hadn't changed much in the past ten years. All the doors were still painted blue with gold numbering. I saw a flash of me running along the first-floor balcony where all the front doors on that level were. Shaking myself, I walked over to the outdoor stairs and made my way up them. My breath stuttered when I came to number eighteen. My heart twisted painfully in my chest, but I had to do this. I needed to know.

My hand rose, and I knocked. A minute went by with no answer. I stepped back and glanced at the front window. The curtains were drawn, so I had no idea if anyone was home.

This flat had been my mother's ten years ago. It was the place I'd spent the first sixteen years of my life. And had been one level up from Prescott's mum, Rosie's place.

Did she still live here? I couldn't imagine so with how ridiculously wealthy the boys were now. Prescott would have done everything he could to give his mum a comfortable life, especially given how his father had fucked off and left them alone, flitting in and out of their lives every so often. Every time Ezra came back, it was never for long. And he always left Prescott miserable. All he wanted

was a father who actually cared, but the only person Ezra Ellis gave a shit about was himself.

The thought of Prescott made my chest hurt worse. The thing was, even though I was angry about the lies and deceit, my heart remained his.

I was completely and utterly in love with Prescott Ellis.

Those feelings weren't going to magically disappear because I'd known him ten years ago. And yes, it was hard to see the boy Prescott and the man Prescott as the same person. But he was still Pres to me. My heart's desire.

I didn't know if I wished it wasn't the case. Right now, I wasn't sure of anything. I wanted to see him. To talk to him. I needed the truth from his fucking mouth before I decided what I was going to do.

I knocked at the door again. No way I was leaving without trying every avenue. I could ask the boys what happened to my mother, but my anger with them was making it hard for me to contemplate going back to Fortuity.

Lylah Nyx was my real mother. I remembered everything about her. How I looked like a younger version of her with the same wavy light brown hair and hazel-green eyes. People had mistaken us for sisters when I was sixteen. And all this time, I hadn't known how much I missed her.

Letting out a sigh when another few minutes went by, I looked around. The place wasn't deserted, but there weren't many people wandering about. The door to my left opened. A man stuck his head out, giving me the once over.

"You looking for who lives there?"

I nodded, digging my hands into my coat pockets. He stepped out and leant against the door frame.

"It's been empty for years."

My heart sank at his words. She wasn't here. I don't know what I was expecting. Maybe for her to welcome me with open arms. For her to tell me why she'd let the Carvers have me. Why had they told me they'd adopted me? Why had they... lied?

"Do you know how long?"

He shrugged.

"Think my mate Danny said it'd been ten years or some shit like that. Why you interested?"

I let out a sigh. Maybe if I told him the truth, he might be inclined to tell me

what he knew.

“It was my mother’s flat... I grew up here.”

Saying the words out loud made it so fucking real to me. Ten years of my life had been stolen from me. I’d not known who I was for all that time. And everything had changed.

“You did? Huh.” He tipped his head. “Only lived here a couple of years, but there’s someone who comes to visit the place once every six months or so. Think they make sure it’s all good or whatever.”

“They do?”

“Yeah, last time was months ago. That’s all I know, though.”

I stared at the door.

“Well, thank you. I should really...” I waved as if I was going to get out of here.

“Sure, sure, you’re welcome.”

He gave me a nod before disappearing back inside his own flat. I rubbed my face. Waiting around here would be futile, yet knowing what I had to do next made me sick to my stomach. Seeing them would only hurt me. Going back to the men with whom I had an incredibly complicated relationship didn’t fill me with anything other than dread.

I’d stood outside this building for almost half an hour before getting the courage to come up here and knock at this door. Now I was no further forward. To be honest, it had only given me more questions, like, where had my mother gone? Why was the place empty after all this time? Who came to look at it regularly? Did they own it?

I took a step towards the stairs when someone appeared at the top of them. My eyes narrowed against the sun, allowing me to see who it was. And it only left me reeling.

“You’re here.”

I widened my stance and gave her a dark look.

“What are you doing here?”

Tonya stood there with her handbag clutched to her side and her eyes fixed on me. I had no idea how she’d found me or why. How the hell did she even know I’d be here? I hadn’t told a soul.

“Making sure you hadn’t disappeared completely.”

My feet carried me forward before I stopped a couple of feet away from her.

“That doesn’t tell me anything. How did you find me? And why?”

She looked away for a moment. The fact she’d turned up here set me on edge.

“I suppose you’ll find out soon enough.” Her eyes landed on me again, narrowing with irritation. “Mason Jones sent me to find you.”

Mason? What the hell is she doing talking to Mason?

“Since when do you and Mason know each other?”

“Since you made West threaten me.”

I put my hands up.

“I had nothing to do with him threatening you. That was all him.”

“He wouldn’t have done it if it wasn’t for *you*.”

The vindictive note of her voice made me flinch. West’s behaviour had nothing to do with me. He was a law unto himself. I had no control over the man.

“That still doesn’t explain Mason.”

She shrugged.

“He approached me. Asked me to get information about what you’re doing. I was happy to oblige him. After all, you’re a thorn in my side, Scarlett.”

I’d known this woman was a bitch, but now she was showing her true colours.

“Me? A thorn in your side? What did I ever do to you?”

The way her eyes darkened with anger and her hand came up made me take a step back. She stabbed a finger in my direction.

“You turned up and wound them all around your little finger. Even Drake, and I’ve never known him to care about anyone but himself. They were perfectly easy to work for before, apart from West, but he’s always been crazy. Now they’re all making my life hell and it’s all your fault.”

I almost fucking laughed. She was delusional. I had done nothing of the sort. If anything, I was at the mercy of the boys, not the other way around. And if they were making her life hell, it was her own damn fault. She was the one who had been out of line when she spoke to me, not the other way around.

“Are you serious? I’m not responsible for them. If you didn’t know what they’re truly like, that’s not on me.”

She shook her head, continuing to glare at me.

“You wouldn’t understand. I’m not here for that, anyway. Mason made me an offer I couldn’t refuse. And now I’m taking you back to him.”

I wasn’t going anywhere with her and especially not back to Mason, even though I had a boat load of questions for him. Did he know the truth about what happened to me? And why would he be complicit in keeping me away from everyone I’d known before?

“Excuse me? I am not going with you.”

I heard the sound of a car below us and the engine switching off.

“Yes, you are.”

The next thing I knew, Tonya had launched forward and grabbed hold of me. Her long nails dug into my forearms, making me wince. I’d rolled up the sleeves of the cropped coat West got me as it was warm out.

“Get off!”

I tried to shove her away, but she held on tighter, backing away towards the stairs.

“I knew you would make this difficult,” she ground out. “A little stuck-up bitch like you has no sense of self-preservation.”

I had the fucking sense to know going with her would be a mistake. Digging my heels in, I wrenched myself out of her grasp. Her nails left red scratch marks all down my arms, but I didn’t care about the pain. Getting away from Tonya was my only goal.

I turned and tried to run, but she caught me by my hair, dragging me back. I yelped, putting my hands up to attempt to pry her off me. My scalp burnt, making my head ache with it.

“What the fuck is wrong with you? Let go!”

And she did. I stood there for a moment, surprised she actually had. Then I turned around and found out why.

Standing there with a murderous expression on his face was West. His hand was wrapped around Tonya’s throat, keeping her from going anywhere. I didn’t like seeing him touch her. Especially not his hand being around her neck. My own itched to feel his tattooed hand around it. No matter what had gone on between us, my heart told me West belonged to me. She didn’t want him touching Tonya in the way he did me.

Stupid traitorous heart.

Next to them stood Drake, his indigo eyes pinning me in place. Seeing him made my body freeze.

“I swear, it was so embarrassing,” he said, dropping his chin to his chest. “I don’t like rejecting people.”

I put a hand on his arm.

“You could have asked me to let her down gently.”

Drake looked at me, a small smile playing on his lips.

“My little knight in shining armour, huh?”

“Oh, shut up! You don’t need rescuing from Rachel. She’s harmless. Now, if it had been Kylie Adams, you’re on your own then. I’m not touching that shit.”

I leant my head on his shoulder as Drake laughed.

“Not so knightly now. I thought you were brave.”

“I’m brave because you four make me that way.”

He stroked my knee.

“No, you’re strong enough on your own without us, Little Nyx. You choose to stay with us because we’re meant to be. One day, you’ll see that.”

I swallowed. The memory was like cold fucking ice being doused all over me. Drake had been so warm, kind, and funny back then. Now, he was none of those things. I ached to see the man behind his mask. To see if the boy I cared for remained.

My heart twisted in my chest, making me want to rub away the agony building inside it. Seeing him and West had my emotions running riot. They were conflicting. On one hand, I knew these boys, and on the other, as men, they’d done a lot of shit to me I wasn’t entirely happy with. How could I trust them when they’d broken it so thoroughly by lying to me all this time?

My eyes went to my arms. The pain registered then. The scratches had grazed my skin in places, leaving angry red marks on my forearms. My eyes darted to West, who was staring at them intently. When he looked at me, I was reminded of a conversation we’d had the night after I’d taken Ecstasy and slept with all of them. And I knew I was in big fucking trouble.

TEN

DRAKE

After Tonya left the office, it didn't take us long to work out where the fuck she was going. West and I had taken the car in case we happened to find Tonya with Scarlett. There was no other reason for her to come to this estate other than to seek out Scarlett. The question was, how did she know our girl was here?

Scarlett was staring at West with abject horror on her face. Fuck knew why. All I cared about was her being here. Scarlett was safe. The relief I felt over her being relatively unharmed was palpable. I didn't want anything to happen to her. And I was fucking glad we'd found her before anyone else had the opportunity. Tonya had led us right to her.

"How did you find me?" was the first thing out of her mouth.

"We tracked this bitch's phone," West said, squeezing Tonya's throat. The way Scarlett narrowed her eyes had me thinking she wasn't best pleased about the way he was touching Tonya. Somehow, I didn't think Scarlett would be very happy if one of us touched another woman. There was a certain possessiveness in her eyes. It had me wondering if she'd ever direct it my way.

"Yeah, well, she said Mason sent her, although she didn't tell me how he knew I was here."

I turned to Tonya. She looked about ready to shit herself, but she should be scared. West had a hold of her and he wasn't known for his restraint.

"How did he know?" I asked her, my voice brokering no fucking objections.

Her fearful eyes fell on me.

"He's tracking her phone."

Well, that was just fucking wonderful. And unsurprising. The fucker had got on my last nerve. I was about done with his bullshit. If there was a way we could

cover it up without it leading back to us, I would set West on him. The cunt had become a damn problem. We'd need to do something about him tracking her phone. At the same time, we couldn't make him suspicious we were on to him either. I'd fix it somehow.

First things first, we needed to deal with Tonya and get Scarlett back home where she fucking well belonged.

"I see."

West shifted on his feet, his eyes fixed on Scarlett's arms where there were large scratch marks down them.

"Who did that to you?" he asked, his voice low.

"Who do you think?" Scarlett retorted.

West looked at Tonya and his amber eyes turned deadly.

"Well, I was going to go easy on you, Tonya, but now..." He turned his attention back to Scarlett and gave her a maniacal smile. "Now Scar knows exactly what I'm going to do."

Scarlett swallowed. I looked between them, wondering what kind of threat West had made. Then I remembered this was West. No doubt it was fucked up.

"The first thing we're going to do is get in the car," I said. "Whatever you have planned, I'm guessing it's not something we should be engaging in out in the open."

"You would be correct."

Scarlett stepped forward and put her hand up.

"Wait, I need you to answer something first."

I raised an eyebrow and waited for her to elaborate. She looked over towards the door of the flat where she'd grown up.

"Where is she?"

West flinched and I stiffened. I'd known it was coming, but it didn't make it any easier.

"That's something we should discuss at home."

"Home?" She turned back to me. "I don't have a home."

"Your home is with us," West ground out, "you know that."

She threw a hand up.

"How can you say that when you've spent this entire time lying to me! All of you have *lied* so many times, I don't know what the truth is any longer."

West shoved Tonya at me and strode towards Scarlett. He caught her by the arm and pulled her against his chest. She watched his other hand come up and cup her cheek.

“When I promised you forever, Scar, I meant it,” he murmured. “That’s the truth.”

For a long moment, she said nothing. I held onto Tonya’s arm, making sure she couldn’t escape and waited. We needed to move, but I could allow them this moment. West needed it after everything he’d been through.

“I don’t know who you are anymore,” she whispered. “You’re not my West.”

West’s expression hardened, but he didn’t stop caressing her cheek with a gentle touch.

“He died on that building site when he watched you fall. When he begged you to wake up and you didn’t. He died the last night we saw each other.”

Tears welled in Scarlett’s eyes.

“West...”

He dropped his hand from her face and his expression became shuttered as if he was trying to hide his true feelings about her words. But I knew they’d broken something inside him.

“I told you what would happen if you ran from me, Scar.” He pulled her arm up and showed her the scratches. “You ran and got yourself hurt, didn’t you. Now I have to punish you.”

“I don’t want—”

He put his finger over her mouth.

“I don’t care what you want. You’re going to be a good girl and take what you’re given.” He glanced at me. “Isn’t it fortuitous Drake is here with us, hmm?”

Scarlett’s eyes went wide. What on earth had he threatened to do that involved me?

He didn’t wait for a response. His hand tightened around Scarlett’s arm and he pulled her towards the stairs with him.

“It’s time we got this little show on the road.”

I followed them down the stairs, dragging a dumbfounded Tonya along with me.

“West, this really isn’t necessary,” Scarlett protested as he opened the car

door on the passenger side and shoved her into it.

He leant into the car slightly to look at her.

“It is entirely necessary, my little Scar. You were warned.”

He shut the door and opened the back one for me to force Tonya inside. When he shut it, he looked at me.

“What are you planning?” I asked, tugging the keys out of my pocket.

“Oh, nothing you need be too concerned over. In fact, I think you might enjoy it.”

“West.”

He put his finger up and dug out his phone.

“Get in the car and drive, Drake. I’ll give you the address.”

I walked around to the driver’s side and got in while West made his phone call. Scarlett turned to me.

“Please don’t let him do this.”

I don’t know why the fuck she was pleading with me.

“Do you think I have control over West’s actions?”

Her mouth thinned. Reaching out, I took her arm with the worst scratches on it in my hand. Scarlett watched me stroke my fingers down them before I brought her arm closer to my face. She let out a breath when I pressed my lips to the first scratch.

“I’m sorry we didn’t get here sooner,” I murmured. “You shouldn’t have had to endure this.”

“I thought you’d be angry with me for running.”

My eyes flicked up to hers.

“Angry? Hmm, perhaps I am. As for you getting hurt, well... that’s unacceptable. No one is allowed to hurt you. I don’t blame you for these marks, Scarlett. I want to take care of them for you, but don’t mistake this for kindness or mercy. I’m relatively sure whatever West has planned will be punishment enough.”

She didn’t say a word as West got in the back and rattled off an address for me. I let go of Scarlett’s hand, turned the engine on, and punched it into the satnav. Turning back to him, I indicated Tonya with my head.

“Give me her phone.”

West grabbed hold of her bag, which was sitting between them, and pulled

her phone out, slapping it into my hand. I opened the car door, stepped out and walked closer to the front tyre. Squatting down, I placed it right in front of the tyre before straightening and getting back into the car. Releasing the handbrake as my foot hit the accelerator, I felt the slight jolt of the car driving over the phone. I checked in the side mirror, satisfied with the sight of the crushed phone. I stopped the car and got out, walked over to it, and gathered up the pieces. Smiling to myself, I brought them back into the car and dumped them in the cup holder next to the gear stick. Then I set off properly towards the address West had given me.

“Turn your phone off, Scarlett. I’ll deal with Mason tracking it later.”

She did as I asked, digging out of her bag and switching it off. I’m not sure she wanted to piss me or West off, given she knew when we reached our destination, she would be punished.

No one spoke for the rest of the journey, not that I knew where the fuck we were actually going. I pulled up outside a rather nondescript looking house in a quiet street. West got out first and walked around to drag Tonya from the car.

“Drake.”

I glanced at Scarlett as my hand went to the door handle.

“What?”

“He’s going to—”

“I’m pretty sure I know what he’s going to do with her, Scarlett.”

I opened the door and got out of the car, not caring what else she had to say. Right now, I wanted to get this shit over and done with so we could take Scarlett home. Then we would have a conversation between the five of us. A very important conversation. It couldn’t wait much longer.

I walked around to the pavement where West stood with Tonya. He gave me a nod as Scarlett got out of the car. Then he led the three of us up to the house and rang the doorbell. A minute later, it opened to reveal Penn with a rather smug smile on his face.

“Well, hello there. I see we have quite the party here.”

I glanced at West, who gave me a smile. My suspicion about what would happen next had been confirmed, but I didn’t say a word as I followed him and the others into the house when Penn stepped out of the way.

“Basement, yeah?” West asked as Penn shut the door.

“It’s all yours.”

Penn waved at an open doorway located under the stairs. Tonya struggled then as West dragged her over to it. He ignored her and tugged her through the door.

“Nice to see you again,” Penn said to Scarlett, who stood next to me, her face having gone rather pale.

Her eyes darted towards him.

“What did you do with the guy?”

Penn smirked.

“Do you really want to know?”

She nodded. Then, much to my surprise, she reached out and slid her fingers between mine. The gesture made my heart hammer in my chest, but I didn’t outwardly show my shock.

“I drove him out to a secluded place, dug a grave, dumped his body in it... then I poured petrol over him, lit a match and waited whilst he burnt before filling in the dirt.” He shrugged. “Doubt he’ll get found, and even if he does, I scrubbed any traces of what you did to him.”

Scarlett stared at him for a long moment before she rubbed her face with her other hand.

“Well, that’s... thank you, I guess.”

“You’re welcome.”

Scarlett looked up at me, her hand tightening in mine. I could feel her fear bleeding out of her. And it made me even more curious about what West was going to do.

I tugged her towards the basement door. Even if she tried to tell me to stop this, I wouldn’t. Scarlett knew I wasn’t the type to give mercy. She didn’t try to fight me as we walked down the steps. At the bottom, there were two doors. One was open. I led Scarlett inside, finding a concrete room with a chair in the middle. Along the walls were shelves with various implements on them. West had already sat Tonya down in the chair, tying her arms behind her. He gave us both a grin when we came to a stop just inside the door.

“Nice of you to join us.”

I shook my head while Scarlett curled herself into my side as if I was going to save her.

“What are you going to do?” Tonya asked, her eyes going to me.

West turned to look at her. The way he smiled made her flinch.

“Isn’t it obvious, Tonya? I made you a promise. If you fucked with our girl again, I would gut you.”

Tonya paled, her eyes still fixed on me. What was it with women today and thinking I was their fucking saviour? Honestly, did they not know me at all? Well, Tonya didn’t, but I was relatively sure Scarlett had some idea. Then again, the fact she was pressed against me, my hand in hers, was making me feel things. A part of me wanted to soften to her and show her affection in return.

I didn’t get a chance to because Tonya opened her fucking mouth.

“Are you going to let him do this to me, Drake?”

Was I going to let West kill her?

You fucking bet I was.

ELEVEN

WEST

I watched Drake let go of Scarlett's hand and curl his arm around her shoulder, holding her closer to him. Perhaps killing Tonya would be a step too far for him, but I highly doubted it. I knew his true nature. Drake was brutal and unforgiving. He wasn't the type of person to show mercy.

"Do you think because you're Fletch's daughter, that will save you?" Drake asked, his voice cold as fucking ice.

"Y-y-yes," Tonya replied, her voice shaky as tears sprang to her eyes.

The way Drake smiled was absolutely chilling.

"We're not family, Tonya. We never have been. Your father was only ever good for one thing. His money." Drake reached up with his other hand and stroked Scarlett's hair, cradling her closer to him. "You, on the other hand, are expendable. Always have been. Let's just say I did him a favour by taking you on. You know who could do a fucking better job in her sleep than you, hmm?"

Tonya didn't respond. A tear slid down her cheek.

"That's right, you have never meant anything to me. When you decided to stage this little campaign of hate towards Scarlett, you sealed your own fate. I protect what's mine. And Scarlett... she's *mine*."

Drake's declaration made Scarlett look up at him with wide eyes. He didn't spare her a glance, but I could see it took a lot for him to admit it out loud when she was right there.

"So yes, Tonya, I am going to let West do whatever the fuck he wants to you. And I'm going to enjoy watching you bleed."

His eyes turned to me and he gave me a nod as if to say go ahead. I winked and strolled over to the shelves on the wall, checking out Penn's collection.

He'd been more than willing to let us have use of his basement. This was the room he used to 'fix' people. The other was where he tattooed. Normally, I wouldn't have asked him for a favour like this, but we needed to get rid of Tonya cleanly. Well, her death wouldn't be clean. The cover-up would be, though. It was the least I could do for Drake. His step-cousin turning up dead would raise a few eyebrows after all.

While I could gut her with my knife, I was in the mood for something bigger. I had promised Scarlett a trophy from the kill. And I was going to deliver.

The whimpering erupting from Tonya's mouth was ignored by me and Drake as I looked the knives over. Penn had a large collection of torture implements, but my weapon of choice was a knife... or a sledgehammer. He had one of those resting against the wall. She would die too quickly if I used it. I wanted to torture the bitch. She deserved no less.

I selected a meat cleaver, testing it in my hand before swinging it around. I had to think big, considering the threat I'd issued to Scarlett. She needed to know I was serious.

"Drake," came Scarlett's small voice. "Is he really going to do this?"

I eyed the two of them. Drake stroked her cheek as soothing a frightened lamb, but his face remained impassive.

"Yes. And I'm going to make you watch him."

Before she could say a word, he turned her towards Tonya and stood at her back, his hand resting on her shoulder. I knew if she looked away, he would hold her chin in place.

I set the cleaver down on a small table next to Tonya's chair and pulled out my knife. Drake and I had changed before we left Fortuity, knowing if things went south, it might get messy. We were both all in black.

"Now, I think I made you a promise, didn't I, Tonya?" I crooned, dragging the knife down her cheek as I stared at her. "This knife and you have a date with each other. And it starts now."

I didn't hesitate in whipping it down and planting it in her stomach. She let out a wail a moment later as I dragged it upwards. Blood pooled around the wound, soaking her white blouse. I ripped the knife from her and wiped it on her sleeve. Then I took a step back, letting Scarlett see what I'd done. Her hazel-green eyes were wide, but she didn't move from the spot Drake held her in. She

didn't close her eyes or make a sound.

My warrior. You're so fucking brave.

Sliding my knife back into my pocket, I gave Tonya a smile. She was still screaming, but no one would hear her. Penn had his basement thoroughly soundproofed.

"It hurts, doesn't it? Well, this won't kill you just yet."

My hand went to the cleaver and my fist wrapped around the handle.

"When I told my little Scar what would happen if she ran from me and got herself hurt, I made her a few promises. Since you decided to inflict pain on my woman, I'm collecting your debt to her. Your limbs come first. And then your heart. Perhaps I'll take your head too, I haven't quite decided yet."

The incomprehensible blubbering out of Tonya's mouth made me laugh. She should have stayed in her fucking lane.

"It wouldn't matter who hurt her, Tonya. My promise is my fucking word."

This was for Scarlett. Proving to her when I said forever, I meant it. She was going to watch me kill for her. I'd destroy the universe if it meant I had Scarlett. She was my beating heart and soul.

I backed up from Tonya, letting the meat cleaver hang in my hand by my side. Turning when I reached Drake, I met Scarlett's eyes. I switched out my hands so the right one, which was covered in blood, touched her face, smearing red across her cheek.

"Which would you like first, hmm? Her arms or her legs? Or do you want me to cut her heart out, give her a quick death?"

Tonya was already bleeding. If I hacked into her limbs, she probably wouldn't survive too long.

Scarlett said nothing for a long moment. Her eyes were fixed on mine. Her bottom lip got caught between her teeth as she contemplated my words. The fact she wasn't screaming and telling me to stop just went to show she was as fucked up and depraved as we were. I'd always known Scarlett had darkness lurking inside her.

"Give me her heart."

Her voice was barely audible, only meant for me. I smiled, stroking more blood across her cheek.

"As my little Scar wishes."

I turned away and approached Tonya.

“It’s your lucky day. Scar wants to give you a quick death, but it doesn’t mean it won’t hurt.”

I lifted the meat cleaver and brought it down hard in the centre of her chest. Tonya let out a horrific scream as metal cut through flesh and bone but I didn’t care. Ripping the cleaver from her chest, I brought it down again, making room for me to rip out her fucking heart.

I dropped the cleaver on the table when I was satisfied I could gain access to what I needed. Tonya passed out sometime during the ordeal. There was blood everywhere, but I’d placed one of Penn’s plastic sheets down underneath us for an easy clean up.

My hands went to her ribcage, prying it open with my bare hands. I’d cracked them enough, so I had easy access. My hand dived into her chest cavity and wrapped around the still-beating organ in her chest. I tore it out and stared at it. It was fucking beautiful. The perfect trophy for my woman.

I spun on my feet and presented it in my hand to Scarlett and Drake. She stared at me with a haunted expression on her face. Drake had a devious but satisfied look in his eyes. The blood did it for him.

“I promised you a trophy, my little Scar.”

Drake let go of her shoulder. She took a step forward and reached out for it. I smiled as I placed it in her hand.

“Thank you,” she whispered, her voice full of hesitancy as if her appreciation of my gift was something she had trouble with.

Scarlett stared at the heart for a long time. Neither Drake nor I spoke while she tried to find her words.

“West, I’m not going to stop you from punishing me, but please, can it not be in front of... her.”

I was sure Penn wouldn’t mind if we used his tattoo room as long as I cleaned it afterwards. Giving her this was the least I could do.

“As you wish.”

I took the heart from her and placed it on the small table with the meat cleaver. My hands were covered in blood, but I’d told Scarlett I wouldn’t stop to clean it up.

“Let’s go.”

Drake hadn't bothered to close the door behind them, so I walked out into the hallway. I pointed at the closed door when they followed me. Drake opened it and stepped in, flipping the light on. Scarlett went in after him as I brought up the rear.

When we were all inside, I pointed at the tattoo chair.

"You can sit there, Drake."

He raised an eyebrow as if asking me why the fuck I kept ordering him about. This was my fucking punishment for Scarlett, so I called the shots. He could deal.

"Listen, if you don't want to join in, that's on you, but I'm pretty sure you're going to enjoy what's about to go down."

Drake didn't say a word, merely shrugged out of his jacket and hung it up on the hooks by the door before he closed it. I watched him take a seat in the tattoo chair, satisfied he wasn't going to object any further.

I walked up behind Scarlett and tucked her hair behind her shoulder, running my bloody fingers down her throat.

"First, I want you to undo your jeans, pull them halfway down your legs along with your knickers. Then I want you to crawl over Drake and get his dick out," I murmured in her ear as I tucked my fingers under her coat to take it off her arms. "I'm sure he's already hard for you. You know how much he likes blood. Maybe you want to run your bloody hand over his face, make him dirty too."

Her harsh breath made me grin. No doubt all the fear rushing through her veins was making her wet and wanting. I knew my little Scar liked to be afraid. It made her horny as fuck. She needed this, even if she didn't want to admit it.

I discarded her coat on the stool Penn sat on to tattoo. Her fingers went to her jeans, undoing the button and unzipping them. As requested, she tugged them and her knickers down her legs. I walked her towards the tattoo chair, making sure she didn't fall. Scarlett knelt on the chair and crawled over Drake's lap. His indigo eyes had darkened. I wasn't sure if he heard what I'd told Scarlett to do. Reaching up, Scarlett ran her finger down his cheek, smearing the blood on her hand over his skin. The sharp intake of his breath and the way his hands curled around the leather chair made me smile harder.

I raised my hand and brought it down on her exposed behind, making her jolt. The second one had her letting out a yelp.

“What did I tell you, Scar? This is not about pleasure. It’s a punishment.”

Several more strikes came, making her little arse red, not to mention the blood transferring from my hand on it. My fingers caressed her skin next, stroking the redness.

“You going to be a good girl for us, hmm? What else did I tell you to do?”

She braced a hand on Drake’s chest while she undid his trousers. He watched her silently. I could tell this was killing him, but he was going to do what I said, just like our girl.

Scarlett got his dick out and stroked it with her bloody hand.

“Mmm, that’s right, Scar. Look at how hard he is for you.”

“He is,” she whispered, her eyes fixed on Drake’s.

My fingers went to my own jeans, unzipping them and pulling my cock from my boxers. I’d been hard for what felt like forever. I took my place behind Scarlett, running my hands over her behind and adjusting the angle of her hips so she was lined up with my dick. Fisting it, I rubbed it over her wet little slit. Then I ran my hand up her back and gathered her hair up in my fist.

“Do you want me to fuck you until you scream, hmm? I’m going to use this little pussy. You like it when I hurt you. It feels so fucking good, doesn’t it?”

My fist tightened in her hair.

“Punish me. Make it hurt.”

It only took one brutal thrust for me to sink my dick inside her wet heat. She cried out from the sudden intrusion. Drake placed his hand over hers on her chest, as if reassuring her she could take it. Pulling back, I gave it to her without letting her adjust to me. I’d warned her she was going to be fucked until she was a mess.

“That’s it. Take it like the dirty little girl you are. Your pussy wants it. She belongs to my dick.”

“West,” she whimpered, “please.”

“What’s that? You want me to fuck you harder? Well, who am I to deny you.”

My fingers tightened further in her hair and I pulled her upright by it, making her neck snap back. I met her eyes and smiled at her.

“You’re such a good girl, Scar. Now, open that pretty mouth of yours. Drake’s got something for you.”

I shoved her back down by her hair. She opened her mouth and wrapped it

around Drake's dick. He let out a grunt, his fists going white around the tattoo chair. Using her hair, I directed the strokes of her mouth along his dick. And when I pushed her further down, making her take more, she gagged. My eyes met Drake's.

"Mmm, isn't that the sweetest fucking sound?"

I knew Drake wasn't vocal during sex, but I was determined to make him snap. He needed to let go. Let our girl make him feel good. My fist in her hair forced her lower, making her engulf his entire dick in her mouth and down her throat.

"Fuck," Drake ground out through his teeth.

"You hear that, Scar, he's showing his appreciation for your talented mouth."

"Fuck off, West."

"She likes to know she's being a good girl."

I let her back off his dick a little, giving her room to breathe. Her hands were planted either side of Drake on the chair, keeping her steady while I fucked her from behind and used my hand to make her suck Drake off.

"You can praise her then."

"She wants to hear it from you."

"When she deserves it, she will."

I couldn't help grinning.

"Is that a promise?"

He glared at me, but I shoved Scarlett further down on his dick and his eyes rolled back in their sockets. His hand left the chair and curled around her shoulder. Making him lose control only had me fucking Scarlett harder. She whimpered around his length, but she took it all. She didn't complain or try to escape.

"Mmm, I think Drake's going to paint your sweet little face soon. He likes to make you messy."

Drake didn't even refute my statement. He was too far gone to care what I was saying.

"Scarlett," he muttered. "Fuck, don't stop."

I made her suck him faster, wanting to watch him let go and explode all over her face. Her clean hand left the chair and gripped his shirt. His breath came out in harsh pants. The sight of this was making me fucking crazy. Punishing her for

running was a fucking high.

“Fuck!”

I pulled Scarlett from his dick, watching him erupt and it coat her face. She blinked, her mouth still open so some of his cum spurted inside it. It was so fucking hot, I could barely hold back. I let out a grunt as the tingles started at the base of my spine.

“Shit,” I ground out. “Fuck, Scar!”

I lost it, my cock spurting wildly inside her hot little pussy. I didn’t even try to stop it. Scarlett hadn’t come, but this wasn’t about her. This was her punishment, not her pleasure. And fuck, it had felt so damn good.

Letting go of her hair, I ran my hand down her spine. The blood had dried on my hands now so it didn’t get all over her t-shirt.

“Good girl, such a good girl.”

It took a long while before the three of us moved. It was time we cleaned this place up. And made a plan with Penn to get rid of Tonya’s body. It was lucky Drake had smashed her phone, so Fletcher couldn’t track where she’d got to. Drake would have to deal with the consequences of her going missing, but considering he hated most of his family, I didn’t think it would be a hardship for him.

After we’d adjusted all our clothes, I brushed my hand over Scarlett’s shoulder.

“I won’t ask you to help us with Tonya, little Scar, but you can clean up the mess we left in here. Penn’s cleaning supplies are in the cupboard over there.”

She gave us a nod. The girl still had cum on her face, but she’d sort herself out.

Drake and I walked out of the room and back into the one with Tonya’s dead body.

“Well, what are we going to do about this?”

Drake rubbed his chin and then looked at me with a feral glint in his indigo eyes.

“We’re going to make this look like some crazy ritualistic murder and have the police chasing their tails.”

“Are you serious?”

He winked.

“Very. You did rip her heart out.”

I rubbed my hands together.

“We better make it good then.”

The way he smiled made me grin back.

This is going to be so much fucking fun.

TWELVE

PRESCOTT

The moment Francis and I heard the lift doors open, we both sprung off the sofa, our eyes darting to it. Out strolled West, followed by Drake, and then there was my girl. The instant she saw me, her eyes softened with recognition. And it made my whole damn world fucking drop out from underneath me.

She remembers. She truly fucking remembers me.

Scarlett didn't walk over. Her eyes flashed with hurt the next moment before they moved to Francis. Pain lingered in her expression, making him shift on his feet, his hands clenching and unclenching at his sides. We'd hurt her by lying about how we knew each other. We both knew that. We'd been discussing it before they turned up.

It had been fucking hours since West and Drake disappeared to go after Tonya. I'd almost called one of them, but Francis told me to leave it. If they needed to, they would have got in touch with us. Didn't stop me from being concerned, given it was now early evening and they'd left around eleven in the morning.

Scarlett strode over to the stairs the next moment with a determined expression on her face after she stopped looking at Francis.

"Where are you going?" Drake asked.

She paused on the bottom step, glancing back at him.

"To take a fucking shower because you two decided to get blood and cum on me."

West let out a bark of laughter at her words. Scarlett gave him a dark look before walking up the stairs and disappearing along the hallway. Drake frowned slightly, digging his hands into his pockets.

“Dare I even fucking ask what happened?” Francis said with a scowl.

My feet were moving before I registered what I was doing. It wasn't until I was halfway up the stairs when Drake's voice caught up to me.

“Pres, we need to talk.”

“She can tell me what happened,” I replied and didn't stop to see what else he had to say.

My heart wanted Scarlett. She'd been gone for three days. I missed her so fucking much.

Somehow, I knew where she would be. So when I found her in my bathroom stripping out of her clothes, I couldn't help the way my chest constricted. She turned at the sound of my footsteps, her nearly naked body on show. I stopped in the doorway, afraid to move any closer. Her expression was guarded, but she didn't move to cover herself. I'd seen it all, anyway.

“Little lamb.”

“I don't want to talk right now.”

I took a step towards her, putting my hand out, but she stepped back.

“Don't.”

Her rejection made my chest hurt worse. Her eyes filled with sadness and heartache.

“I can't, Pres. I just can't.”

Then she burst into tears. I didn't care what she said. I wasn't going to stand there and let her cry on her own. My legs closed the distance. My arms went around her, tugging my woman against my chest and stroking her hair.

“Shh, sweetness, shh. It's okay. I'm here, my sweet little lamb. I've got you.”

Her tiny hands fisted my shirt at my sides.

“He killed Tonya,” she sobbed. “They made me watch... and... and he ripped out her heart and gave it to me as a trophy... and... they fucked me in Penn's tattoo chair as punishment for running away.”

Her words made me pause.

They did what?

“There was so much blood and... and I should have felt disgusted by it, but I didn't. What's wrong with me, Pres? I shouldn't be okay with what they did.”

I held her closer and kissed the top of her head.

“There's nothing wrong with you.”

And there wasn't. Scarlett was one of us. She didn't belong in the world of morality and goodness. She belonged in the grey where the lines between right and wrong were blurred.

"Why does it feel like there is?"

"No one said living in our world is easy... it's going to make you question yourself."

"I don't understand myself."

"You've had a rough few days, little lamb. It's okay to be overwhelmed."

I didn't know for sure, but I had a feeling Scarlett had suffered the whole time she'd been gone. The way her body shook and her words made me think she'd been through an ordeal. Remembering her past couldn't have been easy.

"I need to wash, please. Let me get clean... and... and then we can talk."

I let her go, only to cup her face in both hands. Those beautiful hazel-green eyes were full of tears, but she'd never looked more beautiful to me.

"If that's what you need."

She nodded, staring up at me with such a heart-breaking expression, I almost suggested I get in the shower with her. But she'd asked me to let her do this herself. Whatever my girl needed, she'd get.

I leant closer, pressing my forehead to hers. Needing the connection between us because I couldn't stand not being close to this woman. The owner of my heart.

"You remember me... don't you?"

"Yes," she whispered. "I remember my best friend who made me laugh and held me when I cried. I remember he called me sweetness and light. And the mischief we got into. I remember you, Pres. I remember it all."

One of my hands left her face and slid down to her chest, pressing against her heart.

"Then you know why you belong with us... Little Nyx."

She bit her lip.

"I do."

I couldn't stop myself from brushing my mouth over hers.

"I love you, Scarlett. That will never change. Even if you hate me for lying to you. Even if you're angry. I will still love you until the end of fucking time. You're mine, little lamb. And I'm never letting you go again."

A tear slid down her cheek.

“God damn it, don’t make me cry more. I can’t take it.”

I pressed my mouth firmly against hers, stealing away her words. Her fists tightened on my shirt as she kissed me back. The longing between us was a blazing inferno. I tried to keep a lid on it for her sake. I didn’t want to overwhelm my lamb more than she already was.

Pulling back, I pressed my lips to her forehead.

“Take your shower, sweetness. I’ll be here when you’re ready.”

I let her go completely and walked out of the bathroom, knowing if I didn’t leave, I wouldn’t be able to stop myself from taking her into the shower and having her up against the damn glass. She did not need to deal with my lack of impulse control right now.

I took a seat in the armchair by my shelves to wait for her, staring out over the darkening city. Whatever Scarlett came at me with, I would take it. I’d known lying to her this whole time was wrong. When I fell in love with her, my guilt over it worsened. She deserved so much more from all of us. Now she knew the truth, there were so many other complications that went along with it. Not least of all the fact she knew what happened the night of her accident. She knew we’d killed Stuart Carver’s twin sons and buried them in the foundations of a building.

The whole fucking reason he’d sent her here was to get the truth and to destroy us. We’d known it from the beginning. And we had planned to do everything in our power to prevent it from happening. Then Scarlett showed up and everything fucking changed. It all went to shit, and we were trying to pick up the pieces as best we could.

I sighed, rubbing my face with both my hands. We had a lot of explaining to do. I just didn’t think she needed to hear all of it tonight. What my girl needed was to be fed, tucked up in bed, and allowed to sleep. I would hold her all night if she asked it of me.

When Scarlett came out of the bathroom, she was wearing a little black robe she’d left in there and little else. She’d put her wet hair up in a messy bun. Her feet carried her over to me. I sat back, allowing her to crawl into my lap and wrap herself around me. I stroked my fingers along her collarbone just above where West had carved into her skin. They were angry red lines, reminding me

of violence.

“Can I ask where they found you?” I whispered, leaning my cheek on top of her wet head.

Her fingers traced along my shirt collar, where it was hanging open.

“I went looking for my mother.”

I tried not to flinch at the mention of Lylah. And judging by the softness of her voice, she had no idea of the truth. West and Drake hadn’t told her. I certainly did not want to be the bearer of that news.

“Tonya found me outside the flat. Mason has been tracking my phone, and it turns out she’s been spying on me for him.”

Scarlett shifted, pulling up the sleeve of her robe. There were scratch marks down her forearm.

“She tried to get me to go with her to Mason, but I refused. Drake and West turned up, took us to Penn’s place, and West killed Tonya for hurting me. The reason we took so long is because they had to deal with her body and stage her... murder. I stayed in the car whilst they did whatever the fuck it was with her so you can ask them about it.”

Scarlett settled herself back against my chest and placed her hand on my shoulder.

“I don’t want to talk about that though. I don’t have the energy to be angry. I just want you to tell me what happened to my mother. Drake said we’d talk about it at home, but I don’t feel like talking to him or West right now after what they did.”

I let out a breath. There was no fucking way I wanted to upset her with this, but she needed to know the truth.

“I don’t know how to tell you, little lamb,” I admitted.

She pressed her face into my shoulder.

“It’s bad, isn’t it.”

She didn’t frame it like a question, but a statement.

“Yeah, it’s bad.”

“Then just tell me one thing... is she alive?”

I pressed my mouth into her wet hair.

“No, sweetness, she’s not.”

Scarlett didn’t respond. I wrapped my arms around her, wanting to give her

the space she needed to process the fact Lylah was dead. She slid her hand beneath my shirt, seeking out my skin. I don't know if I was any comfort to her or not, given she was likely pissed at me, but I was going to try my best to help her through this.

“Pres.”

“Mmm?”

“I'm angry at you for lying to me.” She didn't sound angry, but she'd told me she was tired. “But right now, I need you more than I want to give you a hard time over it. Just know you're not forgiven.”

“I know, sweetness.” I stroked her shoulder. “I don't expect you to forgive me. Especially when I've not told you how sorry I am, but that's a conversation for tomorrow.”

She shifted again, removing her hand from my shirt so she could undo the buttons. I didn't comment on it, wondering what she wanted. She parted my shirt, exposing my chest to her gaze. Then she was pressing her mouth to my bare skin, peppering kisses across it while her hands travelled down my stomach.

“I love you, Prescott,” she whispered. “I'm so in love with you, it hurts. Every time I look at you, my heart aches with longing.” Her fingers were at my belt, unbuckling it before she unzipped my trousers. “I'm so fucking angry and hurt and upset, but I don't want to think about those things.” Her hand dug into my boxers and wrapped around my cock, making me choke out a breath. “I just want you. I fucking want you so much.”

She shifted around to straddle my lap, her lips still trailing along my chest. Her mouth latched onto my shoulder and her teeth closed around my skin. I grunted when she bit me, but I didn't say no. I didn't tell her to stop. How could I? Her fist was wrapped around me, stroking in a maddening way and making all my blood rush to my dick.

“You're mine,” she hissed against my skin. “I fucking claim you as mine.”

THIRTEEN

SCARLETT

The way he let out another grunt before whispering, “I’ve always been yours, little lamb,” had my heart in knots. There were so many other things I should be doing right now. Things I should be thinking about. But... all I wanted was him. I wanted the man I loved to take my pain away, even though I was angry with him. Even though he’d hurt me and broken my trust again.

I just wanted Prescott.

I needed him like air.

“Touch me. Please. I need you.”

His hands went to the belt of my robe, tugging at it to loosen it. Then he parted the sides and his fingers roamed over my skin. His touch made me tremble. Raising my head, I looked into his blue eyes. They were full of possessive heat and need, reflecting my own desire for him.

West and Drake hadn’t let me come earlier when they’d punished me. I wanted a release. And I desperately wanted it with Prescott.

“Claim me, Pres,” I all but demanded. “Be my Pestilence.”

His wicked smile had my pulse skittering. He gripped both my hips, pulling me directly over his dick. I held it for him so he could sink me down on it. I groaned at the sensation of him filling me. Leaning closer, he ran his tongue along my jaw.

“I’ve infected you,” he murmured before he nibbled my skin. “My sacrificial little lamb.”

There were no truer words spoken. Prescott had been in my heart my whole life, along with the others. It might never have been sexual, but I’d loved the four of them like they were my family. Now he had more of me. He owned

pieces of my fucking soul. And I couldn't tear him out. Not when I knew as well as they did.

We all belonged together.

No one else would understand. They didn't get it. For our whole lives, something had tied us together. It had bound us and made it impossible for one to be without the other. Only I'd been torn from our gang of five, not that I understood why. It was a question for tomorrow.

"I want you to make it hurt. I want to bleed for you."

He growled, his chest vibrating with it. Taking both of my hands, he locked them behind my back with one hand. Then he latched onto my neck with his teeth before thrusting upwards, impaling me the rest of the way on his cock. I cried out from the intrusion and the sharp pricks of pain from his bite. But it felt so fucking good. It was what I needed.

I craved the primal side of Prescott. The rough way he handled me. His teeth digging into my skin. I wanted him to lay me down on his altar and fuck me without a care for what I wanted. I needed to be used.

"Mine," he growled, thrusting up again and making spots form in my vision from the exquisite pleasure and pain.

I didn't care if he left bruises. I already had 'war' carved into my skin. What the fuck did it matter if I wore the marks of our passion?

"I'd kill for you, sweetness," he whispered as he kissed his bite. "I'd fucking die for you because I wouldn't want to live in a world where you don't exist. We waited ten years for you, but I would have waited a lifetime. You are everything to me."

This fucking man. I can't deal with him. The things he says to me. The way he cares.

"You're everything to me too."

The words came out without me wanting them to. The moment overwhelmed me. Made me want to spill all my feelings towards him. He was king in my heart. It didn't fully register that he'd told me they'd waited ten years. I was too focused on wanting him to tear my body to pieces with ecstasy.

The next thing I knew, Prescott had let go of my hands and crawled out of the chair with me, pressing me on the floor, where he proceeded to fuck me with vigorous strokes. My body was pinned, with his hands covering mine. He bit down on my shoulder, leaving another mark. I gasped as he trailed his hot

mouth down my chest until he met my breast. I bucked when he took my nipple between his teeth. And I cried when he tortured it.

My leg hooked around his hip, drawing him ever closer. His clothes rubbed against my skin with the force of his pounding, but I didn't care. Losing myself to him was the only thing on my mind. Delirious bliss was my focus.

“Don't stop, please. Never stop!”

He bit me again, this time right above my breast. I had told him to claim me. To infect me. And he'd listened.

He raised his head the next moment, his eyes boring holes into mine. I was lost in his gaze. In his possession. In everything Prescott Ellis.

“My beautiful little lamb wearing my marks,” he murmured, giving me the most deviant smile I'd ever been graced with from him.

I shivered as he pulled away and rose to his feet. He put his hand out. I clasped it, letting him pull me to my feet. I was barely upright when he backed me up to the window like a hunter with his prey in his sights. Gripping my waist, he turned me around and pressed me against the glass. I didn't get a chance to say a word with him at my back. He tugged up my robe, then he was thrusting inside me. Prescott took my hands and held them against the glass. As my robe was open, my breasts were smashed up against it as he fucked me.

“If only the world could see you right now,” he told me, his voice low and seductive. “They'd be in awe. And they'd be jealous of me getting to fuck such a beautiful creature. They can't have you, though. You're mine. I own every part of you.”

I pictured everyone being able to see me right now. Watching me get fucked by one of the deviant and infamous Horsemen. It would be even hotter if it was all four.

What the fuck? Where did that come from?

I'd had sex with them all at once before, but both times were under rather dubious circumstances. Maybe I should be the one who got to call the shots next time. Would there be a next time? Did I want there to be?

Yes, you do. It felt good. So very right.

I shoved away those thoughts, wanting to stay in the moment with Prescott. He was giving it to me so hard, I could hardly breathe, especially with the way I was pressed up against the glass.

“Such a dirty little lamb putting yourself on display like this. You want to be watched, don’t you? You love it.”

“I want you to watch me.”

He groaned and fucked me harder in response.

“Mmm, you know how much I like seeing you in the throes of ecstasy.”

“I want you to tell them what to do to me.”

His hands tightened around mine. Apparently, my mouth was running away with me.

“Tell them how hard to fuck your little pussy, huh? Make them shove their cocks in you until you’re crying?”

“Yes!”

“That can be arranged, sweetness.”

I shuddered.

“Please, Pres.”

His clothes were chafing against my skin as he hadn’t bothered to take them off, but it was only making me wilder. I wanted to free-fall into the abyss.

“Anything for you.”

“I need to come, please.”

He let go of one of my hands and pressed his between me and the glass. I moaned when he rubbed my clit. The desperate note in my cries echoed around the room. It was all I could do to stay pressed up against the glass while Prescott used my body for his own pleasure and drove me towards my end.

I was on fire when I came. Bliss washed over me. The coolness of the glass against my heated body was such a sharp contrast, but it only made it that much sweeter. I moaned Prescott’s name, never wanting it to end. This was exactly what I needed to get out of my own fucking head. To just not feel anything but our bodies together.

“Little lamb,” he grunted as he erupted inside me, clearly unable to hold back now I was clenching around his cock with my climax.

The two of us were panting and sweaty when we came down. He leant heavily against me, but I didn’t mind. It reminded me of how big he was compared to me. And how I was safe with him wrapped around me.

When he caught his breath, he pulled back and picked me up, carrying me over to his bed and setting me down on the covers. I stretched and lay on my

back, not caring about closing my robe over just yet. He leant down and kissed me, allowing our tongues to meld together with a rough passion, leaving both of us wanting more. He smiled when he pulled away, stroking my cheek.

“Is that what you needed, hmm? An escape from your thoughts?”

I nodded, not even caring he’d seen right through me. Thinking would only have me angry and upset all over again. Thinking would allow grief to sink into my bones. And I didn’t want it.

You’re going to have to deal with the fact your mother is dead, you know.

I told my brain it needed to take a hike. There were a lot of things I had to deal with. Too many. I didn’t have the energy for them tonight. Today had been fucking crazy. If I went further down the rabbit hole, I might not be able to dig myself back out. Self-preservation had finally kicked in, protecting me from the horrors awaiting me. The truth wouldn’t be pleasant, of that, I was sure.

“Did Drake and West get you dinner?”

I shook my head, making him let out a puff of air as if he was frustrated with the two of them for not looking out for my well-being.

“I will have words with those two.”

“You don’t—”

He put a finger over my lips.

“No, I do. You are precious to me. I won’t accept them not taking care of you.”

I stared at him for a long minute before he lifted his finger from my mouth and straightened. Prescott moved away to change, leaving me on the bed with far too many questions running through my mind. Like, could I love this man more than I already did? He was making it very difficult to remain angry with him.

Prescott had always been the most attentive when we’d been kids. While Francis had been one I always confided in, Prescott was the one who made me laugh when I was sad, he always had my back and never failed to be my rock in every aspect of my life. The two of us shared something the others didn’t. We were raised by single mothers and it gave us a little extra in common.

“How is Rosie?”

He paused in the process of pulling a t-shirt on, turning his head to meet my eyes. There was a softness to them I hadn’t seen since I’d re-entered his life.

Prescott loved his mother more than anything.

“She’s good. I bought her a house outside of London when we made our fortune. She lives with three dogs, five cats and six chickens. I try to visit every couple of months, but sometimes it doesn’t work out that way.”

His words made me smile. I was glad he’d moved her outside the city. Rosie had always been a free spirit of sorts.

“Quite the menagerie.”

He chuckled.

“Yeah, she loves her animals. She was going on about wanting a duck pond, but I talked her out of it. I’ll take you with me next time I go.”

When Prescott was growing up, Rosie had a black and white cat named Clevedon, who was the grumpiest little shit. He used to spend all his time sleeping on the windowsill except for when he was meowing to be fed.

“I’d like to see her.”

“And she’d love to see you, sweetness. I haven’t told her you’re back yet, but I will.”

He fell silent as he finished changing. I sat up and grabbed the tissues from his bedside table, doing my best to clean myself up. Prescott paused on his way to the door.

“I’ll get you some dinner and then you can go to sleep, okay? We’ll talk about everything in the morning.”

“I think that conversation should include all five of us.”

We had work tomorrow. And I had no idea what they were going to do about the fact Tonya was no longer with us.

“You’re right. It should, even if it means we’re all a little late starting. I’ll tell them, sweetness. Don’t worry about it now, though. You just rest.”

And with that, he walked out of the room.

I wasn’t looking forward to the conversation, but there were things we needed to address. Answers they needed to give me. And depending on what they were, I would have to decide what I did next.

Now I knew my father... no... Stuart’s theories about what happened to his sons were not unfounded. They were true. The boys had killed them.

But the thing was, they’d done it for me. And it made me complicit in the whole thing too.

FOURTEEN

FRANCIS

I woke up way too early this morning. Staring out the window with a cup of coffee in between my fingers, I'd watched the sunrise across London and wondered how we got into such a fucking mess. The plan we'd so carefully constructed had crumbled the moment Scarlett came back. Perhaps the years separating us had been the driving force behind making us throw caution to the wind to be close to her again. None of us could help ourselves when it came to Scarlett. To the woman who had been our family. Our hopes. Our fucking dreams.

I felt her before I heard the pad of her feet across the wooden floor. My body turned when she paused and our eyes met from across the room. Scarlett was the most stunning woman I'd ever had the fortune of laying eyes on. No one else was comparable. Her beauty wasn't skin deep. It radiated out of her, shining so fucking bright like a beacon in the darkness.

She wore the black blouse with little white horses she'd had on the first day she started working for us along with navy trousers and a little black belt, but her feet were bare. Her hair was up in a bun, with little wisps surrounding her face.

I set my coffee cup down on the side table nearby, but I didn't move away from the window. Her hazel-green eyes were full of conflicting emotions. We hadn't spoken yet. Not since her memories returned. There were so many things I wanted to say to her, but they were all caught in my throat. Knowing she remembered me was all I could think about. All I could see when I looked at her. She knew our history. It rendered me unable to do anything but stare at her.

There was a moment of stillness before she broke out into a run, almost

skidding across the floor until she was in front of me. She didn't stop there. No, Scarlett launched herself at me, wrapping her arms around my neck and burying her fists in my hair.

"Frankie," she breathed my name out like it was a fucking prayer.

My arms went around her, cradling her against my body.

"Little Nyx," I whispered into her ear, which was right by my mouth.

She let out a shudder and a sigh, like hearing her nickname from me was all she needed.

"This is not me forgiving you, but I can't help it. It's like a part of me was missing without you."

Her words constricted my chest. Guilt. It's all I could feel. Knowing I'd been complicit in keeping the truth from her. It had all seemed so easy when she wasn't right there in front of us.

"I'm so sorry."

"I know."

I kissed the skin right below her ear. She gripped my hair harder in her small fists before pulling away to look into my eyes. The recognition in them had me flipping us around and pressing her against the window. I pinned her there. If she left me right now, I was likely to break in half. My best friend was back. The girl I'd do anything for. The girl I'd fucking well killed for.

"No, Scar, you don't know. You don't even know the half of it. I need you to see me when I tell you I'm sorry for all of it. Every single second you weren't here with us where you belong. Every passing day. All the hurt, anger and pain you must feel at the four of us for keeping it from you. But there's one thing I'm not sorry for..."

She stared up at me, her lips parting on a breath.

"What's that?"

"This."

I took those lips with my own, stealing her breath as my tongue delved between them and curled with hers. Perhaps I shouldn't have kissed her, but I would never be sorry for the intimacies we'd shared. The ones I never expected to have with her. I wanted her to know I wouldn't give them up. I wouldn't give her up for anything. Any-fucking-thing. Not when it felt right to kiss her. To feel her against me. To be inside her.

I held back a groan when all the blood rushed to the place it shouldn't. Releasing her mouth, I leant my forehead against hers, closing my eyes and breathing her in.

"You were supposed to be my safe place," she murmured.

The words almost decimated me. Scarlett had always shared her deepest, darkest secrets with me. She'd confessed how she felt about West years before she'd done something about it. I'd never revealed it to anyone else. It was in my vault, along with many other things we'd spoken about over the years. She always called me her safety. And when she came back, I fell back into the role without thinking about it. Only I hadn't kept her safe this time. I'd dragged her into the dark with us, but she belonged in it even if she didn't realise it.

"I know."

"Sorry isn't going to earn my forgiveness."

I nodded. Sorry was a start, but it was only the beginning.

"I still need the truth."

"You'll get it, Scar, when the others come down."

She rubbed her face against mine as if reminding herself I was here. I was real. I was her Frankie. Not just the man, but the boy too.

"Now I know why you refused to tell me when your birthday is."

I let out a snort.

"Can you blame me?"

"No, it would have had me asking more questions... ones I imagine you didn't want me pestering you with."

Pulling away, I opened my eyes and gave her a look. She was smiling, which put me slightly more at ease.

"You try explaining to the girl who doesn't remember you why you and your friends all share a birthday with her."

Her smile fell slightly and her eyes clouded over.

"Yeah, it's not so funny when you put it like that."

I stepped back, knowing I needed to give her some room. Her gaze fell to the floor, her hands fisting in her trousers.

"What I don't understand is why you kept it from me. Why all the lies? I mean, okay, I get it to an extent because of what happened that night, but it still doesn't make sense to me."

There wasn't anything I could say to her. Not when the rest of them weren't down here yet. I didn't want to do this alone. Besides, when Prescott had come down last night, he may have had a go at Drake and West over their lack of care when it came to Scarlett. West had ignored him, but Drake had been pensive. Gave me the impression something had occurred between him and Scarlett, but knowing Drake, he wouldn't talk about it.

And when they'd told us what they did regarding Tonya... well... I can't say I was entirely surprised West had killed her. But the way they'd staged her body out in the woods with a bunch of cult-like symbols, candles and other paraphernalia surrounding her? It was a new one on me. Apparently, it had been Drake's idea after West had ripped out Tonya's heart. No fucking surprises that Penn had been on board with it. He and West were like two peas in a pod. Both of them were psychotic on some level. Probably why they were friends.

I doubted anyone could tie this shit back to them. We'd always been careful when disposing of bodies. Usually, we got rid of all traces and went about it quietly. With Tonya technically being Drake's family, guess he wanted to draw the heat away from us. If it didn't make the fucking news, I'd be surprised.

"We'll talk about it when those three idiots get downstairs."

Scarlett snorted and looked up at me.

"Idiots, huh?"

I shrugged.

"They have their moments."

I took her hand and pulled her over to the sofa, making her take a seat. I pressed a kiss to her forehead before going into the kitchen to make her some tea. Her eyes were on me. I could feel her stare, making my skin itch in the best way possible.

"Do you like watching me, Scar?" I asked as I poured boiling water into a mug.

I glanced over at her and watched the blush rise up her cheeks.

"Yes," she squeaked, pressing her fingers to her face.

"Oh yeah? Why's that?"

"You know why."

I shook my head and gave her a smile as I stirred her tea.

"No, I don't think I do."

She let out a huff and crossed her arms over her chest.

“Stop fishing for compliments.”

“You sure you don’t want to tell me?”

She wrinkled her freckled nose.

“You just want me to tell you I think you’re hot and I wish you would come over here and take care of my pussy for me.”

“I wouldn’t say no.”

Her cheeks burnt hotter, going the most delicious shade of red.

“You have no shame.”

“When it comes to you? None.”

“Well, if you want my forgiveness, you better be prepared to make it up to me.”

“By putting my tongue in your pussy?”

She shifted in her seat.

“Oh my god, that is not what I meant!”

I finished up making her tea while she stared at me with an adorably embarrassed expression on her face. Given the type of things others said to her, I wasn’t sure why me saying I wanted to stick my tongue in her pussy made her react like this, but it was fucking cute.

I carried over her mug and set it down on the table before kneeling at her feet and spreading her legs. Scarlett watched me as her hands dropped to either side of her. My hands ran up her thighs, making her bite her lip.

“You sure you don’t want me here, Scar?” I murmured as my fingers drifted between her thighs, stroking close to her crotch. “Because I want my little whore to come on my tongue.”

“Frankie,” she whispered, clenching the fabric of the sofa below her.

My fingers went to her belt, undoing it and unzipping her trousers. She didn’t stop me. She didn’t say a word. Just watched me as I peeled her clothes from her body, shoving them far enough down her legs so I could gain access to her pussy. My mouth trailed up her inner thigh. My hands latched onto her thighs to keep them spread wide for me, with her legs resting on my shoulders.

“Your wet little pussy looks so fucking appetising.”

And I dived in, making her let out a little cry of pleasure as my tongue met her hard clit. I groaned before sliding two fingers inside her. Clearly, my words

had an effect on her, as her pussy was so slick and hot. I slid them out and back in again, making her buck into my face. My mouth latched onto her clit, licking and sucking in the way I knew she liked.

“Oh god,” she whined. “Frankie, fuck!”

“I love your pussy. It’s my fucking heaven.”

And I’m pretty sure I’m falling in love with you too, Scar. I just want you to love me back... so fucking much.

The thought was almost sobering, but I shoved it away, concentrating on driving her wild. Her hands went to my hair, shoving me harder against her pussy.

“Don’t stop, Frankie, god... don’t stop!”

My fingers moved faster in and out of her wet heat, wanting to push her closer to the edge. A third joined the first two, making her cry louder. I didn’t care how much noise she was making. It was music to my ears.

“That’s it, scream for me, little whore.”

Latching back onto her clit, I grazed it with my teeth, drawing another cry of pleasure from her lips, and more begging for me not to stop. Then I slowed the pace of my thrusts, not wanting her to come just yet. Lifting my head slightly, I met her eyes. Her pupils were blown and her face was flushed with her arousal.

“I’m not your god, Scar,” I murmured, “I’m your horseman.”

The way she stared at me had me giving her a wink before I dived back in, my tongue circling her clit. And the way she panted out a breath had me sucking on her, making her squirm and try to close her legs. She couldn’t. My hand was keeping her from doing so, not to mention my head was jammed between them.

“Well, well, what do we have here?” came a voice from behind me sounding distinctly like West’s.

“Oh my god!” Scarlett squealed, then she was trying to wriggle out of my grasp, but I wasn’t having any of it. “Frankie!”

I didn’t give a shit if the others saw what I was doing. My attention was on my woman. On making her scream with her pleasure.

“Don’t mind us,” Prescott’s voice echoed around the room. “We’re quite happy to watch.”

I inwardly scoffed. Of course, he would enjoy this.

“Speak for yourself,” Drake said with irritation lacing his voice.

“Frankie, please,” Scarlett hissed, but I didn’t stop. No fucking way.

Her hands gripped my head, trying to tug me away. It only made me want to hold her tighter. Send her higher. Make her fucking cry for me. I wanted her tears.

“Oh, Jesus,” she cried out when I thrust my fingers harder and she gave up trying to get me off her, giving into the pleasure I was drawing from her body. “Fuck, oh, oh, I’m going to...”

Her back arched off the sofa, her fingers digging into my scalp as she moaned out my name again. I groaned when she came over my fingers and face. There was nothing like it. No one like her. If the boys hadn’t come down, I would have done more than just eat her pussy. I would have pinned her hands down and fucked her until she screamed so loud, her voice got all hoarse. I would have denied her orgasm over and over, depriving her of her self-control until she was desperate for a release. And only when she begged me, when she called me hers, I would have let her fall into fucking oblivion.

Soon. I’ll have you soon, little whore. I’ll have you in fucking chains for me.

The thought brought me up short as Scarlett slumped on the sofa, breathing heavily. I slid out from under her legs and clothes, setting them back down. Then I leant over her spent body, gripped her chin and kissed her, not caring she could taste herself on me. I reminded myself Scarlett wasn’t Chelsea. And I wouldn’t take it too far. I could be in control. I would be in fucking control.

If Scarlett was ever going to see the real me, then I had to be honest about myself with her. She knew me because of our history, but I’d kept so much from her. I intended to remedy it as soon as I could.

“If you could stop mauling Scarlett, we need to talk,” Drake said, forcing me to pull away from her lips.

“She was enjoying being mauled, weren’t you, my little whore?”

She blushed but nodded. Drake let out a huff. Someone was in a fucking mood. Then again, we were about to tell Scarlett the truth. Probably why he was feeling sour.

I helped Scarlett back into her clothes, grabbing some tissues to clean my mouth before I sat next to her. Reaching out, I handed my woman her cup of tea, which she sipped gratefully and leant her head against my shoulder. The others gathered on the sofas after Drake had made himself a coffee.

Guess it was time to have the conversation none of us wanted to. And I was pretty sure Scarlett was going to rain down hell on us when we were done.

FIFTEEN

SCARLETT

I held my mug in my hands and stared at the others from where my head rested on Francis' shoulder. For days, I'd wanted answers and now, when I was about to get them, I was nervous, scared even of what they'd say.

Perhaps I shouldn't have allowed Francis to go down on me this morning when I was pissed off over the lies. Something inside me snapped when I saw him standing by the window, bathed in the early morning light. He looked so young. So damn handsome. He reminded me of my teenaged Frankie, who had always felt like he was in the shadow of the other three. The one who had no idea how attractive he was. Even now, Francis held those same demons. I could tell by the way he never quite believed me when I expressed my admiration.

He was never in their shadow. He was my safety. The person I trusted with my whole self at all times. I might have loved and desired West, but Frankie was the one I told everything to.

Every. Single. Thing.

And I wanted Francis to know he wasn't second best to anyone. He was perfect all on his own.

It was all I could do to run to him and hold him. To remind myself he existed as both my teenage best friend and the man who did the most amazing things to me with his mouth. Even now I could feel the aftereffects of my orgasm washing over my body. His proximity had my heart in overdrive.

And yet... he'd lied to me along with the others.

"I thought we would start by talking about Lylah," Drake announced, rubbing his chin with his fingers.

My chest tightened. The world went dark around me. If there was one thing I

didn't want to talk about, it was my mother. The fact she was dead had me holding back a tidal wave of grief threatening to burst through.

"No," I blurted out.

Drake's eyebrow rose.

"No? I thought you wanted to know what happened."

"Pres told me already."

Drake glanced at Prescott.

"I didn't tell her the circumstances, just that, you know, she's..."

My head rose from Francis' shoulder and I leant forward, placing the mug down on the coffee table.

"Dead. My mother is dead."

The silence echoing around the room from my pronouncement made my hands shake. I swallowed hard.

"I don't want to know why or how or anything else. I can't..." I took a breath. "I can't face it. Don't make me... please."

I didn't sound remotely confident, more like pleading. Like a desperate child who didn't want their innocent view of the world shattered. I wasn't ready. Not when the first sixteen years of my life had been shoved back into my consciousness and I had to confront the fact everyone had lied to me.

I don't know why, but my eyes went to West's first. There was a hardness to his expression. It didn't soothe me in the slightest. Perhaps he was thinking about the fact I'd told him yesterday he wasn't my West any longer. While it was the truth, it didn't mean it hurt any less.

The thing was, I could still see parts of Francis and Prescott I'd known as kids in the men they were today. Prescott hadn't stopped being a cheeky little shit. And Francis was still the quieter one who didn't wear his heart on his sleeve. Drake and West were a very different matter. Drake was cold, calculating, and terrifying at times. West was just... I didn't know how to describe it, but he could. He'd told me the boy he'd been had died the night I fell. And I believed him.

"Okay, we won't talk about her," Drake finally said after a few minutes had gone by.

My eyes went to him, finding those indigo blue ones full of sympathy. It took me back slightly, seeing Drake display emotion so freely after all these weeks of

coldness. I couldn't allow it to knock me off course. There were questions I had, and I was determined to make them answer me.

"I want you to tell me what happened when I was in a coma."

My voice came out surer this time now we were off the subject of my mother.

Drake looked at the others before he leant forward, resting his arms on his knees, and let his long hands dangle between them. I had to tear my eyes away from them. Why I found his hands so attractive was a mystery to me.

You like it when he wraps them around you and makes you feel as though you're at his mercy. When he uses them to punish you. You like how big he is compared to you. How terrifyingly beautiful he is. You want everything he has to offer.

I pursed my lips, trying to prevent those intrusive thoughts from showing on my face. Didn't matter how attractive he was. It didn't even matter if my feelings were all tangled up and conflicted over the fact I'd known them when we were kids. And it was making me absolutely fucking crazy. The only thing that mattered was getting answers from them.

"We were questioned by the police over the disappearance of Ray and Ryan," Drake started, his voice steady. "And nothing came of it as they couldn't pin anything on us."

It made sense. This was exactly why Stuart had sent me here. He wanted to know what happened to his twin sons. He was sure they were dead. And he was even surer about the Horsemen having had a hand in it.

"You were put into a medically induced coma after your surgeries. They were concerned about the swelling in your brain with your head injury and wanted to give you time to heal. Two days before they were due to bring you out of it, as the swelling had gone down, you were taken from the hospital overnight. You vanished without a trace. None of us knew why you'd been taken. And it..."

He swallowed and bowed his head.

"It broke us."

I didn't say a word. Drake made one thing very clear. I'd been kidnapped. Taken away from my life. And we all knew by whom.

He took a moment to gather his thoughts before his eyes snapped to mine.

"It took us three years to find out who took you, Scarlett. Three years of searching, running down every single lead, doing everything we could to be sure of what happened. And when we discovered it was Stuart Carver... there was

nothing we could do. Not when we were nineteen with very little to our names.”

He waved a hand around.

“This? We built all of this for one reason.”

My fingers knitted together, knowing exactly what he was going to say.

“We did it for you.”

“Me?” I whispered, my voice shaky.

For the first time since he’d been a teenager, Drake’s indigo eyes softened a fraction. It almost destroyed my anger. Almost.

“Yes. You, Scarlett. We did all of this... for you. To get you back.”

I couldn’t take the way he was looking at me. The way they were all looking at me. As if I should be grateful to them for going to those lengths. Except I couldn’t be grateful. Not after everything they’d done to me since I’d come to Fortuity.

I stood up and paced away to the window, staring out at the city. Looking at them hurt too much. I crossed my arms over my chest, trying to stem the irritation rising inside me. But what was the point? I was angry. I was fucking livid. None of what he’d said explained why they’d treated me like I was a toy. Using me for their sexual gratification. Making me kill someone. Forcing me into an impossible situation where I didn’t know what was fucking up or down any longer.

“So what? I’m supposed to say thank you? Am I supposed to express my gratitude for you going to all that trouble, huh?”

I laughed, but it came out hollow and stilted.

“I’m not fucking thankful. In fact, I’m not even sure I’m happy I’m here right now with you because this is all bullshit.”

I dropped my hands from my chest, my fists clenching at my sides.

“What you’re telling me is I was kidnapped at sixteen years old because of something you four did, right? It’s why he took me. Because you killed his children. I mean, you didn’t say it, but that’s the implication, right? Why all of this happened.”

I didn’t want to see their faces. I knew the truth would be right there. They couldn’t deny it. I’d surmised it pretty well, using what I knew of what Stuart wanted me to do.

“He took you because he thought you could tell him what happened the night

of the accident, the night the twins went missing. And when you couldn't... things changed, obviously," came Drake's voice. "And before you ask, yes, we knew what he wanted when he sent you here. We knew everything."

I swallowed. My limbs shook with his words. They knew my reasons for being here. They'd known I was trying to double-cross them.

Fuck. Why didn't I realise this before? It's so fucking obvious now.

"How? How did you know?"

"Phoebe."

I spun around on my bare feet and stared at him, unable to stop the shock racing through my body.

"What?"

"Well, it's not what you're thinking. She doesn't know."

I put my hand up.

"Hold on. Hold on just one fucking minute." I let out a breath. "You mean to tell me you knew about everything because of Mu... Stuart's wife?"

I'd been about to call her Mum. But she wasn't my mother. My mother... my real mother was dead. And I had to shove away the ache starting in my chest. The grief threatening to undo me.

"It was Phoebe and Mason, to be exact."

I didn't know how many more fucking revelations I could take.

"Explain," I gritted out.

Francis stood up and took a step towards me. I flinched. His grey eyes were full of conflicting emotions like he just wanted to hold me and make this go away, but he knew it had to come out. It had to be said.

He wasn't my safety right now. Francis was complicit in this entire thing, and I didn't think I could let it slide. Not with him. And not with the rest of them.

"After we announced our plans to expand, we wanted to know if our bait had worked. The only reason we did that was because we found out where they were holding you. There was no way we could infiltrate their estate to rescue you. We needed another avenue. A different way to get to you. So we had Phoebe followed," he said, taking over from Drake. "Stuart would have noticed, but she is a little more... careless."

I almost scoffed.

More like she turns a blind eye to everything.

“She met with Mason outside of the estate. And the two of them discussed what was going to happen with you.”

“Mason? What do you mean, she met with Mason? They barely even tolerate each other.”

Francis looked at Drake, who gave him a nod.

“Phoebe has been sleeping with Mason for years.”

There were many things I could believe. Many, many things I could take at face value, but this? This was not one of them.

“You have got to be kidding me.”

SIXTEEN

SCARLETT

They all gave me a look as if to say, ‘why would we lie to you?’, but they’d been lying to me for weeks. I didn’t know what the fuck to do with myself.

How could Mason be sleeping with Phoebe?

What the actual fuck?

I took a step back, banging into the glass behind me. Nothing about what they’d revealed felt right. And it wasn’t even the half of it. There were so many things they hadn’t told me. So many things they hadn’t said.

“We’re not,” Francis said.

“We don’t have any reason to lie to you,” Drake added.

“I think you have every reason to lie to me considering you’ve been doing it since the day I stepped into this building.”

He didn’t flinch, but I could see the pain in his eyes. Why the hell did my heart ache at the sight of it? Why did I feel things for them? I hated my stupid feelings. I hated the way these four men had so much fucking power over me. They knew it too. They wielded it with perfect efficiency. And made it impossible for me to stay away.

I couldn’t escape destiny. None of us could.

It didn’t mean I had to forgive them for the lies. It didn’t mean I was going to submit. And it certainly didn’t negate my anger. My frustration. My abject fucking misery they were all partially responsible for.

Drake stood and dug his hands into his pockets.

“I understand why you wouldn’t believe us.”

“Oh well, thank you *so* much for being *so* understanding. I *really* appreciate it.”

He looked at me as if he didn’t appreciate my sarcasm. Yeah, well, maybe if

he wasn't being such a condescending dick, I wouldn't have to sass the shit out of him. Right now, I didn't give a shit if he wanted to take me to task or punish me. I wouldn't let him. Not when he had some explaining to do.

"Fine. If you don't want to believe us, we'll have to show you the truth."

Drake looked at the others, who eyed him with trepidation in all of their expressions.

"Show me?"

"You think we don't have evidence?"

I should have known better. This was where they had me at a disadvantage. I might now know about our past, but there were four weeks I couldn't account for. And ten years separating us.

There were things they didn't know. The torment I'd suffered. The beatings. The long, lonely nights in the concrete cell. The times I'd prayed for freedom. To be let out of my cage. To remember who I was. And to live the life I chose rather than the one everyone else had decided for me.

I couldn't admit those things to them either.

I didn't trust them.

And yet my heart ached. It yearned. It begged me to stop this anger. It asked me to go to them. To let them hold me and chase away my pain by whatever means necessary. Whether it be with gentle caresses, murmurs of reassurance and precious kisses or by brutal but blissful fucking, torturing my body with pleasure and pain, bringing me to the brink of sanity, only to tip me over into madness.

My heart wanted them. All four of them. At once. No holes barred. Just us. Together. And delirious ecstasy.

And my head? Well, she was not on board with those ideas at all.

"Fine. Show me your evidence. And then you are going to tell me why the fuck you all decided it was okay to treat me the way you have done."

None of them said a word. They didn't flinch or act like I'd said something to hurt them. No, Prescott and West stood up and Drake led them towards where their home gym lay. It took me a second to realise they expected me to follow. On very shaky legs, I did, although I kept my distance lest my body betrayed me and my wayward thoughts.

Drake put his hand on a modern white bookcase sitting next to the gym door.

The next thing I knew, it had swung back, revealing a hidden door. He punched in a code on a keypad next to it, opened the door, and stepped into the room beyond. West and Francis followed him.

“What’s that?” I blurted out just as Prescott stepped up to it.

He paused, his head turning back and his blue eyes assessing me with concern.

“The war room.”

Its name didn’t reassure me at all.

“Come, little lamb.”

I wanted to tell him to stop calling me that. It made me melt and want to give in. But I didn’t say it. I was annoyed, sure, but I loved Prescott. Perhaps too much now I recognised every part of him.

I made my way over to him, walking into the room after he did. What I was met with had me frozen to the spot.

One entire wall was filled with photographs, lines of string connecting them, and text written below it. It was like something out of a detective series or a photo board a stalker would create. Or even... a serial killer. I knew the latter wasn’t exactly off the cards, but I didn’t think they were the type who *needed* the kill. They did it out of their fucked up sense of justice and to protect themselves. West had killed Tonya to fulfil his promise to me. It was his form of retribution. And no matter how much I tried to convince myself otherwise, I understood it.

“What is this?” I pointed at the photographs.

“Look for yourself,” Drake said as he leant up against the table in the middle of the room.

I ventured closer, my eyes darting over the pictures to take in everything. It was a timeline of sorts from the day I disappeared to... now. Well, the day I walked back into their lives. The last photo was of me, taken from security footage, walking into Fortuity. Like a lamb to the slaughter. The irony was not lost on me at all.

There were pictures of Stuart, Phoebe, Mason and others in Stuart’s employ. There was one of what looked like a high-ranking police officer. I narrowed my eyes. I knew him. Or, at least, I’d seen him at the estate in plain clothes, but I didn’t know his name.

“Who is this?”

I pointed at the officer.

“The Met Police Commissioner,” Prescott supplied with a dark note to his voice.

“He’s friends with Da... Stuart. I saw him at the estate a few times.”

“Yes, best friends.”

I followed the string connecting him to a picture of the four boys. The text underneath told me he was the one who questioned them regarding the twin’s disappearance. And it didn’t bode well at all.

The web of connections over the years made my ears ring. Especially the things and people Stuart was linked with. And it made me sick to my stomach.

My eyes traced a path from Mason towards Phoebe. The lines met in the middle. And there it was. A picture of them. It had clearly been taken with one of those long-range cameras. They were in bed together in what looked like a hotel room. There was no denying it. Not when they were embracing each other.

It wasn’t the only line connecting Mason. There was one going straight to the police commissioner. Underneath it read: family.

I glanced between the two men, trying to understand what it meant. Mason didn’t look like him. At least, the similarities weren’t immediately noticeable. The commissioner had lighter coloured hair and blue eyes, but the set of their jawlines were the same.

“Who is the commissioner to Mason?”

“His father.”

I swallowed, realising this went far deeper than I expected. It was overwhelming. But it wasn’t the final straw. No, it came when I followed the path of Mason to me.

“What does that mean?”

I pointed at a symbol drawn underneath the line. It looked like a small skull. And it left me with the impression they hadn’t told me everything about Mason. I mean, I’d just found out his father was the Met Police Commissioner. It was a revelation in itself. I’d never known. Then again, why would I? Mason didn’t talk to me about himself. And right now, I was beginning to think I knew nothing about him at all. Not the real Mason, anyway.

“The symbol for death,” came Drake’s deep and low voice, sending a shiver

down my spine.

“And why is it on the line connecting him to me?”

“That’s a conversation for another time.”

I glanced at Drake. His expression was impassive, but something deadly burnt in his indigo eyes. Something reminding me of a predator. And one I shouldn’t provoke. The man may have strict control of himself, but below all of it lay someone who would grant you a long, slow, painful death if you fucked with him.

“Why are you showing me all of this when you say you know why I came here?”

None of them answered. I turned around, facing all four of them.

“Well?”

“You wanted proof,” Drake said after a long moment.

“And what, you’re banking on the fact that I’m not going to tell him what you did?”

“Yes.”

His answer was plain and simple, said with no inflection or trace of emotion. Drake was so sure of himself. They all were by the looks of the expressions on their faces.

I crossed my arms over my chest.

“What on earth makes you so fucking sure?”

Drake’s fingers were wrapped around the table. I could see them whitening. The only sign my question had rattled him.

“If you were going to tell him, you would have done it by now.”

“You don’t know that.”

“I do.” He lifted one of his hands from the table and held it out as if offering me his words of fucking wisdom. “You’re scared of him.”

He said it so matter of fact, like there was no question in his mind. I was terrified of the man who’d told me he was my adopted father. It made me ball up my fist behind my back. Drake was right. He saw through me. And I didn’t know if I hated him for it or not.

“You’re so scared of what he might do, you ran to us when Mason hurt you. You came here and begged Pres to keep you safe. Not to mention the way I heard him talking to you that night I found you alone on the phone to him. And

let's not forget what he asked you to do the night of the match.”

I flinched. There was confirmation he had the memory stick Stuart had given me.

“So, Scarlett, are you going to stand there and tell me you’re going to take what you know to him? To the man who kidnapped you to punish us. Who kept you from your family all because of a theory he can’t prove? Because I don’t think you are. In fact, I am more than sure you won’t for several reasons.”

He dropped his hand straightened, levelling me with cold eyes, void of all traces of affection for me. It cut me far worse than anything else he’d ever done. Even when he’d used sex to punish me. I didn’t know who he was then. I didn’t know the boy he’d been. The one who used to treat me like I was the most precious fucking thing in the world. Who had rescued me from the twin boys who’d tried to rape me. And who’d, along with my three other best friends, had killed said boys to protect me.

Seeing Drake like this made me want to cry. For him. And for myself.

“You must know the first reason, and if you don’t, well... it’s because of love. You go to Stuart and confess, how do you think that’s going to make him feel, huh?”

Drake was referring to Prescott, who looked away at his words.

“You aren’t going to throw that away. And before you object or ask me how I know, you forget, I grew up by your side. I know you. We all know you. Ten years hasn’t changed who you fundamentally are inside. It didn’t take away your heart and crush it into a thousand tiny little pieces, destroying the girl we knew.”

Tears welled in my eyes. I didn’t try to blink them back. His words hurt. They hurt so fucking much. Because the truth... the truth has the power to shred you to pieces.

“Ten years is nothing when you know we all belong together.”

He took a breath. The only sign of the way his own words had affected him.

“We were born together. And we will die together.”

And there it was. The one thing I’d been avoiding talking about. The one thing making it impossible for me to walk away from them. The one thing connecting all five of us to each other.

Twenty-six years ago, we entered this world on the same day, in the same hospital with a few rooms separating us. We’d taken our first breaths within

hours of the other. And we'd come together five years later. Drawn to each other like moths to the flame. Like we knew we were linked. We were meant to be. It was a thing we shared. Something no one could take away from us.

Fate had brought us back together.

And fate wouldn't allow us any room to escape it again.

SEVENTEEN

FRANCIS

After Drake's words, Scarlett's bottom lip trembled, her hazel-green eyes wide with tears gathering in them. She wasn't the only one they'd knocked the fucking wind out of. Prescott, me, and even West were visibly affected by his pronouncement.

It wasn't a lie. We'd been brought into this world at the same time. And I had a feeling we would leave it as one. While it might be crazy to leave things up to shit like destiny and fate, this was something none of us could escape.

"You say that like it's a curse. Like we're all fucking cursed to be bound to each other for life."

"Maybe it is," Drake said, his voice cracking on the words. "It sure feels like one."

She sucked in a breath as tears spilt down her cheeks.

"Is that why you've been so fucking cruel to me, Drake? You hate the fact you can't stay away from me? Is that why you've become so cold?"

He didn't respond, and the longer the silence went on, the more her tears flowed. The worse the atmosphere between the five of us became. The tension was utterly suffocating.

"I have my answer then," she whispered on a sob. "I bet none of you wants this, do you? None of you wanted it to happen like this." She wiped her face, but it didn't stop her tears. "Fuck fate. What the hell does it even matter? Us being born at the same time means nothing if it's the only reason you want me. If it's the only fucking reason, you found me. Right now, I wish you hadn't bothered if you don't care about me beyond that."

She wrapped her arms around herself like she couldn't contain her feelings

any longer. They were written all over her face. The way this had broken her. Being forced to remember everything. Realising she'd been kidnapped. How the last ten years had been a lie. The way we'd treated her after all the promises we'd made of protecting her for life as kids. Now, confronting the fact we'd all become so tangled up in a web of lies, desire, hate, lust, longing and need.

We hadn't meant for it to happen like this. It wasn't a part of the plan. We weren't meant to fall for our best friend, but I was pretty sure all of us had. Even Drake.

When no one responded, Scarlett dropped to her knees and buried her hands in her face. The sobs echoing around the room made me flinch. And the way she couldn't catch her breath had me fucking concerned.

What the hell are you doing standing there like a fucking lemon? Do something!

I crossed the room in four long strides and squatted down next to her. Tentatively, I reached out and stroked her shoulder. Her hands dropped from her face, planting on the floor in front of her.

"I... I... I can't breathe," she choked out. "I can't."

I could feel the tremors running through her body. The last time I'd seen her so shaken was the night of the killing. When she'd woken up after a nightmare. Knowing exactly what I needed to do, I shifted closer and wrapped myself around her body, holding her so she wouldn't fall apart.

"Shh, Scar, I've got you," I whispered into her hair. Then I turned my head and looked up at the others. "One of you is going to get me a rope. Right now."

"Why?" Prescott asked, looking at us rather helplessly.

"Because she needs it and if you love her, you'll fucking do it."

For a second he hesitated, then he walked out of the room to do what I asked. I turned back to Scarlett, who had gripped my arm around her with her tiny hands and held onto me.

"I can't," she gasped, choking on her own tears. "I can't. It hurts."

My arms locked tighter around her chest. It wouldn't be enough to settle her, but it was all I could do until Prescott got back. And I was glad she hadn't pushed me away.

"I'm right here. I'm going to make it go away for you, Scar, I promise."

I could feel West and Drake staring at me, but I didn't give a shit. Drake didn't need to say the things he had. He'd made this shit infinitely worse than it

needed to be. While I knew he cared about Scarlett, he also had to stop taking his own shit out on her. He had to stop blaming her for the things she'd had no control over.

Scarlett hadn't asked us to kill for her. She hadn't asked to lose her memories in an unfortunate accident. She hadn't asked to be kidnapped and taken away from her life. She wasn't at fault. And while she'd come here with ill intentions, she knew the truth now.

Prescott was back in short order with a couple of my ropes. He brought them over and dropped them at our feet. I extracted myself from Scarlett's grasp and held onto her face with both hands, forcing her to look at me. Her tear-stained face made my chest ache so fucking much.

"I'm going to wrap you in these, okay? Just like last time. Do you want me to do it over your clothes or do you need to feel the rope against your skin?"

The way her body shook was almost more than I could take. I had to remain calm for her. Scarlett didn't need me freaking out over this whole thing. She needed me to be in control so she could fall apart.

"S-s-s-skin."

I nodded before my hands dropped to her face and went to her blouse, my fingers working to unbutton it. She kept crying, gasping for air, but she didn't stop me from removing her clothes. I left her underwear on, knowing she probably didn't want or need to be completely exposed to the others. It surprised me they hadn't left, but maybe they realised this concerned all of us. Her well-being and safety did.

I picked up the first rope and used it to bind her wrists together. The rope coiled down her arms, pressing them close before I put them to her chest. She shuddered as I wrapped the rope around her back, securing her just right. This time, I made everything tighter. Scarlett could handle it. I had a feeling she needed it to calm down. After I'd finished with her torso, I bound her legs, bringing her knees up so she was completely secured and unable to escape. It wasn't about that, though. It was the comfort and peace being constricted would bring.

Scarlett let out a shuddering breath as I shifted behind her, seating myself at her back. I leant against the wall, pulling her with me so she could rest there against my chest. My arms looped around her, making sure she knew I wasn't

going anywhere.

“I’ve got you, Scar,” I murmured in her ear. “There’s nothing to be afraid of. You can let go. Breathe for me.”

Her little sobs echoed around the room as she turned her face into me, resting it against my shoulder. I watched her eyes close as she continued to cry and shake in my arms.

“Is this really going to help her?” Prescott asked in a low voice after a minute had gone by.

“She’ll be okay, Pres,” I replied, stroking Scarlett’s skin. “She needs this.”

Scarlett let out another choked breath, but her body was starting to relax against the bindings. This would work. It had to. I’d recognised it in her the first time. Her need to feel safe. And being surrounded by something helped her in ways nothing else could.

“Frankie,” she whispered.

I kissed her hair.

“What do you need?”

“You.”

“You have me, Scar. Always. I’m never leaving you. It has nothing to do with fate. I want you because you’re you.”

“P-p-promise?”

I smiled and rubbed my face against her hair.

“I promise.”

It was clear to me she needed reassurance. And it was the truth. I cared about her because she was Scarlett to me. The strong, fierce and kind girl with a big heart who did everything in her power to be there for us when we were younger. Who never backed down and always gave as good as she got. Fate had brought us together, but what kept us together was each other.

Her crying subsided after a few minutes, but she was breathing heavily. Or as far as she could with the way I’d bound her. Her eyes were still closed and her face pressed against me as if my presence gave her the peace she needed on top of the bindings.

I looked up when West walked over and squatted down next to us. He reached out and stroked the wisps of her hair back from where it’d been plastered to her cheek by her tears. I didn’t stop him when he leant closer,

pressing his lips to her ear.

“You know fate isn’t why you belong to me, little Scar,” he murmured before stroking his finger down her cheek. “It never has been.”

She let out a breath but didn’t say a word to him.

“I can’t be the boy you knew, but I can be the one who protects you... even from him.”

Scarlett’s eyes flicked open as West pulled away. His eyes flashed with emotion before he rose to his feet. Scarlett’s head turned to watch him walk over to Drake.

“You. Me. Outside. Now.”

West strode away towards the door without waiting for Drake to say yes. Drake hesitated, staring at Scarlett with an unreadable expression, but I knew what was going on in his head. He hadn’t meant to hurt her. Something had broken inside of him the day she was ripped from our lives. Something he couldn’t fix. But I had a feeling she could... if he let her.

He strode away a moment later. If he didn’t go after West, the fucker would only drag him out of here.

“I shouldn’t let them talk by themselves,” Prescott muttered, rubbing his face.

“No. It will end in fists,” I replied. “And we don’t want that.”

He let out a long sigh before making his way over to the door. He paused there, gripping the frame.

“The way I love you, little lamb... it consumes me. It’s not destiny. It’s you. You consume me. And I will prove it to you if I have to.”

Scarlett’s lip trembled as she turned her face back to me and met my eyes. I nodded at her.

“I love you too, Pres,” she choked out, her voice gravelly.

His shoulders sagged in relief. Then he walked out.

For a moment, Scarlett did nothing but look at me as if she was memorising my features. It was almost unnerving. I’d never had anyone scrutinise me the way she did.

“I didn’t mean what I said before,” she whispered.

“About what?”

“When I implied you were no longer my safe place.”

My heart squeezed.

“You’ll always be that for me. No one else can take your place, Frankie. Only you can give that to me.”

I bit the inside of my cheek. There were so many things bubbling up inside me at her words. She knew my insecurities. They hadn’t disappeared over the past ten years. It had always been me standing behind the others. But Scarlett telling me I was the only person who could provide her with a place she could feel safe in? It was everything to me. And it gave me the final fucking push I needed to be honest with her about a lot of things. I was going to tell her about Chelsea. Tell her about my real desire to chain her up and how doing it terrified me because of what happened before. But not right this second. Scarlett had been through enough today. I would take care of her and when she was feeling more like herself, I’d broach the subject.

“Can I kiss you?” I whispered, wanting her permission after the emotional upheaval she’d been through.

“Only if you call me...”

She licked her bottom lip, leaving the words unsaid because she wanted them from my lips.

My hand left her arm and rose to her face. Gripping her jaw between my fingers, I kept her in place as I dropped my face towards hers.

“Can I kiss you, my little whore?”

“Yes... please.”

I pressed my mouth to hers, kissing her with tentativeness and care. Reassuring her I wasn’t going anywhere. She responded by kissing me harder, her tongue snaking between my lips to dance with mine. I smiled as I let her. I’d give her anything she needed.

When I released her, she opened her eyes and blinked.

“Do you like it when I call you that?”

She nodded.

“I like being yours.”

“I like being yours too.”

She rested her head back on my shoulder, her mouth turning up at the sides.

“Can we stay like this a little longer?”

“We can stay like this for as long as you want.”

“Thank you.”

I pressed my lips to her forehead and didn't say a word, letting the peacefulness and silence of the moment wash over the two of us. Thoughts of work had gone out the window. Didn't matter when Scarlett needed me to care for her. Besides, there was a lot of shit waiting for us to deal with. And right now, I just wanted to be with her.

EIGHTEEN

WEST

Seeing the way Scarlett had broken down fucking decimated me. While I didn't outwardly show my feelings, it was ripping me apart inside to know how upset she was. This wasn't how we were meant to deal with the situation. Drake had let it escalate, and I was pissed off with him for it. I couldn't say I was the best at broaching difficult subjects, but he didn't have to be cruel to her. None of us did.

I waited for him in the living room, pacing the wooden floor with my agitation. When he walked out of the war room, his expression was impassive. He dug his hands into his pockets before approaching me.

"What is wrong with you?" I ground out the moment he came to a standstill by one of the sofas.

"Nothing is wrong with me, West."

The way he said it only fuelled my ire. Like he couldn't understand why I was questioning him.

"Oh, really now? You think you put up with a lot of shit from me." I pointed at my chest. "But the truth is we put up with way more from you."

His lip curled up in irritation, his indigo eyes betraying his incredulity. Drake could hide behind his emotionless mask all he wanted with other people, but not with me. I saw right through him because he suffered the same fucking affliction I did. The pain and suffering caused by Scarlett being ripped from our lives, compounded by the problems we had with our parents. While I had turned violent, he'd turned cold, but Drake and I? We were far more similar than he liked to admit.

And he could be mad at me all he wanted. He didn't have a fucking leg to

stand on after what he'd said to Scarlett.

"That in there." I waved my hand at the war room. "That was bullshit, Drake, and you fucking know it."

I dropped my hand when he didn't respond.

"You act like I'm the one who causes all these fucking problems, but you're the one who stopped us from giving her the truth. And now she knows, you make her think you don't care? What the fuck is that, huh? There was no need to hurt her. None. Not when she's already suffering. Do you think this is easy for her? It's not. It's not easy for any of us. It was cruelty for no fucking reason, and you know it."

He let out a tut before he drew his hands from his pockets.

"Funny you're accusing me of being cruel after yesterday."

I tilted my head.

"Yesterday. You want to talk about yesterday. I see. You're going to tell me what I did was cruel." I licked my lip. "Scarlett knew the consequences of her actions. I warned her what would happen if she ran from me and got hurt. She didn't walk into that situation yesterday blind."

He was about to open his mouth when Prescott walked out and looked between us with a doubtful expression on his face. Rather than letting Drake railroad me, I went on the offensive.

"Fate, destiny and all that other bullshit are all very well, but it's not why we stayed with each other, Drake. We stay because it feels right. We've been with each other through thick and thin. We have her back and now you want to ruin it. I'm not going to let you. I won't let you hurt her until she breaks. I won't let you destroy the woman I..." I faltered, finding it hard to get the words out.

His eyes narrowed on me.

"You can't even say it, can you? You can't admit how you feel about her."

"Neither can you. That's why you're taking it out on her."

He flinched and looked away. Prescott came closer as if he was concerned this might turn violent. I didn't want to hit Drake. I wanted him to tell Scarlett the truth. And not about everything we'd done, but his fucking own truth. The one he didn't think any of us knew about.

"What feelings are you referring to, West?"

I let out a sharp laugh before licking my lip again.

“The ones both you and I feel about her but can’t say out loud.”

His eyes narrowed.

“I don’t—”

“You do.”

Prescott stared at Drake as if he was seeing him for the first time.

“And I don’t hate you for feeling that way, Drake. I never have. Why the fuck do you think I’ve never once given you lot any shit for being with her when she was with me first, huh? Do you see me punching Prescott’s lights out for being in love with her? Do you think it hurt me to hear she loves him?” I paused, taking in Drake’s cold, hard gaze. “You all like to see me as a fuck up, but I’ve never begrudged any of you. What Scarlett needs is more important. She needs all of us. I understand that. I know Pres takes care of her and Frankie too, but you? All you’ve done is cause her more pain.”

He needed to hear the truth. All of it. I wasn’t going to hold back any longer.

“You love her, Drake. You love Scarlett and you hate that she never loved you back the way you wanted because now you know she loved me.”

And there was the chink in his armour. The one that made him put a hand to his chest and rub it as if my words had hurt him. Then he dropped his hand and walked away into the kitchen, placing both his hands down on the counter as he leant over it.

“I don’t want to hurt her,” he said after a long moment. “I don’t.”

“Then why do you keep doing it?”

“I don’t fucking know.”

“You do.”

He gripped the counter harder.

“She wasn’t there when I needed her.”

And there we had it. His real reason.

“But you’re torturing her for not being here too, West, so don’t put this all on me.”

I clenched my fist, hating him for being right, but this wasn’t about me.

“Stop deflecting. My relationship with her might be fucked up, but I know I have to fix it. You don’t seem to get that about your own one with her.”

Drake released the counter and turned to me. The haunted look in his eyes almost made me flinch.

“I fucking know I have to fix it. I just don’t know how... I don’t know how to be the person she knew before.”

“You and me both.”

A loud clapping noise startled both of us. Our heads whipped around to Prescott who was applauding us for some unknown reason.

“What the fuck, Pres?” I ground out.

Prescott dropped his hands and gave us a grin.

“It’s nice to see you’ve both finally realised what the problem is.”

I crossed my arms over my chest and glared at him.

“And what’s that?”

“Your stubborn, idiotic nature getting in the way of doing what’s right.”

“Fuck you.”

He shrugged.

“I’m merely stating the truth. You two get in your own way all the fucking time and it’s exhausting for me and Francis to deal with. The problem isn’t Scarlett, it’s you two.”

“I should plant my fist in your face.”

“Go ahead if it’ll make you feel better, but it won’t fix what you broke.”

This little shit was getting on my last nerve already, even though he wasn’t wrong.

“And how do you think we should fix it?”

“You can both start by apologising to her. Then Drake can give her the whole truth, including why we lured her here and what we were going to do until everything went to shit. She isn’t to blame, so stop acting like it. We should be directing our anger at Stuart, not Scarlett. And you, West, you can tell her the truth about how you feel. But if you can’t do that, you can start by saying it to us.”

The thought of saying the words *I love you* out loud to her made my stomach twist in knots.

“What? You expect me to tell you that I...”

The words caught in my throat like I knew they would. Why the fuck was this so hard?

“That you love her? Yes.”

I wanted to say, “What about Drake?” but what fucking good would it do?

He had his own shit to deal with. And I had to take responsibility for mine. Not to mention my history with Scarlett was way more fucked up than anyone else's. We needed to deal with it. The night of her accident. Because the guilt was eating me up inside.

"I do."

"I know you do. Now say it."

I swallowed, dropping my arms from my chest and looking away.

"I can't."

"You can. Stop being a fucking coward, West."

I gritted my teeth. Why was he making me do this? My fingers itched to lash out at something but hitting Prescott wouldn't make me feel any better. Punching Drake might, since he was being a dick. Then again, getting into a fistfight with him wouldn't end well. Not sure Scarlett would appreciate us fighting over her, either.

Scarlett. You're doing this for her. You need to admit it out loud so you can say it to her.

"No. I'm not going to give you those words because none of you fucking well deserve them. The only person who does is her."

I didn't care what Prescott was saying. This wasn't helping me.

"West—"

"Just shut up, Pres. You don't get it. She doesn't see me the way she used to. She told me I'm not her West any longer."

"You don't need to be him. You need to be you. She wants you."

"You don't know that."

Prescott smirked, the fucker.

"I do. She's all messed up right now, as the past has clashed with the present, but she wants this version of you. She *needs* this version of you."

I fixed my gaze on him, not understanding what the fuck he was saying. What did he mean, she needed me this way? She called me crazy. She didn't want my crazy. She wanted the West she had before. The one who wasn't... psychotic. Who hadn't been slapped with an antisocial personality disorder. She didn't know that part, but she had seen my behaviour. She knew who I was. I hated the diagnosis. Hated how it defined me in the eyes of other people. They didn't get it. I wasn't mindless or an animal or anything else. I was me and I didn't need a fucking diagnosis to know there were things about me most people

found abhorrent.

I didn't care what anyone else thought, but I cared about her. Scarlett's opinion mattered to me. And she'd made it very clear. She wanted the boy West, not the man West.

"No, she doesn't."

"Yes, she does. You give her something none of us can." He waved a hand at me. "I'll leave you to work out what that is. In the meantime, I'm going to make breakfast."

He walked over to the kitchen, ignoring my stare. What the fuck was Prescott on about? What did I give her they couldn't?

Drake was watching Prescott with suspicion in his eyes like he couldn't understand what the hell our friend was going on about either. I was glad I wasn't the only one who thought he was off his rocker.

"Now, have you two put some thought into what we're going to say when they find Tonya?"

Drake let out a huff.

"We're not going to say anything because we don't know anything."

We'd agreed to keep our mouths shut. Penn, Drake, and I had done our best work and made sure it couldn't be tied to us. The police would be led on a merry trail to a dead end. No doubt they'd want to speak to us as her employers and Drake being her step-cousin, but we weren't worried about them finding out I'd killed her.

"You sure about that? Aren't you meeting Fletcher for lunch on Thursday?"

"I'll deal with Fletch. You don't have to worry about him."

Prescott raised an eyebrow but didn't say anything further. I was sure Drake could handle his step-uncle. After all, he'd been dealing with his family for years, pretending to give a shit about them when really he wanted them all dead. Well, except for his mother. She was the innocent party in the mess of his parents' divorce.

I turned away and stared out of the window. Was Prescott right? Did Scarlett want me this way? How could she? While I never apologised for the way I was, it didn't mean I was unaware of my... faults. I'd never let Scarlett go, that much I was sure of, but as for her loving me like this? I didn't know how when I couldn't be the boy she'd known.

Can you love me, my little Scar? And if you can't... then how will I survive? You are who I live for.

NINETEEN

PRESCOTT

The rest of the day passed quietly with no further incidents. Francis had remained upstairs with Scarlett while Drake, West, and I went downstairs to work. We couldn't afford to act like anything was wrong to the outside world. No doubt, when the police found Tonya, things would be fucked up. It wasn't the only issue we had. There was still the matter of the memory stick and Stuart. I hadn't asked Drake if he'd spoken to Penn about getting it looked at, but I would. We needed to deal with it.

What I hadn't been expecting when I was done for the day was to find Scarlett in my doorway. She had on a blue summery dress. It fell to her knees paired with white trainers. Her hair was still up in a bun, making her look far younger than she was. Her bright smile lit up all her features.

Fuck, she is stunning.

I rose from behind my desk, watching her carefully. While she'd told me she loved me earlier, things were tense between us after Drake had gone and brought up the circumstances of our birth. I hadn't been very impressed with what he'd said to Scarlett, but West had laid into him enough for all of us. I hoped it would actually get through to him. I was getting tired of picking up after him when it came to our girl.

"Hi," she said in a shy voice.

"Hey, how are you feeling?"

She swept her toe across the carpet.

"I'm okay. Frankie took care of me, so I'm feeling a lot better."

"Did he now?"

Her cheeks went red at my suggestive tone.

“Not like that! He ran me a bath after we had breakfast and we cuddled in his bed.”

“All day cuddles? Look at you getting spoiled.”

She scowled.

“Shut up!”

I walked over to her, stopping by her feet and giving her a smile.

“You deserve to be spoiled, sweetness.”

“Is that so? Are you offering to spoil me too?”

“If you want me to.”

She reached out and fiddled with my tie. I had a feeling she had come down with the intention of asking me for something.

“I would like you to take me out on a date.”

“Is that why you’re all dressed up?”

She looked down at her outfit, then back up at me.

“This? I thought you’d like it if I looked a little... innocent.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“What kind of date are you asking for?”

She rubbed her fingertips against my chest.

“The kind where I’m your sacrificial lamb.”

I swear my heart just about stopped in my chest. After everything she’d been through today, the very last thing I was expecting her to ask for was... this.

“Are you sure you want that?”

“I wouldn’t ask if I didn’t, Pres.”

I didn’t want to deny her anything, but a part of me was concerned this wasn’t what we should be doing right now. Even so, my body was on board with the idea. What she was wearing was perfect. I wanted to dirty her up in all the ways I’d been imagining since I’d told her I wanted to chase her down and fuck her.

“I just worry about you.”

She reached up and cupped my cheek.

“Do you trust me?”

I nodded.

“Then trust that I’m telling you what I want.” Going up on her tiptoes, she pressed a kiss to my mouth. “I love you, Pres. And I need you to do this. I want

you to show me no mercy.”

My fingers went to her neck, cupping the back of it and running my thumb along her skin.

“Okay, but first I need to change and we should eat something. You’re going to need it.”

She grinned, dropping back down to her feet and taking my other hand in hers, linking our fingers together.

“Frankie is making an early dinner.”

I followed her along the corridor as she dragged me down it to the lift.

“Did you tell him about this?”

“Yes, and he encouraged me to ask you for what I want.”

I would have to thank him later. Scarlett and I had talked about doing this before, but I hadn’t broached the subject since then. We’d been so caught up in everything else going on. Perhaps it was exactly why she needed this. Kinky fuckery was her way of getting out of her own head for a while. She liked to be used and shown no mercy. It grounded her.

The two of us made our way upstairs to my room. Scarlett watched me change from her seat on my bed. It was something she enjoyed doing every morning she spent with me, watching me dress for the day. I couldn’t deny having her full attention fed me. The way she fit into my routine was effortless. The two of us had found an equilibrium together despite all the lies and secrets. Love tethered me to her and her to me.

When I was done, we shared a quiet meal with Francis. Fuck knew where Drake and West had got to. After this morning, those two needed to handle their shit, and fast. I’d already shared my opinion on the matter. It was up to them now.

Scarlett held my hand in the car as I drove after we’d made our way down to the basement carpark. It took some time for us to get outside of London, but Scarlett didn’t mind. We listened to music and talked about our childhood, reminiscing on the mischief the five of us had got into regularly. We didn’t bring up what was said earlier today. And we didn’t talk about the past ten years either. If she wanted to ask me about it, she could. I wasn’t going to press the subject with her.

Dusk had well and truly fallen by the time we reached our destination, just

north of London in a nature reserve. I took her hand after I'd locked the car, pulling her into the woods. We walked for a while before veering off the path deeper into the woods, using the fading light to guide us through the trees.

When I thought we were far enough in, I stopped and turned to her. Scarlett was bouncing on the balls of her feet. I could feel the anticipation and excitement leaking out of her.

“We need to set a few ground rules before we do this.”

Her hazel-green eyes met mine before she gave me a nod.

“If at any point it's too much or we need to stop...”

“You want a safe word. I have one with Frankie. Red.”

“We'll use that, then you don't have to remember another one.”

Her smile was her agreement.

“When I'm chasing you, I won't pounce unless it's safe and away from too many trees. I don't want you to be afraid I'll do anything to seriously harm you. Don't run in a straight line either. I don't want you to make it easy for me to catch you. I need the hunt, little lamb. Make me work for you.”

She squeezed my hand.

“I trust you not to harm me, Pres.”

“Is there anything you specifically want me to do, or don't want for that matter?”

Her blush made me cup her face with my other hand.

“I want you to fuck me from behind and to push my face into the dirt. I want to feel like I am trapped by you, at your mercy and under your control. Be rough with me. Bite me... spank me. I want to be treated like I'm a bad girl for running when you know I want it.”

Her words had me shifting on my feet.

“My bad little lamb?”

“I don't want to be your good girl tonight.”

“I'm going to punish you thoroughly for running.”

Her eyes twinkled.

“I want you to.” She shifted on her feet. “Is that everything we need to go over?”

“Mmm, yes.”

Leaning down, I kissed her, wanting one last tender moment between us

before the hunt began. She wrapped her hand around my neck, pressing her body into mine and groaning when she felt how hard I was already. The mere thought of chasing her aroused me beyond belief. I wanted her so badly, my need was palpable, coursing through my veins like an inferno.

When I released her, she backed away slightly, giving me a rather salacious look.

“Little lamb...”

“Chase me, my big bad wolf.”

With that, she turned and ran. I shook myself, giving her a little head start before I gave chase. I didn’t want to lose her in the trees. My feet pounded the dirt as I darted around the trees, following the blue sundress streaming behind her.

“Little lamb,” I called after her. “You’re not going to get away from me.”

“You can’t catch me,” she shouted back, causing some birds to scatter above us.

I grinned, keeping my pace even and steady. If I caught her too quickly, it would ruin the game. I wanted her out of breath, her pulse racing and her body trembling from the effort of trying to escape.

She veered off to the right, forcing me to change direction to follow her. We didn’t want to run out of woods or encounter anyone else who might be out here this evening. And I really didn’t want her to make it easy for me.

She darted behind some trees, making it harder for me to see her. I picked up the pace. Running to me was like second nature. I spent most of my time on the treadmill in our home gym, but I also got out at least twice a month to do cross-country. This was me in my element, chasing after my prey, who had no idea of the stamina I possessed. She would run out of her own long before I did.

I noticed an incline ahead of us and a figure scrambling up it. My lips turned up as I watched her make it to the top and turn to look for me.

“You think I won’t get you up there, little lamb?” I asked as I drew closer, slowing my pace down.

Instead of answering, she gave me a wink and stuck her tongue out at me. A low growl sounded in the back of my throat at the sight of it. Then she was running again. I shook my head, chasing her up the incline.

“Don’t think you’re going to get away with that. I’ll make you pay for taunting

me.”

“You can try!”

I chuckled as I got to the top and looked left and right. She was running along the line of the incline as opposed to further into the woods. I turned to the left and ran after her, watching my little lamb pick her way through the trees. My eyes darted around, looking for a good spot to pounce on her, but I couldn't yet see anywhere. By the time my attention was back on my lamb, she was almost tumbling down the incline to get away from me. When she reached the bottom, she ran faster, her breathing laboured as she disappeared into the trees. I growled again and chased her down the hill.

“Oh, big bad wolf, can't you keep up?” I heard her voice echoing through the wood.

“You're playing with fire, my lamb.”

“Maybe I want you to burn me.”

I was going to burn her all right. Make her pay for all of her words. Scarlett would not come out this unscathed. My girl would be marked and claimed. I'd make her messy. I wanted her tears and pain. Scarlett was going to bleed for me.

I saw her dress in the distance. Her pace was slowing, so I picked mine up. She could hear me chasing her through the undergrowth. Her head turned back, catching sight of me. She tried to run faster, but I wasn't going to let her get away. No, now was the time to catch her and make her take everything.

There was a slight clearing filled with ferns she was running towards. I smiled, ready to make my move.

Oh, little lamb, you've found the perfect place for me to dirty you up.

My hands reached out as I caught up to her. They latched on to her body, tugging her backwards into my chest. She let out a yelp when I slowed to walk and backed away into a tree. My arm wrapped around her torso and my hand went to her mouth. Her body trembled and her heart pounded in her chest. I could feel her breathing heavily as fear coursed through her like wildfire. She wanted to be scared. She liked it. Fear fed my little lamb unlike anything else.

It was time she met the big bad wolf in the flesh. The wolf who wouldn't grant her any mercy.

Leaning closer, my lips brushed across her ear.

“I've got you, little lamb, and now... now I'm going to make you pay for

running from me.”

TWENTY

SCARLETT

I don't think I'd been so scared and excited at the same time in my life, but something about Prescott chasing me through the woods made my heart sing. I'd wanted it for a long time. To be honest, ever since I had the dream about being chased, I'd been desperate for it. And now it'd come true. He'd chased me down and caught me.

I trembled in his hold, his arm pinned across my torso, holding my arms at my sides and his hand covering my mouth. His hot breath was against my ear, making me fear him even more. The way his voice sounded animalistic had my own breath coming faster.

It might be crazy for me to want an experience like this with him after everything that happened today with the others. The thing about love was you didn't get to control who you felt it for. No matter the lies and secrets, I loved Prescott with every inch of me. I couldn't live without this man behind me. And I needed this with him. To let go of my emotions and dark thoughts. Running from him had given me a sense of freedom I never thought I'd ever feel. Now, I craved the brutality he was about to deliver.

He licked my ear, making me shudder as he walked us a few steps forward. Then he was pushing me down into the dirt on my hands and knees. His body covered mine, his hand pressing against the back of my head as he shoved me face-first into the ground, just like I'd asked for. The dirt was cold against my skin. I turned my face to the left, gasping for breath as he held me down, his fingers twined in the bun on top of my head.

"Bad girls deserve to get fucked in the dirt," he told me, his voice full of menace. He wasn't my Prescott right now. He was my wolf. My punishment.

Prescott was my Pestilence. And I was his innocent, sacrificial little lamb.

“You’ve been a very bad little girl, haven’t you, little lamb?”

“Yes,” I moaned, feeling him start to undo the little buttons at the back of my dress with one hand.

My body arched into his, wanting him so badly it hurt all over. I ached with my need to feel him using me for his own pleasure.

“What’s this, hmm?” He chuckled. “Are you wet for your wolf? Is this pussy dripping for me?”

I shifted in his grasp, not to escape, but to rub myself against him. The next moment, I felt the sharp sting of his palm hitting my flesh over my dress.

“Stay still,” he growled, making me freeze.

He leant closer and ran his lips over my shoulder, where he’d bared it after finishing with the buttons. Then he bit me, making me cry out with the pain of his teeth.

“Answer me, little lamb,” he demanded around my skin.

“Yes,” I gasped, “I’m so wet for you.”

His free hand slid my dress up, exposing me to him. Fingers ran over my behind while another low growl sounded in the back of his throat.

“Only bad girls are bare and ready for their wolves.”

“I’m a very bad girl.”

“Mmm, yes you are.”

He spanked me again, making me jolt, and my face pressed harder into the dirt. I could feel it digging into my skin, but it only made my need worse. I whimpered as he continued to pepper my behind with strikes, no doubt thoroughly reddening it. It made me ache to feel more of him. I wanted him to fuck me so hard, I cried.

My hands scrabbled at the dirt as his strikes got worse. It stung so fucking bad, but I’d asked for this. I wanted it. The pain made me needier. I couldn’t help wriggling in his grasp. It only earned me a harder slap and another warning growl from him. I didn’t realise how hot it would be when he made that noise, more animal than man.

When he stopped, there was a moment of stillness before he pulled me upright by my hair, making my scalp burn. With his other hand, he shoved the front of my dress off my arms, leaving it bunched up against my waist. He

peeled down one of the cups of my bralette and pinched my nipple between his fingers. And then he bit down on the side of my neck.

“Pres!” I cried out, gripping his hand with both of mine.

He said nothing, his teeth digging in harder. I rocked back against him where he’d pressed me to his chest. I could feel him hard against my behind. Fuck, how I wanted his cock in me. If I begged, would he give it to me? Would he punish me with his dick until I couldn’t take it anymore?

“Please,” I choked out. “Please, I want you.”

“Bad girls don’t get what they want, little lamb. They get what’s given.”

He shoved me back down, planting me face-first in the dirt again. The next thing I knew, he’d spanked my pussy, making me yelp with the pain. Then he slid his fingers between my lips, dragging them through my arousal.

“My dirty lamb is so desperate for me. Does this soaking wet little pussy need punishment, hmm?”

“Yes, yes, please, please.”

The high-pitched note of my voice betrayed my desperation as my body pressed back against his exploring fingers. He swiftly removed them. I almost complained but felt him shift behind me. Then hot flesh rubbed against my raw behind.

“Do you feel that?” he ground out through his teeth, pressing his cock against me. “Your wolf wants to fuck your wet little hole and make it all his.”

“Please!”

He didn’t give me any warning. One second he was rubbing against my behind, then next, his cock slid inside me with one brutal and unforgiving thrust. I lurched forward, letting out a cry of shock. My fingers dug into the dirt as he pulled out and shoved himself back in. The pace he set was unlike anything else. I was hard-pressed to keep up with the way his body was pounding into mine. Each thrust made my behind throb with pain as his skin slapped against me.

“Fuck,” he grunted, “so wet, fuck, you’re soaking.”

I wasn’t remotely embarrassed by the sucking noises of him fucking me. It was evidence of how much fear and pain turned me on. Made me wild with need.

Prescott leant over me, pressing his body into mine before his teeth found my

ear and tugged on the lobe.

“You’re not innocent,” he taunted. “You’re a corrupt little lamb. And you’re mine.”

“Yours.”

He pulled me upright the next moment, planting me in his lap and forcing his dick deeper inside me. His arm wrapped around my body, pressing me down into him. I squirmed in his hold, but he didn’t let me go. No, he thrust upwards and I cried. Tears ran down my cheeks at the catharsis of this experience. I let go of everything and allowed Prescott to drown me.

His other hand snaked down between my legs, his fingers gripping my clit between them and pinching. I bucked and whimpered as he tortured it while he fucked me, his dick hitting just the right spot.

“That’s it. Come for me, dirty girl. You’re covered in it. It’s all over your face.”

I had no control over myself. The pressure was too intense. Too fucking much. I writhed in his embrace, my hands gripping his body behind me as I exploded on him. My body shook, my nails digging into his t-shirt. Prescott had changed into athletic clothing earlier, making it easier for him to run after me. He looked fucking hot in it, but I had been too busy wanting him to fuck me to tell him earlier.

“Pres,” I whined as I came on his dick.

I could feel him breathing heavily against my back, but otherwise, he continued to fuck me, drawing out my climax until I went limp in his hold. His fingers left my clit and hooked into my mouth instead.

“Open wide,” he demanded, shoving them deep.

I spluttered, but obeyed him, letting him fuck my mouth with them. Then he tugged me off his dick and forced me to turn around. He fisted my bun and dragged my head down.

“Lick your cum off my dick. Taste yourself on me.”

My tongue snaked out, flicking over his crown, but it wasn’t good enough for him. He shoved me on his cock, making me take him in my mouth. I could taste the tang of my arousal all over him.

“That’s it, clean me up real good.”

My tongue skated across his dick. The pressure of his hand on the back of my

head forced me into taking more. His dick slid into my throat and I gagged on it. My hands curled around his thighs, giving me something to hold on to while he continued to feed me his cock. My nose pressed up right against him the next minute, leaving me almost unable to breathe. He held me there for a long moment before pulling me off. I choked, spit dribbling out of my mouth, but before I could take more than a few breaths, he pulled me up and claimed my lips. It was a messy and unyielding kiss, but it didn't last very long.

Prescott released my mouth and pulled me into his lap, shoving me back down on his dick. He groaned at the feeling of my pussy wrapped around his cock, and I shivered at the intrusion. His hand went to my chest, shoving me backwards until my head hit the dirt. He rose up on his knees and drove into me, holding me down with his palm flat on my chest. I could see the dark glint in his blue eyes. The danger radiating off him was intoxicating. My predator had a hold of me and I never wanted him to let go.

“This pussy is mine, lamb. Fucking mine.”

He let go of my chest and tore down the other cup of my bralette. Then he was leaning over me and taking my nipple between his teeth. My fingers threaded in his hair, wanting to keep him there even as it hurt. My other hand remained against the dirt, my fingers digging into the cool ground.

“Mine,” he growled, biting down on my chest to mark me. “You belong to me forever, little lamb.”

“Yours,” I cried as he bit harder. “Forever, Pres.”

It wasn't a lie. I wanted forever with him. It felt like an impossible task when our lives were so fucked up and crazy right now. When there were so many things left unsaid and secrets remaining. But we could fight this together. All of us could... couldn't we?

“Touch yourself. Make yourself come. Your climax belongs to me.”

My hand left his hair as he straightened. It snaked between my legs, finding my clit and stroking it. He gripped my hips and fucked me harder, forcing me down on his dick over and over. He watched me touch myself for him. Showing him how much I wanted to obey his commands. To be his lamb. He'd laid me down on his altar. This was his sacrifice and mine.

“That's it. Give it to me, lamb.”

I rubbed harder, my body grinding back against him with his thrusts. He

shifted to change the angle. I was fucking lost when he hammered into me again. I was done. This was too much. Too fucking everything.

“Fuck, Prescott!”

I swear I shouted it, but I didn’t know what was up or down any longer. This second orgasm was more intense than the first. It drove into me, knocking me for fucking six. I was shaking, clawing at the dirt as it claimed me. But my eyes were locked on his. Watching the way his blue orbs were full of satisfaction from seeing me this way. The longer it went on, the more out of control I got. My body was fighting against the tide of pleasure, wanting it to end but needing it to go on. It was all I could do to give into it.

The moment I settled, he pulled me off him and set me on my hands and knees again. I could barely hold myself up, but he didn’t care. He slammed into me, leaving me breathless. His hands were around my hips, pressing my dress into my skin with his ruthless demands on my body. I was whimpering as he fucked me, using me for his own end.

“Take my cum, little lamb,” he growled before he emptied himself into me, his body twitching against mine. I felt utterly claimed by him right then. Like he’d branded himself inside me.

Both of us were breathless and panting when he stilled. Prescott pulled me down with him in the dirt, circling my back with his body and keeping himself inside me. He pressed a kiss to the shell of my ear before settling next to me. We lay there in silence for a long time, letting the experience sink in. It was everything I’d needed and so much more.

“I love you,” he whispered against the back of my sweaty neck, pressing his lips against me. “And I’m sorry for the lies. I’m sorry for everything, little lamb, but it doesn’t stop me from loving you and hoping you’ll find it in your heart to forgive me for the way I treated you. I can’t live without you. You’re my world. And my soul.”

A tear leaked out of my eye. His gentle caress was the balm to my aching and satisfied body. He’d given me exactly what I’d asked for. And I didn’t think I could adore this man more than I did now. My heart was his. My whole being belonged next to him. But forgiveness? It would come when I knew the whole truth. He knew that and he wasn’t asking for it now, just when I was ready.

I pressed myself further back into his embrace, needing him to hold me tight

and never let go.

“I love you too.”

TWENTY ONE

DRAKE

Thursday had rolled around, and I was in an absolutely foul mood. Yesterday afternoon, the news broke about Tonya's death after her body was found late on Tuesday evening. The headlines had dubbed it a *'ritualistic sex murder'*, which amused the fuck out of West, but I wasn't in the mood to laugh about anything after the last few days of hell. Not sure where they got the sex part from, given we hadn't touched her like that, but whatever. I didn't care what the tabloids said. It was what the police did that mattered the most. And so far, we hadn't been questioned, but no doubt it would happen.

I thought Fletch might cancel our lunch today, but no such fucking luck. It was time for me to suck it up. I stood up, buttoning up my suit jacket before starting towards the door. My feet came to a halt when someone appeared in the doorway. Scarlett had her hair down today, giving her that innocent appearance I hated. Well, I didn't hate it. More like it drove me fucking crazy. Not to mention the indigo dress she was wearing. It was all floaty in the skirt and cinched in at the waist. It had a high neckline and little sheer capped sleeves. My eyes narrowed. She rarely wore dresses at work. I'd come down early this morning so hadn't seen her until now. And it did not escape my notice she'd picked something to match my eyes.

What is she playing at?

"Can we talk?" she asked when I said nothing.

There was no timidity to her. She straight up asked me with all the confidence she possessed, staring me down like she was on a mission. I didn't know what to make of it.

"I have a meeting, Scarlett. You know this."

Her eyebrow curled up.

“Didn’t your step-uncle cancel?”

I tried not to scowl.

“No, and don’t call him that. He’s Mr Sinclair to you.”

She rolled her eyes, making my hand twitch with the need to punish her for it, but I knew I couldn’t. Our relationship was in the gutter right now after what I’d said to her on Tuesday.

“Okay, so you’re still going?”

“I just said I was.”

“Well, I’ll come with you and we can talk on the way.”

If she thought I was letting her go to lunch with Fletch and me, she was crazy.

“No, you absolutely cannot come with me.”

The way she looked at me as if I was the crazy one had my hand involuntarily clenching into a fist.

“No? You afraid of what I’m going to say?”

“I am not scared of speaking to you, Scarlett.”

“Then I don’t see the problem.”

“This isn’t a negotiation.”

“I wasn’t aware we were negotiating. I need to talk to you and it can’t wait.”

I let out a huff. I’d never allowed my emotions to get the better of me, but with Scarlett, it happened all the fucking time.

“I don’t have time for this.”

I walked towards her, meaning to remove her from the doorway. Scarlett stood her ground, crossing her arms over her chest and staring up at me when I stood before her.

“I think you’ll find you have ample time if I come with you.”

“You are trying my patience,” I muttered.

“Good. Maybe you’ll stop being an emotionless robot then.”

I blinked. What the fuck was this? Her attitude was pissing me off, and I’d meant what I said. I did not have time to deal with her.

“Excuse me?”

“You heard what I said, Drake. Now, come along, you don’t want to be late.”

She took my hand and pulled me out of the office. For some reason, I didn’t

extract my hand from her grasp, nor did I object to her taking me down to the lifts. I couldn't form a response. Scarlett reminded me far too much of the way she'd been when we were younger. Headstrong and stubborn. I don't know what happened between Tuesday and now, but something had shifted in her. It's as if she'd joined together the pieces of her past to her present self. And now she was whole.

It was only when we were in the lift riding down to the ground floor when she broke the silence. I stared down at our clasped hands, wondering why she was okay with this when I'd said some fucked up stuff to her. Stuff I'd yet to apologise for. And after the way West had a go at me about it, I knew I had a lot to make up for.

"Now we're alone, there are some things I need to say to you."

"Okay," I replied, unsure of how this conversation was about to go, given the way she'd manhandled me into this lift and didn't want to listen when I told her she couldn't come to lunch.

"First of all, I'm done fighting with you. Literally done, Drake. I refuse to do it anymore." She looked up at me, her hazel-green eyes full of determination. "We share too much history with each other and I will not let you throw me or that away."

Her words made my chest ache. I didn't want to throw her away. I wouldn't have searched for her if that was the case. I wouldn't have tracked her down and got her back. She was important to me, even if I hadn't made her feel like she was.

"Secondly, you owe me an apology for the things you've said to me. You were mean and I don't think it's okay to take out whatever shit you've been going through on me."

I bit the inside of my cheek. She was right. It wasn't okay.

"And lastly, you are going to finish explaining everything to me because I deserve the truth."

I waited a moment to see if she was going to say anything else, but she didn't.

"Is that everything you want from me?"

"For now? Yes, yes it is."

"I see."

Her eyebrow curled up.

“Is that all you have to say?”

“We will talk about this after lunch.”

I almost smacked my hand into my face, realising I’d insinuated it was okay for her to come with me. The conversation I was going to have with Fletch wouldn’t be easy, considering he’d just lost his daughter. Even if I didn’t care about Tonya, I wasn’t about to drive the knife in further.

You have gone and fucked this right up.

“Okay, after lunch it is.”

She gave me a smile as the lift doors opened. I didn’t say another word as we walked into the lobby and out the front door. The restaurant I was meeting him at was a short walk from the office, so I didn’t bother getting on public transport. I didn’t enjoy going on it in the first place. The tube was always stuffy, and I’d rather be stuck in traffic in a car than on a fucking bus.

When we got there, I had to explain to the maître d’ that I needed an extra place setting at the table. He didn’t bat an eyelid thankfully as he led us over to where Fletch was already seated and waved at one of the waiters.

My step-uncle was a short man with blonde hair and brown eyes. He wore a rather bland black suit and a pale yellow shirt with one of those ridiculous cartoon ties. I almost rolled my eyes when he stood up. He didn’t look remotely upset, which would be odd considering his daughter had just been found brutally murdered but Fletch wasn’t known for being a caring father. In fact, I think he liked me more than his own flesh and blood. Fuck knows why when I didn’t talk much and refused to bullshit him. Actually, it was probably the exact reason.

“Fletcher,” I said, putting my hand out and shaking his.

“Drake, it’s nice to see you.” His eyes flicked to Scarlett, who was still clutching my other hand and wouldn’t let go. “And who is this lovely lady I see here?”

Scarlett immediately stuck her free hand out to him.

“Hello, Mr Sinclair. I’m Scarlett, Drake’s girlfriend.”

Fletch raised an eyebrow as he shook her hand. I gritted my teeth, wanting to ask her what the hell she was playing at announcing that to him. If anything, she should have told him she was my PA.

“Girlfriend? Well, you kept that quiet, Drake.” He gave Scarlett a smile. “He’s

never introduced me to a woman before. You must be something special.”

Scarlett blushed and dropped his hand.

Wonderful. Now my father is going to find out about this. No doubt he'll tell my mother and then I'll have her on the phone asking me who Scarlett is. She's not meant to know Scarlett is back yet. This is a fucking nightmare.

To say I disliked the fact my parents still spoke to each other after the things Oscar had put her through was an understatement. It wasn't my place to tell my mother what she could and couldn't do, so I kept my mouth shut.

“She is,” I said, knowing I had to keep up this fucking charade. “Very special.”

It wasn't a lie. Scarlett was more than just special. She owned a piece of me. Something I wasn't best pleased about West or Prescott having knowledge of. No doubt one of them had told Francis. Those three were always ganging up on me.

The way Scarlett looked up at me after I uttered those words with such strong affection in her eyes made my stupid heart tighten.

“Well, sit down, sit down,” Fletcher said, eyeing me with curiosity.

I pulled out a chair for Scarlett as he sat, trying to be a gentleman even though she knew very well I wasn't one. While we'd been talking, the waiters had set a place for her. I sat down to her right and she placed her hand on my thigh. I stared at it, trying not to screw my face up with disbelief. It took a supreme effort on my part not to ask what the hell she was playing at.

She gave me a brief smile before turning to Fletch.

“I hope you don't mind me bringing this up, but I'm very sorry to hear about your daughter. It must have come as a shock.”

The genuine note in her voice almost made me narrow my eyes. This was the father of the woman she'd watched West kill. She'd held his daughter's heart in her hand. Not sure why she was being so pleasant, but then again, Scarlett was far more compassionate than the rest of us.

“Thank you, Scarlett. It is... a very difficult time for us, especially T's mother.”

Fletch did, to his credit, give Scarlett a sad smile.

I'd already spoken to him about this earlier this morning when he called to ask if I was still coming to lunch. Despite me saying it wasn't necessary and we

could reschedule, he'd insisted. Now, I was stuck pretending Scarlett was my girlfriend, and this wasn't awkward as fuck.

She kind of is your girlfriend, you know.

I wanted to tear my stupid thoughts out of my head and stamp on them. Girlfriend, indeed. I didn't even know what the fuck we were at this point. It certainly wasn't normal. But me, Scarlett, and the boys had never been normal. Not sure why I was surprised we'd found ourselves in this situation. Whatever the fuck this whole thing was.

Scarlett carried the conversation while we ordered and waited for our meals to arrive. I sat in silence, watching her animated face as she told Fletcher about her now-deceased horse, Chocolate. I didn't know she could ride. Then again, I hadn't bothered to ask her anything about her life at Stuart's. It reminded me of how much of a mess our relationship was.

I rubbed my face. How the fuck would I fix this shit between us? She'd given me an opening. I had to take it. I had to make things right. Scarlett deserved that from me.

"I just need to nip to the ladies," Scarlett said, rising from her seat.

I gave her a nod, not expecting her to lean over, squeeze my shoulder and press a kiss to my cheek. My eyes followed her path towards the toilets as she weaved through the tables.

"She's quite something."

My head whipped back around to Fletcher, who was staring at Scarlett's arse. My hand clenched under the table.

"Yes. And I would hasten to add she's too young for you, not to mention she's *mine*."

"All right, Drake, hold your damn horses. I was only looking."

"Well don't. She's not on the fucking menu."

Fletch's eyebrows shot up.

"What's got into you?"

I leant back in my chair, trying to appear relaxed. I didn't need him questioning my behaviour.

"Nothing."

"Possessiveness is an unattractive trait according to most women."

"She knows who she belongs to."

“Well, I never. Didn’t peg you as the type, but I see I was wrong.”

I levelled my gaze at him.

“We’re not here to talk about my relationship with Scarlett.”

I wasn’t going to tell him she’d insisted on coming with me and I’d had no intention of introducing her to anyone in my so-called family.

He let out a sigh.

“No, we aren’t.”

“Then spit it out. I’d rather you tell me before she gets back.”

He fiddled with his cutlery.

“Your father wants to see you.”

And there was the fucking kicker.

Good one, Oscar. Send your fucking brother-in-law to do your fucking bidding.

TWENTY TWO

DRAKE

As if I didn't have enough on my plate, now my fucking father wanted in on the action. I'd already told him to stay away from me. I don't know why he kept trying after all these years. It's not like I was interested in having a relationship with him. To be honest, I should cut all of my family out of my life. Well, not my mother, but everyone else. They were all cunts, including the man in front of me.

"I don't want to see him."

"Listen, I know how you feel about Oscar, but—"

"But nothing, Fletcher. He burnt his bridges."

He had the fucking audacity to tut.

"You really like to hold grudges."

"If you want to be added to the list of people I've removed from my life, then by all means, keep talking."

He leant back in his chair and eyed me warily. I wasn't going to sit here and listen to him go on about all the reasons why I needed to speak to Oscar.

"And you can tell him if he tries this shit again, he knows what will happen."

"You should tell him that yourself."

"Why would I when I can just go through you like he has."

I had him there. He let out a breath and looked away. Thankfully, that was the moment Scarlett returned. She looked between us as she sat down, resting her hand on the table. I immediately placed mine over hers, curling my fingers around her small ones. Both she and Fletcher watched the movement. Scarlett looked startled while Fletch's expression turned to amusement. Apparently, seeing me be possessive over a woman was quite something. I didn't have

girlfriends. In fact, I think my mother despaired over me ever finding someone to settle down with. I'd had enough lectures from her over it.

I didn't want anyone but the woman sitting next to me. I had to admit it to myself, even if I couldn't do it to her yet.

"Is everything okay?" Scarlett asked, her eyes wide as she stared at me.

"Yes."

She gave me a disbelieving look. I wasn't going to talk about my father to her right now.

"Are you sure?"

"Come here."

"I'm already right next to you," she said, lowering her voice and giving me a weird look like I was asking for something crazy.

"I want you closer."

She glanced at Fletcher with a worried expression on her face.

"Are you asking me to sit in your lap or something? Because I'm not going to do that in a restaurant," she hissed as she met my eyes again.

"No."

"Then what do you want, Drake?"

You. I just want you. I don't know why the fuck I can't say it.

"Just sit closer to me."

She huffed but shifted her chair until it was right next to mine.

"Better?"

I let go of her hand and tucked her hair behind her ear, stroking my fingers along the lobe. Her thigh was pressed against mine. I don't know why it made me feel better, but it did.

"Yes."

The waiters arrived with our meals, but it didn't stop Scarlett muttering, "bossy," under her breath. I pinched her ear between my fingers to let her know I heard. She merely fluttered her eyelashes and gave me a smile, as if she wasn't acting like a fucking brat.

You like it when she pushes your buttons.

I didn't want to like it... but the truth was, I did. I liked it too fucking much.

While Fletcher made a start on his meal when the waiter left, Scarlett continued to look at me, pressing her thigh harder against mine.

“Do you want something?” I asked in a low voice.

“You know what I want from you.”

“I mean, right now.”

The rather deviant look in her eyes made me suspicious, but she turned away and picked up her knife and fork.

“No. I’m pretty sure you don’t do PDA.”

It took a second too long for what she said to register. By that time, she’d already started eating. And I was left wondering if she wanted me to kiss her or if she was just saying it to get to me.

I turned to my own meal, picking up my fork with a small smile playing on my lips as I leant a little closer to her.

“The type of PDA I’d want to engage in with you would get us thrown out of this place,” I murmured.

The blush rising to her cheeks had me hard-pressed not to smile wider. That was until she laid her knife down and wrapped her hand around my thigh.

“Don’t threaten me with a good time.”

“You’ve been hanging out with Prescott too much.”

She smirked and squeezed my leg before going back to her food.

“Or you’ve just forgotten I remember everything about you... including how to make you smile.”

I tried really hard not to, but I couldn’t help it. My lips curved up. Fuck. I was utterly screwed. The quick-witted and no fucks given Scarlett was back. And she was on a mission involving me. I wasn’t entirely sure how I felt about it.

The rest of the meal passed with Fletcher asking me about how the business was going and all of us avoiding the topic of Tonya. I could only be glad he didn’t suspect us of having anything to do with her death. Not that he would have any reason to, but we couldn’t be too careful.

Fletcher told Scarlett it was lovely to meet her when we were saying goodbye and hoped we could do this again. I refrained from commenting but took her hand and led her out of the restaurant.

“Am I in trouble?” she asked after we’d been walking for a couple of minutes.

“Why would you be in trouble?”

“I told him I’m your girlfriend.”

I glanced down at her, noting she wasn’t letting go of my hand... again.

“We’ll talk about *that* when we’re at home.”

She was about to open her mouth when my phone rang. I fished it out of my pocket, almost groaning when I saw who it was.

“Hello, Mum.”

“I have a bone to pick with you.”

Oh, Jesus Christ.

“Why do I have to find out everything about your life last, Drake?”

I’d known this was going to happen, and I still wasn’t prepared for it.

“What are you talking about?”

“You introduced your girlfriend to Fletcher and not me. That’s what I’m talking about. You are always hiding things from me and I’m sick of it.”

I gritted my teeth. Scarlett’s eyebrow was raised, but she couldn’t hear what my mother was saying. She’d known exactly what May Ackley was like when we were younger, and she hadn’t changed. Always up in everyone else’s business and never letting me get away with anything. Mum hadn’t bothered to change her last name after the divorce. I wished I didn’t have the same fucking last name as my father, but it couldn’t be helped.

“I didn’t keep anything from you. It’s... new.”

“I don’t care if it’s new. I’m your mother. You should be introducing her to me first, not Fletcher.”

“Okay, I’m sorry I didn’t.”

There was no use telling her I hadn’t meant to introduce Scarlett to anyone at all because she wasn’t actually my girlfriend. And the only reason Fletcher had met her was because the damn woman wouldn’t take no for an answer.

“Who is she? Your father said her name is Scarlett and all I could think about was little Scarlett who used to hang off your arm when you were kids. It’s such a pity she disappeared. You always had time and a smile for her. I was hoping one of you boys would end up marrying the girl.”

Did she really have to bring that up? For fuck’s sake. I don’t need to be reminded of that shit when she’s right next to me, reminding me every single fucking day.

Fletcher had worked fast if he’d already told my father and he’d rung my mother. Honestly, I swear nothing was kept secret in my family. It’s why I never told them anything.

I sighed. I couldn’t exactly tell her the truth, but she would give me hell for

lying. What would I even say, anyway? Oh yeah, by the way, we're all fucking her, so your hopes for us ending up with Scarlett came true? That would go down so well.

"I don't have time to discuss who she is right now."

"You never have time for anything, Drake. Why can't you make time for me, hmm? I just want to know what's going on in your life."

"Mum—"

"Is it serious? Are you in love with her? I want you to bring her around to dinner and I won't take no for an answer."

My fingers tightened around Scarlett's, making her let out a yelp as we walked through the doors of Fortuity. My mother was getting on my last fucking nerve.

"What was that? Is she there?"

"Jesus, Mum, are you going to let me speak?"

"Well?"

"I'm back at the office and I have to go."

"Drake Ackley!"

"Bye, Mum."

I hung up and stuffed my phone back in my pocket. Scarlett raised her eyebrow as I practically dragged her across the lobby to the lift, not even stopping to say hello to the receptionist.

"You know, I didn't think you'd turn out bossy like your mother."

"What?"

"May liked to keep you in order. I see where you get it from now."

"Are you quite done pushing my buttons today, Scarlett?"

"Oh, come on, Drake, you need to relax."

I stabbed the lift button several times. Relax? Was she fucking kidding? She'd made my day infinitely worse. My mother was going to give me absolute hell for hanging up on her.

I tried to extract my hand from hers, but Scarlett laced her fingers with mine to keep them trapped. My other hand clenched. Did she have any idea how much I wanted to punish her? Actually, she likely did, and it pissed me off even more.

The lift arrived. I tugged her inside and hit the button for the office floor. As soon as the lift doors closed on us, I backed her up into the corner and stared at

her defiant little mouth.

“You are giving me a fucking headache, Scarlett.”

She didn’t bat an eyelid. Instead, she traced the fingers of her free hand down my torso.

“Am I? Well, I’ll just have to help you with that.”

“Help me? More like put me in an early fucking grave.”

She smiled, which was unnerving. I didn’t trust the look in her eyes.

“I would never.”

I gritted my teeth and paced away from her.

“You drive me insane,” I muttered.

“I know I do.”

I didn’t respond. What I needed was to get the hell out of this enclosed space with her before I did something stupid like kiss the damn look off her face.

“Drake...”

“What? What is it now?”

“I meant what I said. I want to help you relax.”

“You have helped more than enough already, thank you very much.”

She came over to me and wrapped herself around my arm. I didn’t shake her off me, but I didn’t look at her either. She wasn’t making it easy for me. And I didn’t expect her to.

The lift finally arrived on the office floor. I tried to walk towards my office, but I found myself tugged towards the stairwell by a very determined little wisp of a woman.

“What are you doing? I have to get back to work.”

“No, you don’t. I know for a fact you have nothing scheduled this afternoon and work can wait.”

“I’m your boss, Scarlett, not the other way around.”

She smirked and continued dragging me into the stairwell.

“As your PA, it’s my job to see to your needs.”

“I don’t recall telling you I need to go upstairs.”

“And to anticipate needs you might not know you have,” she continued as if she hadn’t heard what I’d said.

I had no idea what I could say to make her stop, so I didn’t. I allowed Scarlett to pull me up two flights of stairs and open the roof door, securing it so it

wouldn't close over and lock us out. Not that it mattered, as I would have called Francis or Prescott to come to open it.

"Why are we up here?"

"Stop asking questions and come with me."

She took me across the roof to my glass house and opened the door, ushering me inside. The next thing I knew, she was unbuttoning my suit jacket and sliding it off my shoulders. I was so dumbstruck by the whole thing, I let her undo my tie and place both on the sofa along with her handbag. Then she pulled me over to my armchair and sat me down in it.

Scarlett leant over me, undid the first few buttons of my shirt and took out my cufflinks, rolling my sleeves up slightly. She kicked off her heels and dropped to her knees at my feet. I was about to protest her taking off my shoes and socks until she gave me a look that spoke volumes. She set them aside and looked up at me from where she was kneeling between my spread legs.

"Now, are you going to apologise to me or not?"

"Why are you kneeling?"

She let out a puff of air.

"Are you going to sit there and tell me you don't want me at your feet? I know you like this and I told you, I'm giving you what you need... sir."

I swallowed. Denying it would be futile. She looked so beautiful kneeling there in a dress the same colour as my eyes, waiting for me to give her what she needed in return. Even though she'd frustrated the hell out of me and got me in trouble with my family, I couldn't help but lean forward and take one of her hands, pulling it up towards my face. All I could think about was her mouth and the need to make things right about her.

I pressed a kiss to the heel of her palm.

"I'm sorry."

"For what exactly?"

Everything.

"The things I said, the lies... and for being a dick."

I could see she was trying not to smile at the last part.

"I spent so long waiting for you. I don't want to throw you away, Scarlett. I'd never want that." I shook my head and pressed her hand to my face. "I want to keep you."

TWENTY THREE

SCARLETT

When I got up this morning after spending the night with Francis, I'd decided to take the bull by the horns and deal with Drake. Perhaps I should have just told him to go fuck himself, but I didn't want to be at odds with him. He used to be my best friend. And I wanted that Drake back. I wanted his smiles, his laughter, and his joy. He had to be in there somewhere, locked underneath his icy exterior. I was going to find him no matter what it took. Giving up on him would only make me unhappy. I'd already had enough of that to last a lifetime. The last ten years had been miserable for me. I was drawn back to this place with these men who had been my world for over half my life until I was stolen away. Drake was a huge part of my past. And if I was honest with myself, I wanted him to be in my future.

Drake stared at me after he'd told me he wanted to keep me. His indigo eyes weren't emotionless for once. They were full of need... for me.

"I accept your apology, but it doesn't mean I've forgiven you. I haven't forgiven any of you and I won't until I know the full truth."

"Do you want me to tell you now?"

I shook my head. There was a reason I'd brought him up here, away from anyone else. It was the place I'd first discovered he had a lot more going on behind his mask. And now I remembered him. It was even more significant. He'd been learning to play the guitar since we'd been kids and I was the only one he'd allowed to listen to him practise even when he sucked.

I felt safe with him up here, like he wouldn't harm me on this roof. Not the way he had done when we'd got into the stupid fight over the football match and he'd fucked me as a punishment. Now I wanted to change the last memory

I had of when we'd been intimate. I needed to. If we were ever going to move forward, I wanted to wipe the slate clean. Well, not completely, but at least when it came to sex with him. It might be crazy to desire all four of the men who'd been my best friends as kids, but I didn't care. This was my life, and I was going to do what I wanted with it now I was no longer locked away.

"No," I whispered, taking my hand from his face and pushing him back against the armchair. "I don't want to talk right now."

I climbed up into the chair with him, straddling his lap and running my hands up his chest, along his neck and into his dark hair. His indigo eyes flickered with heat, but he didn't move to touch me.

"What do you want?"

My hands went to his face, forcing his head back so I could look him in the eyes from my position.

"I meant what I said about helping you relax." My hands drifted from his face to his chest, my fingers working to undo the rest of the buttons of his shirt. "But this isn't just for you..." I ran my fingertips along his exposed skin. "It's for me too." My hands went lower, sinking between us until I wrapped my fingers around his dick. "I want this." I watched his expression and the way his mouth twitched. "And I'm going to take it... because you know what, Drake?"

"What?"

"It's mine."

He let out a puff of air but didn't say a word. I leant closer to him until I was an inch from his mouth.

"I want to erase what happened before. I need you to touch me, kiss me, fuck me until I overdose on you. Can you give me that?"

His response was to run his hands up my chest and grip my shoulders. The gesture made me feel small in his grasp. And I needed it. I liked how he was so much bigger than me. How his hands dwarfed mine.

"I can," he murmured before he caught my mouth with his.

His kiss wasn't brutal or savage. It was soft and full of need like he wanted to drown in me, but he was holding back. Always in control. I planned to make him lose it but in a good way this time. My hand curled tighter around his cock, stroking it through his clothes. I could feel it swell under my fingers, reminding me of how thick he was. That extra girth was going to feel so damn good when

he was inside me. When he was fucking me.

“Drake,” I whimpered in his mouth, desperate for him already.

His hands moved along my shoulders and found the zip at the back of my dress. He tugged it down, exposing my hot skin to the air. When his fingers slid over it, I arched into his touch. He tugged the dress off my shoulders, forcing me to release him to slide it down so it pooled at my waist. Releasing my mouth, he stared at my bra-clad tits. Then he was pulling down the cups and sucking one in his hot mouth, such a contrast to his cold nature.

I couldn't wait any longer. The ache was all too real, almost violent. It pulsed and writhed, wanting to take, claim and conquer.

“Please.”

“What do you want?”

His mouth pressed to my skin, delivering hot, wet kisses to the flesh.

“You inside me.”

Drake's hands went to the skirt of my dress, pushing it up higher. He looked between us when he realised I wasn't wearing any underwear.

“Bad girl,” he muttered before undoing his trousers and tugging out his hard cock. “You sat having lunch with me and Fletcher like this, didn't you?”

His hand clamped around my hip, drawing me lower until the tip met my wet pussy.

“Yes,” I hissed when he dragged it through my folds.

“Fuck,” he grunted before shoving me down on him.

I let out a harsh pant at the thick intrusion. My hands went to his shoulders, holding onto him as I sunk lower, taking every inch of his beautiful dick. My eyes locked onto those indigo blue ones when my body was flush with his.

“Tell me you want this. This is what you need, right?”

Those long fingers of his tightened around me.

“I *need* to punish you.”

The raw agony of his voice made me shiver.

“Then do it with your dick. Make me feel it.”

Next thing I knew, he'd stood up with me in his arms, still impaled on him, and strode towards the sofa. He pressed me down on it, planting his knees on the soft material and leaning over me. My mouth was claimed before he fucked me with intense strokes that had me arching into him. My feet dug into the

fabric, lifting my hips up to give him a better angle. His hand wrapped around one of them, holding me in place. The way he was pounding into me was almost too much, but I didn't want him to stop. I needed this version of him, the one who lost control and drowned in his desire to have me.

"Fuck," he groaned into my mouth. "Fuck, Little Nyx."

I almost froze hearing the nickname from his lips. The one he'd given to me. Then I turned my face from his and buried it in his neck. Tears started pricking behind my eyes, making me want to sob on his chest from the relief of knowing he still saw me as the girl he'd once known in some small way.

"It's not enough," he murmured in my ear. "You feel so good, but it's not fucking enough."

I was about to ask what he meant when his hand left my hip and curled around my behind, brushing between the crease of my cheeks. Then I knew what he wanted. And at that point, I was willing to give him anything, so he'd keep fucking me. I didn't care how. I just wanted his cock inside me.

"There's lube in my handbag," I whispered. Prescott had put it in there, telling me I never knew when I might have need of it. "And if you're going to fuck me there, I want you to look in my eyes as you do it."

Drake was the only one who hadn't taken me that way. I wanted to see his expression. To see if it made him betray his emotions. His feelings. To witness his reaction to sliding his dick up inside me.

He pulled away and twisted, reaching over to my bag. I didn't care if he saw what was in it as he rooted around for the tube. He threw my handbag back down after he'd extracted it, along with my pack of wipes, and looked at me.

"Get on your hands and knees so I can fuck you whilst I prepare you."

The demand in his voice had me scrambling to obey, tugging my dress off my hips in the process and unsnapping my bra. Drake pulled the rest of his clothes off, leaving him utterly bare. I couldn't help looking at him in all his naked glory. The trail of dark hair from his navel to his cock made my mouth water. Those big hands of his circled my hips before he pressed inside me again, making me moan in response. The slight smirk on his face had me biting my lip. He liked how I reacted to his dick inside me.

He released my hips, picking up the tube and squirting the liquid onto his fingers. I moved my hips back into him, fucking myself on his cock while he

stroked those wet fingers along my hole. I whimpered when he pressed one inside me, even though he was gentle. Didn't stop me from working myself on his dick while he opened me up to him.

He took his time as if he didn't want to rush this. Seeing him devote his full attention to me was a heady experience. Drake had once called us toxic, but I think we were merely drunk off each other. Drowning in our need to be as close as possible. And fighting against it because we both knew it was dangerous to want each other this much.

When I was practically squirming on his dick and fingers after he'd inserted three, he pulled away from me, taking a seat on the sofa and proceeding to coat his dick, still slick with my arousal in lube.

"Come here."

While I turned around and crawled into his lap, he used one of my wipes to clean off the excess from his fingers. He held his dick for me as I positioned myself, then his eyes were on mine, followed by his hand wrapping around my jaw. Mine went to his shoulders, so I had an anchor.

"You want me to look at you, hmm?" he murmured. "Here I am, take it the fuck in."

I bit my lip as he breached me, the stretch almost too much for me to handle even with his preparation. But it was worth it because the way his lips parted had me mesmerised. His indigo eyes were almost black pools of lust and desire. Drake wasn't hiding his emotions behind a mask. I could see them plain as day on his face. He desired me to the point of insanity.

Slowly but surely, I took him until he was deep inside me. I watched every twitch of his face, the way he stared at me, how his teeth ran over his bottom lip as I clenched around his cock. He was so damn handsome like this, it almost hurt to keep his gaze.

"I want to make you bleed. I want to see crimson blood all over your skin, the colour of your fucking name, scarlet red."

I shuddered at his words.

"I want you to," I whispered, rocking my hips into his and making him groan out loud, his hand wrapping around my behind. His fingers dug into my skin as if my agreeing to it was the best news he'd ever had.

"What if I bathed you in the blood of my enemies?"

“Do it.”

“Fuck.”

Drake pulled me into him and kissed me. It reminded me of the night he'd found me talking to Stuart and he kissed me with such savagery, I almost melted on the spot. He claimed my mouth like it was his for the taking and no one else could have it. Then he pulled me off him, flipped me over onto my front, and covered my body with his. He drove back inside me, making me yelp as his hands held mine down. His breath was hot on my ear with his thrusts, making me writhe beneath him.

“You're going to come on my cock. I'm going to fuck this tight little hole until you scream. That's your punishment for telling Fletch you're my girlfriend, causing my mother to have a go at me and for winding me the fuck up.”

And what a punishment it was. The way his body slammed into mine, making me feel every single inch of his thick cock. When he dug his hand under me and stroked my clit while continuing to hold me down with his other hand and body. The pleasure and pain from how hard he fucked me. All of it had me teetering on the edge. My toes curled as my body pressed against his and I exploded, crying his name with tears leaking out of my eyes.

He followed soon after me, groaning his release in my ear. Then he was pressing kisses on my wet cheeks and nuzzling my face.

“Don't let me push you away,” he whispered. “Promise you won't let me.”

My heart fucking burnt with his words. They were laced with pain, like the thought of it killed him inside.

“Okay.”

“That's not good enough. Promise. Me.”

“How can I make promises to you when you're not giving me anything in return?”

He let out a sigh and kissed my cheek again before resting his forehead against my hair.

“Do you remember when we were kids, and you forced me to pinkie promise I wouldn't leave you as long as I lived?”

“Yes.”

“That's the reason I never gave up when we were trying to find you. The others wanted to, but I couldn't break my promise. I won't leave you, Scarlett,

but as you have probably noticed, I'm not good at relationships.”

I tried not to smile.

“No, you suck when it comes to me.”

“I don't know how to act around you.”

“Well, that's a lie. You certainly know how to act when your dick is inside me and when you want to punish me.”

“That's not what I meant.”

I shifted, wanting to look at him. He pulled out of me and allowed me to roll over to face him. He had his hands planted on either side of my head as he stared down at me.

“No? You sure you weren't fishing for compliments about your sexual prowess?”

He didn't look remotely impressed by my question.

“My sexual prowess?”

I reached up and stroked his face.

“Mmm.”

“I don't need you to compliment me on it when I just made you scream my name.”

Well, that told me. The way he smirked had me raising my eyebrow.

“Fine, I promise I won't let you push me away. Happy now?”

He leant closer until our lips were almost touching.

“No, I'm not happy with you for forcing me to play hooky from work. I think I might have to punish you again.”

He pressed a kiss to my lips before trailing them down my body until he was in between my legs. He wrapped both of his hands around my thighs and spread them wide.

“What do you think, Scarlett? Should I punish this pussy with my tongue?”

I squirmed because I couldn't think of anything better.

“Yes, sir.”

“Good.”

It wasn't quite a 'good girl', but it was almost. He'd told West he would only say it when I'd earned it. I liked their praise as much as the way they degraded me in different ways. And I wondered what it would take to get Drake to praise me the way I wanted him to. If I had to make him lose control again and

again... well, it wasn't too much of a chore now, was it?

TWENTY FOUR

DRAKE

Scarlett tasted like fucking magic. I could drown in this pussy and it would never be enough. I don't know what it was about her, or maybe I did. Maybe I hated the fact West knew I'd wanted Scarlett longer than I was ever willing to admit. Maybe I was just so fucked up about it, I kept taking it out on her and it wasn't fair. While I'd apologised to her, it didn't feel like enough. I wanted her friendship back, but I needed her... heart.

Well, at least you finally admitted it to yourself.

Internally shaking myself, I concentrated on circling her clit with slow strokes and listening to her moans every time I hit a sensitive spot. Fuck, did I love being between her legs. While she might have driven me crazy today and made trouble with my family, I couldn't deny I needed this. Her. She was so fucking important to me on an intrinsic level. Being without her for ten years had twisted all of us in dark, depraved ways, but with me? It had altered things on a fundamental level. I remembered when I used to be open and free. The way she'd always bring out the best in me. And now she was bringing out the worst. I was letting my long-buried emotions eat me up inside. She was caught in the crossfire.

It didn't have to be this way. I could change it. Make it better between us so she'd bring out the best parts of me again.

"Drake," she whimpered. "Please, please, I need more."

Slipping my hand from around her thigh, I buried three fingers in her pussy, making her buck from the intrusion. I angled them to rub over the right spot, knowing how to make her dizzy with pleasure.

"Fuck, yes, there, right... there."

I almost smiled against her body, but instead, I circled her clit harder. She writhed and moaned, her hand going to my head and pushing me into her pussy. I wasn't going to tell her to stop. Not when she was close. I could feel the stirrings of her orgasm building inside her. Her pussy was so wet around my fingers.

“Drake!”

Her fist slammed down on the sofa. Then she was coming, her hips bucking into my face with each pulse. Watching her fall apart with her climax was always the most beautiful sight to behold. I didn't want to hurt her any longer. All I craved was this. Giving this woman everything. And yet, despite my wants, I knew it wasn't possible. Not with all the secrets. Not when she had asked us not to tell her what happened to her mother. It fucked me up inside, knowing she was going to have to deal with that pain soon enough.

“No more. I can't take any more.”

She pushed my head away, her body going limp beneath me. I sat up on my knees, withdrawing my fingers from her. Scarlett put her hand over her face, hiding her afterglow from view. Deciding maybe she needed a minute, I grabbed the wet wipes and cleaned myself up. Then, without saying a word, I did the same for her. Scarlett watched me from underneath her arm. I didn't care about the mess. Wasn't anything I hadn't dealt with before. I just needed to show her I cared. That I would try my best to look after her, even when I struggled with my own fucking demons.

I got up and dumped the wipes in the bin before returning to her. Scarlett almost protested when I shifted her to lie down behind her body and wrap mine around her back. She let out a soft sigh, stroking her fingers down my arm with a gentle touch.

“That didn't feel much like a punishment,” she said after a minute.

I rested my head on hers.

“Maybe I don't want to punish you today.” I nuzzled her hair. “Maybe I'm tired of fighting with you too.”

“Why didn't you tell your mum I'm back?”

Scarlett was far too perceptive, but I didn't hate it. In fact, I needed her to ask me those questions. I needed her to push me. It was the only way we'd fight through this discord between us. I was well aware of my faults. My inability to

communicate my feelings. And how I needed this woman to break the cycle.

“Because then I would have to explain where you’ve been. It’s the same reason Pres hasn’t told Rosie and Francis hasn’t told Eliza and Jasper. West is estranged from Henry and Cynthia, but you can ask him about it.” I stroked her bare stomach. “Not to mention I’d have to tell her about all five of us and what we are.”

“And what are we?”

“Well, I’m pretty sure you made that clear to Fletch earlier.”

She chuckled.

“That was to provoke a reaction out of you.”

“It worked, but it doesn’t make it any less... true.”

“So what? You’re agreeing that you’re my boyfriend then, huh?”

I let out a breath before pressing my face harder against her hair, breathing in her cinnamon scent. Being hers was all I’d ever wanted. Ever since I’d been a kid. The five of us were drawn to each other in a way none of us understood at first. It was only when we found out from our parents where we’d been born and when, did we realise the insane coincidence. For a long time, I’d been okay with fate having a hand in bringing us together. Then Scarlett was ripped away from us and it began to feel like a curse. Like something none of us could ever escape.

“I don’t know what we are, Scarlett. It’s complicated with all five of us, isn’t it? None of us are asking you to choose, but as for labelling it... well, I don’t know.”

She nodded and fell silent as if the weight of what I said had settled over her. I hugged her closer, wanting this moment of peace between us.

“I take it your parents got a divorce.”

My breath came out in a whoosh.

“Yeah, they did.”

At the time of Scarlett’s accident, my parents had been going through their issues. Mum found out Oscar had cheated on her with Mona Sinclair, a woman ten years my father’s junior.

“What happened?”

“Oscar married Mona after the divorce went through and I got stuck with a whole new family, including Fletch. The only people I speak to are him and

Mum, though he's skating on thin ice right now."

She turned to look at me, forcing me to raise my head.

"He doesn't seem very upset about Tonya."

"I don't think Fletch cares much about his kids. They're more assets to him. Things he can use rather than people. Besides, Tonya was an accident he wished never existed."

Scarlett eyed me for a long moment, then turned fully in my arms, pressing her naked body against mine. She was so warm and real. Her closeness melted my icy exterior. It made me want to spill everything to her.

"Why did he want to see you today?"

"To tell me Oscar wanted to see me."

"And you don't want to see him?"

I shook my head before brushing her hair out of her face. Before I could move my hand back to her waist, she nuzzled it with her nose and closed her eyes, as if savouring my touch.

"No. He treated Mum like shit and me too during the divorce. Afterwards, too. He was... cruel. He called my mother a bitch who no longer gave him what he needed and said it served me right that you disappeared because I was ungrateful for everything they'd given me. All because I couldn't be nice to his new wife. I wouldn't call her mum or give her the time of day. I was almost eighteen then. I wasn't going to call a new woman who tore my family apart along with my father, Mum. She will never deserve that title from me. And I won't forgive him for everything he's said and done. It doesn't matter if he's sorry. He's not worth my time. He's not worth anything."

It was the first time I'd admitted it to anyone out loud. I'd not even told Francis exactly what Oscar had said to me about Scarlett. It had been the final straw for me. The one that had me telling him to go fuck himself.

Scarlett opened her eyes. They were shining with unshed tears, making my heart lurch.

"I'm sorry."

"Why are you sorry? You're not to blame."

"Because I wasn't there to help you."

"Scarlett..."

She shook her head and shifted closer, brushing her mouth against mine.

“No, you needed me and I wasn’t there. I’m sorry I wasn’t there for all of you. I know it’s not my fault. It’s not like I meant to disappear, but I’m sorry all the same.”

To shut me up, she kissed me. It was full of pain and sorrow like she understood why I was hurting inside. Why her kidnapping had left us fractured and incomplete.

“You don’t need to be sorry,” I whispered against her lips when she drew back slightly. “It’s me who should be. I never meant to cause you pain. There’s so much you don’t understand and I don’t know how to tell you.”

She pressed her hand to my cheek.

“I know. I... I can’t right now. It’s too much. I’ve only just remembered all of you. That was hard enough. You never asked me where I went, but I stayed in a hotel. I barely got out of bed, couldn’t stop crying and experiencing those memories all over again. It was agony, but I needed it. My past isn’t just mine... it’s ours and I forgot it all. I lost everything. I don’t want to lose you again.”

She blinked and took a breath.

“Is the person I knew still in there, Drake? Or did the world break you like it did me?”

I gave her a smile, or at least the best one I could muster.

“Maybe... you’ll have to find him. I don’t think anyone but you can.”

“I’ll try.” Her hand left my face and skimmed down my chest until it met my heart. “At least I have hope. Before today, I didn’t know if I could see a way out of this mess between us. Thank you for trying with me.”

“Even if I’m a stubborn dick?”

She grinned.

“Oh no, especially because you’re stubborn, unyielding and entirely the most difficult man I’ve ever encountered.”

“Is that so?”

“Mmm, but I happen to like your dick, so that goes a long way to making up for your other less than redeeming qualities.”

For the first time in a very long time, I couldn’t help the laughter bubbling up inside of me. I let it out, my chest rumbling with the noise. Scarlett stared at me for a long moment before her smile grew wider. I couldn’t stop. It was as if the floodgates from the past ten years had opened and I was purging the pain of it

through my laughter. Scarlett held me the whole time, letting me work it out of my system.

When it finally subsided, I stroked her face and smiled at her.

“I knew he was in there somewhere,” she murmured before pressing a kiss to my chest and nuzzling her face into it.

And I buried my face in her hair, finally allowing myself to admit I needed her more than I needed air.

“Only for you, Little Nyx. Always for you.”

TWENTY FIVE

WEST

I'd just handed Penn a beer when the door to the stairwell opened, revealing a rather dishevelled looking Drake with his tie in one hand and Scarlett's in the other. His hair was all mussed, and he definitely had a post-coital glow about him. Scarlett was looking up at him with a smug smile on her face like it had been her intention to make Drake lose his hard edges and force him to relax a little.

Prescott walked out of the kitchen, stopping when he spied the two of them. His eyebrow shot up.

"Well, I was wondering where you'd got to."

I watched Drake's expression harden, then Scarlett prodded him in the ribs. He glanced at her with a frown.

"No scowling or getting annoyed at them," she told him as she pulled him further into the room. "You'll undo all my hard work."

"Your hard work? I think you'll find I did the heavy lifting."

The way she blushed and shoved him had me wondering if she'd forgiven him for what he said to her. If he'd actually apologised. I fucking hoped he had after my words to him.

Her attention turned to the rest of us a moment later, after she stopped blushing up a storm.

"Oh, hello, Penn," she said, her voice tight as if seeing him again brought back memories of what happened on Monday.

It made me run my tongue over my teeth, imagining her bent over Penn's tattoo chair, offering herself up for her punishment. If I wasn't sure she'd tell me to go fuck myself, I would have snatched her up, taken her to my room and

fucked the living daylight out of her. Fuck the discussion we needed to have and the reason Penn was here.

“Evening, Scarlett,” Penn replied with a smirk before he lifted his beer to his lips. “Nice to see you again, though I’m sure you’ll be happy to hear there won’t be any blood involved.”

Scarlett made a show of looking around.

“What? No dead bodies today? Damn, I was so looking forward to dealing with another one with you.”

He laughed and gave her a wink.

“I thought we should meet under better circumstances.”

“Not sure I’d call these better circumstances,” Francis said as he turned away from where he was staring out of the window.

Scarlett dropped Drake’s hand and went over to Francis, wrapping her arms around his neck and giving him a smile.

“Can I make them better for you?”

“Always.”

She went up on her tiptoes and kissed him. I struggled to stop from wanting to rip her away from him. It had nothing to do with jealousy, more I wanted her so fucking much, it hurt. Now she knew who I was, it made it harder for me not to want to fall back into the relationship we had before. Only I knew it wasn’t possible. We would never be the West and Scarlett we had been. And it decimated me on the inside.

“What did you do to Drake?” he asked in a low voice when she dropped back to her feet.

“I helped him relax.”

His eyebrow raised, but Scarlett skipped away from him, clearly in a good mood and not inclined to give any details. Drake took a seat on the sofa across from Penn while Prescott caught Scarlett up in his arms when she tried to go into the kitchen.

“Don’t I get a kiss, little lamb?”

She gave him a rather enthusiastic one. Penn watched this with amusement in his eyes.

“So, it’s all of you then, is it?” he asked in a low voice.

“All of us, what?”

“With her.”

I shrugged and sat down next to him. Not like it bothered me. I’d said as much to Drake and Prescott. Ten years of us longing for her had made staying away from Scarlett an impossibility for all of us. Desire was a potent drug and one none of us were immune to. Only now, desire had morphed into more. So much fucking more.

“So what?”

“I can see why. She’s fit as fuck, man.”

I smacked him around the back of the head.

“Don’t talk about her like that.”

The fucker had the audacity to smirk and give me a wink.

“Someone’s touchy.”

I leant closer to him.

“She’s *mine* and if you keep flirting with her, I will knock your teeth out. Don’t think I haven’t noticed.”

“Yours, eh? And theirs too?”

If he thought I was going to deny their claim to Scarlett, he was barking up the wrong tree.

“Yeah, that’s fucking right.”

Penn and I went way back, but I’d never told him about Scarlett. Well, not properly anyway. I didn’t talk about her to anyone but Prescott, Francis, and Drake. Even then, it wasn’t about my true feelings. Opening up wasn’t easy for me. It never had been. Not after she’d been ripped out of my life and I’d been ostracised further by my parents.

“If you could stop winding West up and actually get to the point,” Drake interrupted, giving me a hard look.

“Excuse me for putting this fuck in his place when it comes to our woman,” I said. “Not like you’d do it.”

“I’m sure Scarlett is capable of telling him she’s not interested if that’s the case.”

“Oh, so you’d be fine with Penn joining our little gang bang then?”

Drake’s scowl worsened.

“I did not say that.”

“No? You sure about that, Drake? You don’t want to watch her get railed by

him?”

“No, I fucking don’t. I’m not Prescott, who will literally watch anyone fuck if he can. And I’m not going to pass her around like she’s some toy for all and fucking sundry to use. She belongs to us.” He pointed at Penn. “He is not allowed to touch her. And if he does, I will help you knock his teeth out.”

I noticed Prescott and Scarlett watching us. Him with amusement and her with wide eyes, as if hearing Drake stake his claim on her, was unexpected. Perhaps I’d deliberately pushed Drake’s buttons to get him to admit it in front of her. The fucker needed to stop being so closed off when it came to her. I knew it was the kettle calling the pot black, but whatever. At least I was aware of the fucked up nature of my and Scarlett’s relationship. He was content to be a dick about it.

Francis snorted as he came over to sit down next to Drake.

“Well, if we’re quite done with this whole ‘who is Scarlett allowed to fuck’ business, I think we should get on with the real reason Penn is here.”

“I think I should decide who I’m allowed to fuck,” Scarlett muttered as Prescott pulled her over and sat on the free sofa with her.

Penn dug something out of his pocket and slapped it on the coffee table. Scarlett’s eyes widened, and the blood drained from her face when he lifted his hand off it. There sat the little issue Drake had spoken to him about before we’d left his house on Monday to deal with Tonya’s body. Drake had told me about it when we were cleaning up the blood.

“I knew you took it from me,” Scarlett said to Drake a moment later.

He sat there, looking between her and the memory stick he’d given Penn yesterday. I had to give my Fixer friend credit. He worked fast.

“Do you want to tell us what’s on it, Scarlett? Or should we ask Penn?”

“He didn’t really say, other than it would get him the information he needed if I plugged it into one of your computers. And before you ask, I didn’t.”

Drake turned to Penn.

“Can you confirm that?”

Penn sat back, his legs wide as if he was completely at ease with the four of us, despite the fact Drake and I had threatened to knock his teeth out and gave him a smile. He rested his arm along the back of the sofa.

“If she had, your whole system would be fucked.”

Drake's eyes narrowed.

"Explain."

"Well, my techy guy said it would have ripped through your firewall and brought everything to a standstill. Whoever gave that to her wanted to fuck with you."

"Fuck." Drake turned his attention back to Scarlett. "What else did he tell you to do with it?"

"Bring it back to him when I was done," she replied, staring at the memory stick in horror. "He said he wanted information, not that he wanted to destroy your systems."

"Maybe now you'll see why you shouldn't trust him."

"Who said I ever did?"

Drake crossed his arms over his chest and frowned.

"He's going to expect you to have used it, and that's a problem."

Given none of us had directly brought up who we were talking about, I was assuming Drake wasn't prepared to tell Penn the truth. Probably wise, even though he would keep his mouth shut. We didn't need anyone else finding out about our connection to Stuart Carver.

Scarlett looked at Drake.

"You don't want him to know that I remembered."

"No. Has he contacted you?"

She shook her head.

"My phone is still off because you know who is tracking it. You said you'd deal with it."

Drake stood up and wandered over to the shelves hiding the war room. He picked up a box from there and brought it with him, placing it down on the table in front of Scarlett.

"I should have given this to you yesterday."

He took a seat, rubbing his face with his hand. The box contained a new phone for her.

"What do you want me to do with my phone?"

"You're going to turn it back on and keep it on you."

"Why?"

"If you keep it off any longer, he's going to get suspicious and it will only lead

to trouble.”

“But he’s tracking me.”

“I know.” Drake pointed at the new phone. “And so will I.”

That made her scowl.

“I don’t want to be tracked by anyone!”

“I don’t care. How are we meant to protect you if we can’t find you?”

Scarlett stood up and paced away.

“So I’m still a pawn then, am I? Stuck between you and him? It’s what I’ve been this whole time. A pawn in your games.” She turned back to us. “I won’t do it any longer. I’m not going to sit here and let you dictate everything to me.” She pointed at her chest. “I am just as much in this fucked up situation as you are. If I go back to him with the stick and tell him I haven’t done what he asked... I can’t do that. I won’t.”

Before Drake could ask what she meant, Penn waved a hand at the stick.

“I forgot to say, we’ve already handled that little issue. You don’t need to worry about it not looking like it hasn’t been run. It fucked the laptop we originally plugged it into. If you want me to plant fake information on it, I can do that.”

“Can you do it now?” Drake asked.

“If I call my man, we can have it done before the evening is over.”

“Do it.”

Penn stood, snatching up the memory stick in the process and walking away into the kitchen to make the call.

“I just told you I’m not doing it. I’m not taking that thing to him,” Scarlett said.

“You don’t have a choice.”

The way her expression dropped and pain flashed across her features made my chest hurt.

“You don’t understand. I can’t. He’ll...” she faltered and put her hand to her mouth.

“No, I don’t, so why don’t you enlighten us, Scarlett? Why don’t you tell us why you’re so afraid of him?”

She took a step back, shaking her head profusely.

“No.”

“No?”

“I won’t tell you a thing. I don’t trust you.”

With that, she turned, ran across the room and up the stairs, disappearing from sight.

“Well done, Drake,” Prescott said with a scowl. “What happened to not confronting her directly about it?”

“I didn’t think she would react like that.”

I stood up.

“You poke at her wounds, she’s going to lash out,” I muttered before I walked towards the stairs.

“Where the fuck are you going?” Drake asked.

“To smoke a joint.”

“We aren’t done.”

“Oh, yes, we fucking are. You don’t need me to deal with that thing.”

What I didn’t tell him was I planned to find our girl and deal with the situation myself. Maybe it would be better if Francis or Prescott spoke to her, but I didn’t care. If we needed her to go back to that fuck with this stick to keep him off our backs for a little while longer, then I would make her do it. She might not trust us with the truth of what happened to her in the Carver household quite yet, but I could persuade her to do the right thing. All I needed was to give our girl a little incentive. And I knew exactly how.

TWENTY SIX

WEST

I found her in Francis' room, sitting on his sofa by the window, staring out at the darkening skyline with her head resting on her knees. The lights were off, but she was illuminated by the city lights. She didn't look upset, but an air of melancholia surrounded her. Francis would have a fit if I lit up in his room, but I didn't care. I tugged my joint from my pocket along with my lighter and fired up. Then I walked into the room. Scarlett didn't look up, even when I sat down next to her.

"Here," I said, holding the white stick out to her.

"I don't want it," she whispered.

"Want something else?"

"I don't know."

"Then have this."

She shifted so she could take it from me and put it to her lips. I watched her take a long drag, filling her lungs with the sweet-smelling smoke before blowing it out. She rested her head back on her legs, holding the joint between her fingers.

"I feel like it's always two steps forward and a hundred steps back with him."

"Drake?"

She took another drag. The wisps of smoke coiled out of her lips a minute later.

"Mmm."

I leant back against the cushions.

"He has his issues."

"All of you have issues."

I shrugged and stroked her arm.

“You don’t seem to mind Pres and Frankie’s.”

She sighed and handed me the joint.

“Their issues aren’t tied up with me. They don’t act like any of this is my fault. I didn’t ask to be stolen from my life because of what you four did... and I know you did it for me, but it doesn’t make me feel any better about it. Doesn’t make it any less fucked up.”

I took a drag and continued stroking her skin. She wasn’t pushing me away, so I assumed she didn’t mind.

“I’m conflicted,” she admitted a moment later. “I don’t know what the right thing to do is any longer. Nothing feels okay or like I’m on the right side of things. And I’m tired. I’m so fucking tired... and unhappy. Everyone wants something from me. If I keep giving up pieces of myself to them, I won’t have anything left.”

Her eyes met mine. There was so much pain in them. Too much.

“I ache inside. Everything I knew before is gone. I wanted so badly to know who I was and now... now I wish I didn’t because the truth has made everything so much worse.”

I handed her back the joint and stood up, striding over to Francis’ bedside table to pick up an empty glass he’d left on there. Walking back towards her, I sat down and she tapped the joint into the glass before taking a drag.

“Do you hate me for forcing you to remember?”

She shook her head.

“I don’t hate you, West. I just don’t understand you any longer.”

“I’ll take that.”

Her eyes narrowed.

“Why?”

Shifting closer, I ran my fingers through her light brown hair, the silky texture making me want to wrap it in my fist. I refrained from acting on the urge.

“Hate will only bring you more pain, little Scar. I don’t want that for you.”

“I thought you enjoyed hurting me.”

I smiled.

“Hurting you to give you pleasure isn’t the same thing, and you know it.”

She rested her head back on her knees and gave me the joint. I took it and

inhaled. As the smoke curled out of my mouth, she touched my fingers where they were tangled in her hair.

“Why did you come after me?”

“As opposed to Pres or Frankie?”

She nodded.

“To give you this.” I waved the joint. “And to talk to you.”

She lifted her head from her legs and stretched them out.

“About what?”

“You won’t like it.”

“Then I don’t want to know.”

I took one final drag before stubbing the end of the joint out in the glass and setting it aside. Then I reached out and wrapped my fingers around her throat. She let out a small sigh of pleasure as if this was something she desired wholeheartedly.

“I need you to take the memory stick to Stuart.”

“Not you as well.”

“This isn’t about what I want, little Scar. It’s about what’s best for everyone, including you.”

“Since when did you care about what’s best for other people?”

My fingers tightened around her neck.

“I don’t, but those three are my family and so are you. I won’t let the cunt who stole you destroy what we have.”

She wrapped her small hand around mine.

“What we have is purgatory.”

“I’d rather live in purgatory with you than the hell I experienced without you.”

Her eyes turned sad.

“West...”

I didn’t want to talk about my feelings right now. Nor the pain of being without her. It wasn’t why I’d come up here.

I dug my other hand into my pocket and slid out my knife. Flicking it open, I ran the flat side of the blade along her cheek. She didn’t flinch, but her expression turned wary.

“If you agree to take the memory stick to Stuart, I’ll give you something in

return.”

She looked at the blade, then back at me.

“You’ll give me something of your own free will? Huh... somehow I’m not convinced.”

“Put your hand out.”

She did as I asked. I flipped the knife around in my hand and placed the handle in hers.

“You gave me this.”

I let go of her neck to stroke along the fabric of her dress where I’d carved into her skin. It was healing up nicely and wasn’t causing her further discomfort.

“I’ll let you carve into me.”

Her hand didn’t close around the blade. She stared at me with no small amount of shock, her eyes widening to saucers.

“You’ll what?”

“I belong to you, little Scar. I’ll let you mark me the way I did you.”

I continued to stroke the scar I’d given her, wanting to reassure her. Wanting to tell her it was okay, I would take it without complaint. I liked pain. And I’d wear her brand with pride.

“I don’t understand.”

I folded her fingers around the handle of my knife.

“What’s there not to understand? You agree to do what Drake asks. You get to give me a scar like I gave you. My body is yours to mark where you please.”

“You’re serious.”

“Why wouldn’t I be? This isn’t a trick. I’ve given you my knife.”

Scarlett looked down at it. This had been my plan since the moment I realised she wasn’t going to agree to do what Drake was asking for. An incentive for her to do what we needed her to. I wanted it too. Needed it from her. It would reassure me Scarlett wasn’t lost to me completely.

“I don’t know if I can.”

“Which part?”

“Both.”

My hand went to her hair, fisting it between my fingers. I pulled her closer by it.

“You can. You’re my little warrior. You killed for me. You can do this too.”

My beautiful girl swallowed.

“Why do you believe in me so much?”

Because I love you.

“You’re the queen of this castle, Scar. You just have to take your crown.”

“I don’t feel like a queen or a warrior. I feel like a coward.”

I took her hand with the knife in it and brought it up to my neck. She watched me. I could feel her fingers trembling beneath mine. The blade pressed to my skin, but not hard enough to break it.

“Remember what I said about fear? It feeds you, makes you stronger.”

“How can you say that when you’re not afraid of anything?”

I used her hand to drag the blade across my throat. It scraped my skin, making me lick my bottom lip.

“I’m afraid of one thing in this world.”

“What’s that?”

Pulling her hand away, I lowered it to my chest, making her place the blade flat against it, right where my heart lay beating for her.

“That you’ll break your promise to me.”

Her brow furrowed for a moment.

“Which one?”

Scarlett had promised me several things over the years. There was only one I cared about. The only one that would be the death of me.

Forever. You promised me forever.

“I’ll leave it to you to work it out.”

She gave me a look, but I wasn’t going to budge on it.

“That’s not fair.”

“I don’t play fair.”

Scarlett let out a huff before she pulled her hand out of mine and looked at my knife.

“I want to carve my name in the same place I have yours,” she whispered.

My heart swelled.

“Are you going to do what’s necessary?”

She nodded, biting her lip.

“Use your words. Make me a promise and you can do it right now.”

Her eyes flicked up to mine.

“Not sure Frankie would appreciate us potentially getting blood on his sofa.”

I stood up and put my hand out. She placed her free hand in it, allowing me to tug her to her feet.

“Bathroom then.”

“Can we do it in your room?”

I smiled. Of course, she’d want to do it in the place where I cut into her.

“Promise me first.”

“I promise I’ll take the memory stick to Stuart like Drake wants.”

I stroked her cheek.

“Good girl.”

Scarlett blushed as I led her out of the room, along the hallway, and into mine. My hands went to my shirt, undoing the buttons before I tugged it off and let it fall to the floor. I sat on the bed and waited for her.

Scarlett approached me with hesitant steps.

“You’re going to take care of it for me, aren’t you?”

She nodded as she reached me. Her palm flattened against my chest, pressing into my skin.

“Lie back.”

I did as she asked, watching her climb on the bed and straddle my waist. Then she leant over me, tracing a line across my collarbone with the tip of the knife.

“You have to be precise and make it deep enough so it scars,” I said when she didn’t move to cut me.

“I’m nervous.”

I latched onto her thigh with one of my hands.

“I’ve got you, little Scar, you can do this.”

“I’ll hurt you though.”

“I want you to. I’m not scared of a little pain, remember? I can take it.”

She let out a breath, then set the tip just below my collarbone. The sharp pain radiating outwards as she dragged the blade across my skin made me grit my teeth. She was careful and meticulous as she spelt out the word, branding me for life the way she’d inked herself on my heart.

Scar.

My chest swelled with pride seeing it there as blood welled out of the cuts, leaving crimson drops across my skin.

“Is it okay?” she whispered, staring at the word she’d carved into me.

I placed my free hand over hers where it rested next to the cuts she’d made.

“It’s perfect.”

“West—”

“Shh, I’m fine.”

And I was. It fucking stung, but it was nothing I hadn’t experienced before. Besides, having someone pummel your face in was worse. I could take a few cuts without wincing and complaining.

“Go get a cloth from the bathroom to clean up the blood, yeah? You said you’d look after it. That’s the deal.”

She didn’t move. Her eyes were fixed on my mouth. Fuck. It was all I could do to stop myself from tangling my hand in her hair, pulling her closer and crashing her lips to mine. Scarlett had to do it. She had to take it from me because I couldn’t give it to her. There was so much holding me back.

This guilt inside me over her accident and the years without her ate me up. Letting her scar me was my way of helping repair the breach between us. The one that was so fucking deep, I couldn’t see the bottom.

Reaching up, I cupped her cheek and stroked her face with my thumb.

“Little Scar.”

“I don’t know how to fix us,” she whispered. “There are so many things we need to talk about but I’m scared if we go down that road... we’ll break each other.”

My chest fucking hurt and not because of the cuts she’d made, but her words.

“I’m already broken, there’s nothing you could do to make it worse except leave me.”

A tear leaked out of her eye.

“You’re not broken.”

I shook my head.

“There’s so much you don’t know. And now isn’t the time to discuss it.”

She rubbed my chest and gave me a nod. As much as I wanted to keep her in here with me, for us to lay it all out on the table, there were more pressing matters at hand.

Scarlett slipped off me and went into the bathroom, bringing back a damp cloth with her. She sat next to me and cleaned the cuts she’d made. I didn’t

make a sound, no matter the stinging pain. It reminded me I was alive, and I had her right here. It was worth it.

When the blood clotted finally, I sat up. Scarlett had gone back into the bathroom to rinse the cloth out. Standing up, I snatched my shirt off the floor and put it back on, not bothering to button it up properly.

Scarlett took my hand when she came out and led me towards the door so we could return to the others. It was time we made a plan for her to go back to the man who'd stolen us from her.

TWENTY SEVEN

SCARLETT

I swallowed hard, clutching my handbag strap between my fingers as I walked into the stadium. It was late on Saturday night, right after the game had finished. And I'd agreed to meet Stuart to hand over the memory stick.

It wasn't something I wanted to do, but I didn't exactly have a choice. I'd made a promise to West. Not to mention it was our only option. While I didn't know the whole truth yet, it was imperative I didn't give Stuart any reason to suspect I'd remembered.

I had no idea if Mason had told him I'd gone looking for my mother. Nor what Mason thought about Tonya turning up dead. No doubt he would have known it was the boys, no matter how the body had been staged. He'd sent her after me.

The police had visited the office yesterday, but it was merely to confirm Tonya's whereabouts on Monday and what they knew. They hadn't questioned me as I wasn't in the office at the time. It made it clear while Mason knew, he hadn't said a word about it. It would only bring more questions than answers, anyway. Like, why was he tracking my phone and why Tonya was at my mother's old flat. Not sure he wanted to get wrapped up in a murder investigation. Although, finding out he was the Met Police Commissioner's son put a whole new spin on things.

I had a lot of questions for Mason, but I knew contacting him would only put me in danger. And to be honest, after all the revelations about him, I wasn't sure I could face the man without wanting to hurt him for lying to me. For being complicit in my disappearance. For allowing Stuart to hurt me the way he had. For everything.

I should want to hurt the Horsemen for their lies, but we shared a history I couldn't erase. Our relationship was complicated. And I didn't want to lose them again. Not now we'd found our way back to each other. The thing about families, even the ones you choose, was you didn't abandon them when things got tough. The boys had never stopped searching for me. And I couldn't help my feelings towards them. How my heart wanted them no matter how much they'd hurt me or done things I still didn't understand.

After getting directions from the guy at the reception desk, I made my way upstairs to Stuart's office. I was glad he hadn't asked me to go back to the estate. It was one place I wanted to avoid. It would only leave me vulnerable and weak, flooded with the awful memories I had of the place. The only time I'd felt free there was when I'd been allowed to ride my horses. Since Chocolate had died, I'd lost some of my love for it, but perhaps when this was all over, I could try again. If this was ever going to be over. I had no idea what the boys planned to do about Stuart. They didn't know how truly monstrous the man was. I don't know why I couldn't trust them with the truth of what happened while I was locked away. Drudging up those events would only cause me pain. And I wasn't willing to when they hadn't given me all of their truths.

Stuart's door was open, so I knocked on the frame. He sat behind his desk, his eyes fixed on the window outside where the dark football pitch lay, the lights having been turned off for the night. He turned his attention to me a moment later.

"Ah, Scarlett, there you are."

I stepped in and shut the door behind me, knowing he'd want this to be private.

"Hello, Dad."

The word made my stomach roil in protest but keeping up appearances was far too important.

"Come, give your old man a hug, eh?"

I didn't want him to touch me, yet my feet carried me over and I leant over his chair, allowing him to embrace me as I pressed a kiss to his cheek. The fact he was being nice to me set me on edge, but I tried not to show it. Nice Stuart was better than mean Stuart, who would hurt me for not being good enough. Who said awful things to me. Who made me feel small and insignificant. I

couldn't allow him to do that to me again. Not when Francis and Prescott had been building me up. Not when the real Scarlett was back and whole. And yet being in Stuart's presence only made me feel like insignificant Scarlett who could do no right in his eyes.

Only my abuser has the power to make me feel like I'm nothing and no one.

"How have you been?" he asked when he released me and I leant back against his desk, planting my hands on the edge.

"Okay, I suppose. Not easy living with four people you hate."

Stuart gave me a bright smile.

"I imagine not, but you have your freedom for now, isn't that what you wanted?"

The casual way he said it had me curling my fingers around the edge of the desk. Stuart did not do casual questions. There was always an ulterior motive behind them.

"I just wanted to experience the world a little more is all."

"Indeed. Now, have you got what I need?"

I nodded, releasing the table to dig my hand into my bag and extract the memory stick. My fingers shook as I gave it to him. While Penn had reassured me they'd made sure Stuart would never know it hadn't ripped through Fortuity's firewall, I was nervous all the same. The things they'd had to do to stage this made me wonder about the lengths they'd gone to when trying to find me. I imagined they weren't pretty.

Stuart turned to his laptop and plugged it in.

"Are they enjoying the little surprise I left them with?"

I rubbed the back of my neck. This was the exact question I'd been dreading. And I didn't need him looking at the stick right now. Sweat beaded at my hairline, but I tried to smile.

What if this goes wrong? I'm the one whose arse is on the line here!

"They aren't exactly happy their data has been exposed to hackers."

Fake data. It had all been faked. And if Stuart found out... I dreaded to think what would happen.

"Do they suspect you?"

"Not that I'm aware. They think someone must have infiltrated their system outside of the company at the moment."

“Good. Just what I like to hear. I was beginning to think you wouldn’t come through for me, Scarlett, but perhaps... you aren’t so useless after all.”

His words hit their target. They stung in the worst way possible.

You shouldn’t let this man have power over you.

He did. He had too much. My fear kept me silent about his abuse. West kept telling me fear made me stronger, but I didn’t know if I believed that. While the boys terrified me, it wasn’t in the same way as Stuart. I wasn’t scared they’d beat me and leave me chained up. With Stuart, I had no idea how much he’d hurt me and how far he’d go. If I would end up with a split lip or a bruised torso. Not all the scars on my body were from my accident. Some of them were from him. And the emotional scars had jagged edges. They left me feeling broken and alone.

You’re not alone any longer. You have Prescott, Francis, Drake and West. You have your family back.

But they weren’t the family I’d known. They were different versions of themselves. Darker, meaner and a hundred times more deadly.

The room was silent as Stuart looked over the data he’d brought up on his screen. For a minute, I had no idea what he thought, but then he sat back and smiled.

“Your mother and I have been talking.”

“Oh?”

“We think it’s time you came home and let us deal with the rest.”

My blood froze.

“What?”

“It’s been months, Scarlett, and this is all you’ve produced. One measly task. And you couldn’t even do that right.”

I swallowed, my hands bunching my t-shirt at the sides.

“What do you mean? I did what you asked.”

Stuart shook his head and met my eyes. The harsh note to them had me wanting to run, but my feet were glued to the floor.

“This isn’t what I wanted at all. I can’t do shit with what’s on here. And it’s not really surprising when you send a girl who is liable to fall under the sway of four rather charming but monstrous men.”

He rose from his chair, making me swallow.

“W-w-what?”

The evil smile he gave me was unnerving. I should have run when I had the chance. He reached out and gripped my hair, tugging me closer. My scalp burnt where he was holding onto it. I didn't try to pry him off. It would be useless. I wasn't strong enough. My limbs shook, and I wanted to cry. This was exactly what I'd feared the most.

“They got to you, didn't they? You think I don't know?”

“I don't know what you're talking about.”

“Oh yes, you do, Scarlett. Carrying on with him right in front of my fucking eyes at the game last week.”

Fuck. I knew Frankie kissing me would come back to bite me.

“Sleeping with the enemy is not what I told you to do. Is it just one of them? Or have you spread your legs for them all like some wanton fucking whore? You make me sick.”

Tears pricked behind my eyes. There was so much safety in that word for me with Francis, but Stuart had gone and made it feel dirty and shameful.

“I... I...”

Words failed me as he tightened his fist around my hair. This wasn't pain for pleasure. This was cruelty for the sake of it.

“That's why you wanted to go live with them so you could fuck them, isn't it?”

I shook my head, my hands useless at my side as my body shook.

Is he going to hit me? Is he going to throw me to the ground and kick me? Tell me I'm a waste of space?

“You stupid little slut.”

He shoved me away from him, causing me to slam back into his desk. It hurt, but not as much as I knew he could inflict with his fists.

“Those bastards thought they were so fucking clever, didn't they? They sent you here to burn. They don't care about you at all. You're just a warm hole for them to fuck when they please, aren't you? That's all you're fucking good for.”

If I didn't move, I was going to meet the rough end of his wrath. I would go home with bruises I couldn't hide from the boys. That's if Stuart even let me go back to them. Right now, that wasn't looking like it would happen.

Run, Scarlett, just fucking run.

I'd worn my trainers. I could get away from him if my body would fucking well cooperate. Edging along the desk, I tried not to make any sudden movements. He was glaring at me so hard, I thought the vein in his temple might pop.

"I didn't keep you away from the opposite sex to have you fall at the feet of the first fucking man to show you attention."

"Then why did you?"

He laughed. The sound echoed around the room, making my skin prickle.

"Because, Scarlett, when this is all over and those fuckers are dead and buried, you're a very special reward for someone. And he's waited a very long time to have you."

I'd reached the edge of his desk now, but I paused, the implications of what he'd just said making me ill.

What the fuck? He promised to give me to someone? That's fucked up. I'm not his to give away. I'm my own person. I always have been.

He couldn't just give me to some man who wanted me. I wouldn't let him. I wasn't so fucking broken down by his abuse that I'd ever willingly go along with this. But I didn't have to be willing. He would do it anyway. That's the type of man Stuart Carver was.

And then it dawned on me exactly who he was talking about. My world tilted upside down. Rage filled my veins. There was no fucking way on earth I would ever allow it to happen.

"I'm not a possession you can hand off to him like a trophy," I spat.

He laughed harder.

"Oh, dear girl, that's where you're wrong. I own you."

TWENTY EIGHT

SCARLETT

If I had any doubts Stuart Carver was evil, I didn't any longer. This man had kidnapped me and held me captive for ten years. He'd told me lie after lie after lie, beaten me until I was bloody and broken me down to nothing to force me into doing his bidding. He'd dangled freedom in front of my eyes and now... now he was making it very clear he never intended to let me go. He was going to give me away to another man when this was all said and done.

"No! No, you don't!" I shouted in his face before I turned and ran towards the door.

I wasn't fast enough. He was on me in a flash, gripping my hair and dragging me back against his chest. It hurt so fucking much, but I wasn't going to let the pain stop me. I struggled against him as he wrapped an arm around my chest, pinning me to him. My legs kicked out and my hands clawed his sleeves. He grunted when I elbowed his side.

"Let go!"

He slammed a hand over my mouth and leant over my shoulder, his disgusting hot breath dusting across my ear. I tried to scream, but the sound was muffled.

"You think you can escape, do you?" He chuckled. "It's adorable, really. You will never escape, Scarlett. I don't give a shit what happens to you when this is over. When I've given you away. All I want is for those bastards to die for what they've done, but first, they're going to admit they killed my boys. They're going to tell me where they are."

I kept trying to wriggle away from him, but he didn't budge. He didn't know I remembered. He didn't know I knew where his sons were buried. The twins. I

remembered the way Ray and Ryan had treated everyone around them like they were playthings. Their own personal toys. And no fucking wonder their father was the same. We were all pawns. All of us. Cogs in his wheelhouse. He would use and abuse everyone stupid enough to cross his path until they were nothing left but a shell of themselves.

I tried to respond, but his hand across my mouth made it impossible.

“You’re a stupid, stupid girl. You shouldn’t have come back here and you know it. This was a test to see if you really were fucking them or not. You see, Mason told me the real reason you ran from him. He told me you’d admitted to spreading your legs for them. That was your plan to get them to trust you. Pity for you men like them don’t care about the women they fuck. I know all about their proclivities. How they’ve cultivated a certain image of themselves but if people saw what they do in the shadows?” He spat on the floor next to me. “They wouldn’t revere them.”

I shivered at his words, scared of what would come out of his mouth next. What he would tell me about the men I’d grown up with. Whether I’d believe him was another matter, but I couldn’t help dreading it all the same.

“Do you know what happened to the last woman they shared between them?”

I shook my head.

“They almost killed her. One could call it a sex game gone wrong. They almost broke her arm, and she overdosed on the cocktail of drugs they gave her. But she’s not the first. You’re just one girl in a long line of whores they’ve shared between them. And if I didn’t make it clear, not all of them were as lucky as the last one. They don’t like it when their secrets come out. You didn’t take my warning about them seriously. They will kill anyone who gets in their way without hesitation, and I mean anyone. They aren’t nice men. They’re monsters.”

I didn’t know what the fuck to make of what he was saying, but he lowered his hand from my mouth. He wanted to hear what I had to say about it.

“You’re a monster too,” I ground out.

The way he belly-laughed at my statement made my skin crawl. As if having his hands on me wasn’t doing that already.

Stuart didn’t know I’d watched West kill. I stood there and let it happen. And

I'd felt a sick sense of justice when he placed Tonya's bloody heart in my palm. Like her death was justified because she'd hurt me. What kind of person did that make me? One just as fucked up as the four men I'd grown up with. The Four Horsemen. And me? I was their Little Nyx. The personification of the night.

The man behind me had no idea I'd looked into the Horsemen's eyes and realised I didn't care how dark, twisted and fucked up they were. They were mine. And I was theirs.

"Perhaps I am. You ran from one cage straight into another. When they find out you're there to destroy them, they'll want you dead too."

They didn't want me dead. The boys wanted me back. They'd waited ten years for me. But Stuart didn't know I knew. He was saying this to scare me. He must know how the boys felt about me. How they would stop at nothing to keep me by their sides now I was back with them.

"If you've promised me to Mason, then shouldn't you be keeping me alive?"

"That's his job. If he wants you, he has to keep them from destroying you."

I should have known better than to expect Stuart to care about my well-being. The only reason he'd kept me alive this long was so he could use me against the boys. That much was now clear. The missing pieces of the puzzle were slotting into place, but there were still blanks for me. Things I didn't understand.

I wasn't going to get answers by staying here. I needed to get as far away from Stuart as possible and never look back. In order to do that, I had to get out of his grip and not reveal a single damn thing about how much I knew. If he realised I had remembered, I would be in worse fucking trouble than I was now. He wouldn't have a reason to keep me around. And he would hand me off to Mason like a fucking prize pony.

I will not let that happen.

Throughout the past couple of months, my loyalties had shifted. And when I'd regained my memories, it had cemented them. No matter how angry I was with the boys, no matter how many lies they'd told me, I was loyal to them. It wasn't blind or misplaced, but the deep-seated knowledge we couldn't escape each other even if we tried. It wasn't only fate or destiny, it was need, desire and, dare I say it, love. The familial type of love that was quickly turning into the desperate, all-consuming love you couldn't fight against.

I loved Prescott. And I had fallen in love with Francis, although I hadn't told

him. When I was younger, I'd been deeply in love with West. The kind of love you couldn't forget or move beyond. The truth was, I didn't want to. I wanted to fix things between us, even though they were broken, damaged, and bruised. Then there was Drake. I had no idea how I felt about him, only I wanted to repair the breach between us too. I wanted to keep him as much as he wanted to keep me. If only he could show me more glimpses of the boy I'd known, then maybe we could find our way out of this toxic mess between us.

It didn't matter. I was bound to them, regardless. Bound to follow them into the dark. And to remain with them until the end.

"You know, he told me he's going to punish you for fucking them. He's going to make you feel the pain for being such a dirty little slut, selling yourself to them like a prized whore. It's nothing less than you deserve. Silly, silly girl. It wouldn't surprise me if he kept you in a fucking cage for all the care and appreciation you've given him by whoring yourself out."

I shuddered, hating the way his words cut into me. They made me feel so small. And dirty. They were tearing me to shreds and making me wonder if he wasn't right. If sleeping with four men did make me worthless.

Don't let him get to you. Don't allow his venom to sink into your veins.

It was so fucking difficult not to let those words into my psyche. I didn't want this man to have any power over me, but he did. He fucking did. And I hated him for it.

It was now or never. I had to get away from him before he destroyed me. Before he ruined what I had with my boys for me.

"Go fuck yourself," I hissed.

Then I redoubled my efforts to escape him, letting a scream rip from my throat. His hand went to my mouth again, stealing away the loud noise that might bring attention to us.

"You stupid little bitch."

I didn't let it stop me. My foot raised up, and I brought it down hard on his, making him grunt. My body shifted and moved against his as I tried to get him to loosen his grip. His hand tightened around my mouth. So I did what any girl would do in my position. I opened my mouth and bit him. He yelped, but I bit down harder, wanting to draw blood.

He pulled his hand from me before I could. Then I was elbowing him with

both arms, hitting his ribs and wherever else I could get to. His grip loosened as he grunted against the impact. I used it to my advantage, pushing my hands up under his arm to give me more room. I ducked out from underneath his grasp the next moment, shoving him away from me. He stumbled backwards, but then he was coming at me. I was ready for him. My knee came up. I hit him right in the fucking balls. He let out a horrifying sound of pain, his hands going to his groin.

I didn't take any further chances. My legs carried me to the door, my hands grasping the handle and ripping it open. It smacked back against the wall, but I didn't stop. I ran down the corridor, knowing if I didn't keep going, he would come after me.

"Scarlett," he roared, the sound echoing along the hallway.

My legs carried me faster until I hit the stairwell. Slamming open the door, I took the stairs two at a time. The flights passed in a blur. The only goal I had was to get out of this building. To get away from Stuart. To never look back.

When I hit the ground floor, I flew out of the door into the reception area. The man behind the desk looked startled, but I ignored him as I ran for the door.

"Miss! Miss!" I could hear him calling after me.

I pushed the doors open and ran for my fucking life away from the stadium. In the next street over, a car was idling by the pavement. I tore open the door and jumped into it. I slammed it shut behind me and turned to the driver.

"Drive. Now!"

Drake looked at me with a raised eyebrow before his face fell when he truly took me in.

"What's wrong?"

"Fucking drive, Drake. Get me the fuck away from here."

I didn't care if I was screaming at him, nor how my arms were flailing as I gesticulated for him to go.

"What happened?"

"Drive the fucking car or so help me I will pull you out of that seat and drive it myself, even though I don't know how."

"Jesus, okay."

He gave me one last look of concern before he set off. I reached over and put

my seat belt on, shoving my handbag into the footwell. I had no idea how I'd managed to keep it on me, but I didn't give two flying fucks. My heart was racing out of control, my breathing was utterly erratic, and I couldn't stop shaking.

He reached over and rubbed my thigh to get my attention, even as his eyes remained on the road.

“Are you okay?”

“Do I fucking look okay?”

“No.”

“Then don't ask me stupid questions.”

“Scarlett—”

“No! Take me the fuck back to Fortuity and don't fucking talk to me.”

Voicing aloud what Stuart had said and done was impossible. And the fact they'd made me do this had my stomach in fucking knots. They'd sent me back to the man who had terrorised me for years. They didn't know because I didn't trust them with that information.

“I'll take you home, but you need to tell me what happened.”

I glared at him despite the fact I was coming apart at the seams. Stuart might not have given me physical scars, but he'd dug the knife in anyway. He made me feel wrong, dirty... sullied. His words had punched a hole in my gut. I wanted to cry, scream, and curse at him. I wanted to curl up in a ball and fade away.

“Scarlett.”

“If you say one more fucking word, I'll never let you touch me again. You hear me? Never.”

Drake retracted his hand like I'd stung him. I didn't want to talk to him. I didn't want to talk to anyone. I was falling to pieces and nothing could stop it. Nothing could help me... could it?

I didn't want Stuart to have this power over me any longer. I wanted to take it back. Make it my own again. And there was only one person in this world capable of giving me those things, of showing me words like slut, bitch and prized whore didn't make me worthless. Who could degrade me to make me feel powerful.

It wasn't Drake. It wasn't Prescott. And even though Francis had made me feel safe with his use of little whore, it wasn't him either. No... the boy I'd

grown up with. The one I'd loved most of my life. He was the only one who could make me feel like I was the queen he said I was. Like I was his little warrior.

What I needed more than anything was West. And I needed him right now.

The journey home was filled with a thick air of tension as I slowly disintegrated inside. The longer it took, the worse my panic became. My chest was so fucking tight I could hardly take in air. By the time we reached Fortuity, I was at my wit's end. I tore out of the car the moment it stopped, grabbing my bag and running towards the lift. My hand went to the button, pressing it several times in my desperation to get upstairs.

Drake didn't say a word as he came to a standstill next to me, but I could feel his gaze on me. Concern bled out of him. I didn't have the energy or wherewithal to deal with him. My only goal was to get to West. It was the only thing I could do.

I bundled into the lift as soon as it arrived and keyed in the code for the penthouse. Drake walked in and stood on the opposite side. He'd insisted on taking me to the stadium. He didn't trust Francis after the last time. I hadn't objected, but I was beginning to wish he'd let someone else take me.

Time passed so slowly as the lift rose up to the penthouse. I rubbed my arms, trying not to let my legs buckle as I waited. They were some of the worst minutes of my life being stuck in this fucking box with a man I craved and yet wanted to be away from at the same time.

I practically ran out of the lift when it arrived on the penthouse floor, but I was caught by Prescott a moment later. He held onto my arm and looked at me with worry spread across his features.

"Sweetness?"

"Let go of me," I barked at him, trying to pull away from his grasp.

"What's going on?"

"I need... I need..."

I couldn't get my words out even as I tried to back away.

"She's been like this since she got in the car," Drake said, waving a hand at me.

"What's wrong, little lamb?"

I looked around the room, not answering his question, searching for the

person I needed, but he wasn't there.

"Where's West?"

"He's upstairs."

My eyes went to Prescott, who was looking even more concerned by the second.

"I need him, please. I *need* him."

Prescott let go of me then as if realising I wasn't going to talk. I shoved my handbag at him before running towards the stairs. I didn't care what the other three thought right now. It was all I could do to scramble up the steps and race down the hallway towards West's room.

When I got there, I tried the handle before hammering my fists on the door, desperation bleeding out of me with each strike.

Please, West, please open the door. Please... I need you. Only you can fix me.

TWENTY NINE

WEST

The pounding on my door had me frowning. I'd come upstairs a while ago, not wanting to deal with Prescott and Francis pacing the fucking living room. They were worried about Scarlett going to see Stuart. Admittedly, I didn't like the idea of her going back to him, but I knew it had to happen. We didn't have any other choice if we were to keep him from realising Scarlett had remembered the past.

I hadn't bothered to turn the lights on when I got up here. Instead, stripping down to my boxers and lying in bed as I watched the city lights below. There was a sense of peace being up here alone in the dark. Just me and the night's sky spread out before me. My fingers stroked across the scars she'd given me, leaving me content with the knowledge Scarlett knew I belonged to her.

I was considering lighting up a joint when the hammering started. I hauled myself out of bed and walked over to the door, prepared to give one of them hell for the racket. Unlocking it, I ripped it open. Scarlett tumbled into the room, falling against my chest and wrapping her arms around me.

"Scar?"

I shut the door as she clung to me, feeling her chest heaving with each one of her breaths. Having her come to me was unexpected, to say the least. The way she was letting out these soft whimpers of pain like she was falling apart had me wondering what the hell happened.

"Hey, hey, what's going on?"

I wrapped an arm around her, but she struggled against me. Then she was falling to her knees and nuzzling her face into my crotch. My hand went to her hair, intending to drag her away from me until she spoke, her voice coming out all needy and panicked.

“I need you.”

“You need me?”

She looked up at me. I couldn't see her eyes in the dark, but I could tell she was in a bad way. Whatever had happened between her and Stuart, it wasn't good. It couldn't have been between her and Drake. She would have gone to Prescott or Francis if that were the case.

“I need you to... to... to degrade me.”

That had me freezing on the spot.

She wants me to do what?

“Please, please degrade me, West. I need it. I can't cope with... with all these feelings inside me. I need you to take it away. Please... please... fix me.”

The desperate notes of her voice were like knives digging into my skin. Her pain filled the space between us, making me ache for her. I wrapped my hand around the back of her head, stroking her scalp with my fingertips.

“How would you like me to degrade you, little Scar?”

We had to be clear about what she was asking for. It's not like I would deny her this, but I wanted to know exactly what she expected me to do. What she wanted.

“I have... I have all these horrible things in my head. I need... I need you to replace them. Break me... break me down until I'm nothing but a mess of pleasure, pain and everything in between. Break me to fix me.”

I fisted her hair, pulling it taut until she winced and let out a little sound of pain.

“As my little Scar wishes.”

I wasn't going to ask any further questions. This woman was *mine*. She had been mine from the moment our eyes met twenty-one years ago. And I was going to give her what she needed.

She didn't have time to protest as I dragged her towards my bed by her hair. Her hands went to mine, but I didn't let go. No, I stopped and squatted down on my haunches, forcing her to meet my eyes. There was fear in those hazel-green orbs. I smiled and tightened my hand around her hair to the point where I was almost tearing it out of her scalp.

“Tonight you are one thing and one thing only... *mine*. You better get it through that pretty little head of yours, otherwise, you and I are going to have a

problem. Do you understand?”

She nodded, her face pulled back into a grimace. Little exhales left her lips in quick succession as if her fear was making it impossible for her to speak.

“Good girl... although, I don’t think you are a good girl. That word doesn’t belong to you.”

She whimpered in response.

“No, you’re a bad one. A dirty little girl who craves things she shouldn’t.”

Her hands reached out to me, but I batted them away with my other hand.

“Oh no, you don’t get to touch me. You haven’t earned the fucking right.”

Oh, but the way a tear fell from her cheek had me smiling.

“That’s right, cry all you fucking like. Beg and plead with me, but it won’t get you very far. Dirty little bitches like you don’t deserve rewards. They deserve to be used like the whores they are.”

She let out a choked pant at my words.

So, you want me to call you names, do you, Scar?

“Is that what you are, Scarlett? A slut who wants nothing more than to get fucked six ways from Sunday and beg for more? So fucking wanton. So needy. I bet your little pussy is dripping for me right now. She’s begging to get abused.”

She shook her head.

“Such a little liar.”

I stood, pulling her with me by her hair. She yelped, but I didn’t care. No, I threw her down on the bed face first and shoved my knee into her back, pinning her there.

“Don’t you worry, you nasty little slut. I’m going to use every one of your holes for my pleasure. You won’t be able to walk straight when I’m done with you. And you’re going to love every second of it even as you beg me to stop. Even when you’re crying and gasping for fucking air. I’ll keep using you until you’re nothing but fucking dust.”

Reaching out, I ripped open the drawer of my bedside table and extracted a pair of handcuffs. She struggled weakly against me as I gathered up her wrists behind her back. I locked her in place before shoving my knee between her legs and rubbing it against her jean-clad pussy. She gasped with the friction.

“See this here? It’s fucking mine. It belongs to my cock.”

“West.”

“No use begging me, slut. I’m not going to grant you mercy.”

A sob erupted from her mouth. It didn’t stop me from leaning into her further, making her whimper and yelp with the way her jeans were digging into her sensitive skin. She could cry all she wanted. This is what she’d asked for. There was nothing she could say to stop me.

I’m going to break her.

Moving away from her, I went over to my drawer and extracted a tube of lube along with a rather imposing looking dildo, throwing them on the bed. My knife rested on top of the bedside table. I picked it up, flicking it open and running the tip of the blade along my finger.

“Are you fond of the clothes you’re wearing, my little fucktoy?”

“N-n-no.”

“Good.”

I knelt at her feet and tugged off her trainers. I wasn’t going to ruin them as I’d bought them for her. It made me smile to see her wearing them. Her socks came next. Then I peeled her jeans from her legs, exposing her lace-clad behind to me. I pulled those off her too, then I rubbed them against her wet pussy, gathering up her arousal with them. Dumping her knickers next to her, I used my knife to cut down the back of her cardigan and t-shirt, shredding both pieces of clothing. I ripped them off her body and threw the ruined fabric away before using my knife to cut her bra off her body.

I left my girl naked apart from the cuffs around her wrists and she lay there all the while, sobbing her heart out but not telling me to stop. She didn’t utter a word of protest. I ran the tip of my knife down her spine, making her shiver and her skin rise with goosebumps.

“Are you scared, slut? Are you afraid of what I’m going to do to you?”

“Y-y-yes.”

I laughed, stroking the flat side of the knife along her behind. Then I dipped it between her legs, gathering up her arousal on the blade.

“Open your mouth and stick out your tongue.”

Hesitantly, she did as I asked. I brought the knife up and set it on her tongue.

“Lick.”

She ran her tongue along the blade.

“That’s it, taste yourself. Only dirty little sluts get turned on by monsters. You

know that's what I am. A fucking monster. Your very own villain."

Picking up her arousal drenched knickers, I removed the blade and stuffed those in her mouth instead. Her muffled noise of protest only made me chuckle.

"Don't worry, I'm going to feed you my cum later, whore. You'll have to swallow all of it or I'll make it worse for you."

I slapped a hand across her behind, making her jolt and whimper.

"Mmm, look at this." I pulled open her cheeks, staring down at her beautiful little holes. "So ripe for fucking, aren't you? I'm going to make you feel it, little Scar. Feel each and every inch of me inside you. Fuck you so hard, you sob from the pain, but you won't be able to tell me to stop, will you? Not with your mouth full."

Her answering muffled cry was all I needed. My hands went to my boxers, tugging them off to leave me as bare as she was. I ran a hand along my cock, stroking the hot, throbbing flesh. Fuck, I was so ready to be inside her.

Taking both her legs, I shoved her further up the bed so she was swaying there, resting on her shoulders as her arms were cuffed behind her back. I knelt on the bed behind her and slid my arm underneath hers, holding onto her shoulder. With my other hand, I notched the head of my dick at her entrance, rubbing her arousal all over it. She whined, pushing herself against me.

"My needy little slut wants dick, doesn't she? She wants my cock so fucking badly, she'll let me do anything to her."

Her answer was to rub my dick with her pussy, shifting those hips to entice me to fuck her.

"Are you going to fuck yourself on my cock, huh? Is that what you want?"

She shook her head, moaning into her makeshift gag. I chuckled, running my cock over her entrance, but not quite dipping it inside her.

"No? Do you want me to fuck you?"

She moaned again.

"That's right. You want me to use you until you're a panting, sobbing, whimpering mess. You want me to make you feel so much fucking shame for being the dirty little slut you are, don't you?"

Her hips bucked. I tightened my grip on her shoulder, forcing her arms up to restrain her further.

"No. You're going to stay still and take it like a good little bitch. That's how

I'm going to fuck you. Like you're a bitch in heat."

My free hand wrapped around her hip and I shoved my cock deep inside her, making her cry out through her gag. I pushed deeper until I was flush with her body, feeling her pulse and strain around me.

"Look at that needy little pussy taking me so fucking well. So she should. She's mine. Made for my cock."

I pulled back and slammed inside her again. Then I released her hip, sliding my other arm between hers and gripping her other shoulder. I fucked Scarlett with deep, brutal strokes, using her shoulders as leverage to allow me to give it to her with zero restraint. She cried through her gag, tears streaming down her cheeks, but it didn't stop me. If anything, it only made me give it to her that much harder. I knew it was hurting her, but she wanted the pain. She craved it. She wanted to be broken into tiny little pieces.

"That's it, bitch. Take my cock. Take it until you bleed for me. Scream, cry and beg. No one is going to hear you. No one is coming to your fucking rescue. I'm going to destroy you."

THIRTY

SCARLETT

It hurt. God, it fucking hurt. I screamed into the gag, trying to struggle against him, but the way he had me restrained made it impossible. The way he was fucking me was brutal, savage, and merciless. But it felt so good too. It felt so fucking right. It was exactly what I needed. What I craved.

My muscles strained with the cuffs on my wrists and his arms between them and my back, holding my shoulders down while he slammed into me. No matter how hard the others had fucked and used me, nothing could prepare me for the way he did it. None of our previous encounters were in any way shape or form as violent as this.

More tears flowed down my cheeks. I was helpless against West. Utterly at his mercy, not that he had any for me. I'd told him to break me. My mind was fighting against the inevitable even so. It was protesting at the way he spoke to me. The way he hammered into me. The pain was overwhelming. The pleasure too. They were two opposing forces trying to tear me into pieces. And I wanted them to.

Please destroy me. Ruin me for good. I need it so fucking bad.

I couldn't tell him because my mouth was full. I could taste myself on my underwear. Taste my need in the fabric. And it only made me greedier. Made me want him so badly, I was coming undone with it.

"You think this is everything, do you, slut? I'm not even halfway fucking done with you," he growled at me.

West sounded more like an animal than a man at this point. His voice was gruff and full of menace. He wanted me scared. And I was utterly terrified. I had no idea what he was going to do to me next.

Abruptly, he pulled away from me, releasing my arms. I slumped down on my shoulders, shifting my arms against my back. They ached from the strain, but there wasn't much I could do about it.

My eyes followed his hands grasping something next to us on the bed. Two things. A tube of lube and a sex toy. I swallowed against my gag. It was a rather large dildo. Was he going to put that inside me? And if so... where?

West popped the cap of the lube and slathered it all over the thing, making it look even more imposing. He was smiling to himself, making me think he was about to stick that thing somewhere it might hurt if he didn't prepare me for it first.

"Do you see this, little Scar?"

I whimpered. I wanted this. I needed him to break me, but fuck was I afraid of it too.

"Sluts like you want more than just one cock in you. You crave it. And don't forget, I've seen the way you come when you're impaled on two dicks so you can't tell me you don't love it."

He shifted behind me again and placed the head of the dildo at my pussy, rubbing up and down. Then he slid the tip inside me. I almost let out a sigh of relief, but then I felt cool gel falling on my skin from above. West was holding the tube above us and dribbling it between my cheeks.

Oh, fuck!

He dropped the tube on the bed, pulling the dildo away and resting it on my behind. Then he was feeding me his cock again, stretching my pussy out for him. His fingers went to my other hole, rubbing the lube in. The wicked glint in his eye made me nervous, especially when he slid his finger inside me, pushing the lube in.

"That's right, slut. I'm going to slide this in you, make you take every fucking inch whilst I pound this pussy."

I made a noise behind the gag, but he merely chuckled.

"You can try to tell me you don't want it, my dirty little bitch, but I know you do."

Another finger joined the first, stretching me out for that fucking thing. I was relieved he was giving me some preparation, but I knew it would hurt even so. He wanted me to feel the pain. And I couldn't deny I needed it.

Break me. Please fucking break me, West.

After only a minute, he withdrew his fingers and then the toy was there, pressing against me. I tried to move away from him, but he slapped my behind so hard, I yelped.

“Don’t you fucking dare, whore. I told you to stay fucking still.”

Then he leant over me, fisting my hair and pulling my head back. He grazed his teeth over my ear, then he bit the lobe.

“You are mine and if I want you to take this fake cock up your arse whilst I fuck your pussy, you will. I will remind you of who you belong to with each fucking stroke.”

He pressed it forward, forcing it to breach me. Fuck, it burnt on the way in, but I wanted it. The pain was breaking me into tiny pieces. My mind was fracturing with the physical strain. With his words. With everything. The sheer girth of this thing was far more than I’d ever taken before. There was nothing I could do about it. I couldn’t run away. I could barely scream around the gag.

West released my hair and straightened, his eyes going straight to where he was pressing the dildo up inside me.

“Fuck, look at that. It’s stretching you out so fucking wide. Mmm, what a sight you are. Crying and panting, tasting yourself with every breath you take whilst I fuck you silly.”

And with that, he forced it deeper. I cried harder, trying to scream, but it came out all muffled. West groaned at the noises I was making. At the way he was stretching me, making me so much fucking tighter for him. I was in delirious pain. It was so fucking pleasurable, driving me to a state of liberation unlike anything else I’d experienced. I was so close to losing it completely. Allowing it to drown me.

“What’s that? You want me to fuck you harder? You want it to hurt?”

I was stuck. I could only shift my arms on my back. He wrapped his fist around the middle of the cuffs and held them down, stopping me from moving any further. He let out a low growl of annoyance.

“What the fuck did I tell you, whore? Huh? I warned you not to fucking move.”

Another shove of the dildo and it was so far up inside me, I thought I might pass out. West held it there, forcing me to take what he’d given me. He released

my cuffs and then he was slapping me, spanking my behind with rapid strokes I could hardly keep up with. I screamed against the gag, but he didn't stop. He kept going until I was broken. A sobbing, panting mess of shame because I liked this. I wanted this man to do this even as my mind rebelled against it.

With one hand, he held the dildo inside me. The other wrapped around my hip. And then he fucked me with long, deep strokes, making me howl behind the gag. It was to the point of being far too much. I cracked and shattered under his savagery. My mind went somewhere else. Somewhere words couldn't hurt me any longer. A state of delirium where nothing felt real, but I could feel it happening to my body. I could feel him wrecking me like I'd asked for. And fuck, it was everything.

Every. Single. Fucking. Thing.

West let go of my hip and reached around me, his fingers rubbing over my clit. And that was it. I lost it. I trembled, struggled and strained, but he kept stroking me, driving me higher until I was at my wit's end. And then I was coming so hard it drove through my entire body like a fiery inferno razing its way along my skin, burning away all the horrific things Stuart had said to me. Making it impossible for them to hurt me any longer.

My climax ruined me completely. And West was the wielding force of my destruction.

My body slumped on the bed when I came down. If it wasn't for him holding me, my knees would have given out. He hadn't stopped fucking me through my climax, and he was still giving it to me just as hard now. I was done, but he wasn't. He was still using me for his pleasure.

I whimpered against the gag, wrung out from the pleasure and pain. Broken in two by the boy I'd grown up with. The one I still loved no matter the distance and years between us. Even though West wasn't that boy any longer, my feelings hadn't disappeared or lessened. But we had so much separating us. Too much to talk about.

Those words would wait. They'd stay inside my heart while I was still so fucked up about our relationship with each other.

West released me a moment later, ripping the dildo from me and throwing it down. Then he was pushing me over onto my back. He straddled my chest and tore out the gag from my mouth. I choked and coughed, but I wasn't allowed to

recover. The man leant over me and shoved his cock between my now vacant lips. He fucked my face, staring down at me with such an intense expression, I thought I might combust. Those beautiful amber eyes were full of violence.

“That’s it, I’m going to paint your fucking mouth with my cum, you dirty little bitch.”

He groaned the next moment, erupting inside me. His taste mixed in with mine, a heady cocktail of pleasure seeping across my tongue. Evidence of how hard we’d climaxed with each other.

He pulled his cock from my mouth when he was spent and wrapped his hand around my throat.

“Swallow.”

I did as he asked. He could feel my throat working, and it made him smile. Then I was sucking in air, trying to regain my equilibrium as it had been thrown into the abyss. West stroked my throat with his thumb, making me shiver.

“What a good little slut you’ve been.”

I couldn’t answer him. My throat was raw from crying and screaming.

He shifted off me and turned me on my side, unlocking the cuffs and throwing them away from us. Then he took one of my arms and rubbed it down before doing the same to the other. The next thing I knew, he’d picked me up from the bed and carried me into his bathroom. He set me down in the bath, put the plug in, and turned on the taps. I lay there, unable to move as the water filled around me. He pressed a kiss to my forehead and left me there while he went back into the bedroom.

I stared at the water flowing from the taps. My mind drifted. I wasn’t sure what was up or down any longer. All I knew was I felt wrecked beyond belief.

West returned a moment later, dumping the sex toy in the sink before he climbed into the bath behind me. He held me against his chest after he’d turned off the taps. He stroked my skin, soothing me with each touch.

“You were such a good girl, little Scar,” he murmured in my ear. “Such a good girl for me.”

My hand wrapped around his wrist, holding it to my chest. He nuzzled my hair.

“I know, you can’t talk yet and it’s okay. I’ll take care of you, my perfect little warrior. You did so well.”

His praise made my heart tighten in my chest. It took my broken pieces and started to knit them back together.

“I’m so proud of you, little Scar. So fucking proud.”

I turned my face into him, wanting him closer. Needing him to engulf me. He would repair me. He’d make me better. I’d known coming to him was my only option. It had been my only way out of the mess Stuart had left me in. West gave me the one thing I needed more than anything else. A safe place to break into tiny little pieces. He’d ruined me. And now... he would put me back together.

“That’s my good girl,” he whispered. “My little Scar.”

I was his. His girl. His forever. And he was mine too.

THIRTY ONE

PRESCOTT

West trailed his hand along the bannister as he walked down the stairs, the morning sun glowing around his light brown hair like he was some kind of fucking king. At least, that's what his expression bore. One of satisfaction and confidence. Like he'd spent the night revelling in his basest desires. I, on the other hand, had spent the whole night worrying about Scarlett. The panicked way she'd told me she needed West was like a punch to the fucking gut. Not because she needed him but seeing her in that state tugged at my heartstrings. Made me want to soothe her, but I couldn't. Not when she'd been so desperate to find West.

"Where's Scarlett?" Drake asked, giving West a dark look.

"Asleep," he replied as he walked across the room, barely sparing our friend a glance.

"Is she okay?" I interjected, unable to hold my tongue. "Did you ask what happened with Stuart?"

West's eyes went to me as he reached the kitchen. For a moment, he merely scrutinised me. Then he went over to the fridge and pulled the door open.

"I didn't ask her. She wasn't in a fit state to talk about it."

"But how is she?"

West took the milk out of the fridge, shutting the door and setting it on the counter. He stared down at it with a furrow between his brows.

"I don't know how to answer that, Pres."

My stomach hit the floor. The last thing I expected was for his cocky, confident self to disappear the moment I questioned him about Scarlett.

"What do you mean?"

“When I was done giving her what she asked for, she was spaced out, content, but so fucking spaced out. I took care of her and all, you know, but she didn’t speak. Then she conked out when I put her to bed and hasn’t surfaced since. I didn’t want to leave her, but she needs to eat when she wakes up, so I came down to make her something. I asked Frankie to watch her.”

I had wondered where Francis had got to. He’d not been down this morning. And irrational jealousy surged inside me. He’d asked Francis rather than me. Then I remembered Scarlett felt a certain sort of safety with him she didn’t have with the rest of us. Rubbing the back of my neck, I turned away and looked out the window.

What the fuck is wrong with you?

Insecurity is what I was feeling. It was fucked up and ridiculous, but there we were. I was messed up, no matter how hard I tried to hide it. Messed up because my father had flitted in and out of my life whenever it suited him, leaving me feeling as though I was just something he picked up when he was bored.

Fuck you, Ezra Ellis. Fuck you for making me feel like I wasn’t worthy of your attention. Fuck you for abandoning me. Fuck you for everything.

I wasn’t unaware of why I felt this way, but it was horrifying all the same. That I would ever feel jealousy or insecurity when it came to Scarlett. I knew she loved me. Knew she needed me. Something about this relationship between the four of us and her was tearing at the edges.

“What did she want?” Drake asked.

“I don’t think you want to know the answer to that question.”

I turned around in time to see Drake give West a questioning look.

“Try me.”

“What she wanted is between me and her, Drake. I didn’t ask you what you and her did up on the roof on Thursday. And don’t you dare fucking ask her either. I know what you’re like. You’d punish her to get it out of her.”

“Are you lot fighting again?” came Francis’ voice.

All of us looked to the stairs where he was standing at the top of them. Next to him stood Scarlett, her hazel-green eyes narrowed and her hair a wild mess of curls down her back. Her gaze went straight to West, who looked at her with something akin to adoration, but West didn’t do adoring. He did brutal and vicious.

The two of them walked down the stairs. Francis had his hand on her lower back as if she needed steadying. She left him to walk into the kitchen. West didn't say a word as she approached him. Her hands went to his chest. She stared up at him for a long moment.

"I didn't get to say it last night, so I will now," she said, her voice quiet and full of appreciation. "Thank you."

He reached up and stroked her hair.

"There's nothing in this world I wouldn't give you, little Scar. Nothing."

She nibbled her bottom lip. There was one thing I knew he refused to give her. A kiss. And I wondered if she'd comment on it.

Scarlett leant forward and rested her face against his chest, pressing her ear to his heart. She rubbed her fingers along his pec as if she needed to feel him and know he was real. Then she placed a kiss over his t-shirt on his heart before pulling away. West did nothing other than watch her as she turned and spied me standing near the windows.

Her feet carried her in my direction, her eyes full of apology. I didn't know what she had to be sorry for. If anyone had to apologise, it should be me for having these fucked up feelings about what happened last night. For the way she'd begged me to let her go.

The moment she reached me, I took her hand and brought it to my lips, kissing the heel of her palm.

"Pres..."

"Are you okay?" I whispered into her skin. "That's all I care about."

She stepped closer and frowned.

"Stop it."

I dropped her hand.

"Stop what?"

"Being so selfless. What's wrong? And don't tell me it's nothing. I know you, Pres. I can see it in your eyes."

My chest got tight. Scarlett had been the only one I'd ever opened up to about my father in the past. And now she was looking at me like she knew exactly what I was thinking.

"I need to know you're okay first, little lamb."

She let out a sigh as if I was frustrating the fuck out of her.

“I’m fine.”

I looked around, finding the others staring at us. It made my skin itch. Thinking too hard about Ezra always did.

“Are you?”

“Yes. West took care of me. Now, will you please tell me what’s going on with you?”

“Not with an audience.”

She took my hand.

“Okay, let’s go somewhere else then.”

“You are going to sit at the table and eat breakfast, Scar,” came West’s voice from the kitchen. “You can talk to him after that.”

Scarlett didn’t look back at West. Instead, she dragged me over to the table and sat down, making me sit next to her. Her thumb rubbed up and down my hand like she knew I needed soothing. Such an observant little lamb. And I should have known better. Scarlett remembered me. She knew what I was like and there were things about me that had never changed despite the years separating us.

“You’re doing what he said,” I murmured.

“I need to eat,” she responded with a shrug.

“You seem... different.”

I couldn’t explain it, but something had shifted in her since last night.

She looked at me with a resigned expression on her face.

“I feel different.”

“What happened?”

Her eyes clouded over.

“All you need to know is he...” she faltered as West came over with a mug of tea for her.

“He?”

West set the mug down and eyed her as if he wanted to hear her answer too. She picked it up and sipped at it.

“Stuart doesn’t know I know about the past. He... he threatened to take me back to the estate and told me some things that scared me, so I ran before he could keep me there.”

She gripped my hand tighter.

“What things?”

Scarlett turned her head and caught Drake’s eyes across the room where he was sitting on the sofa.

“How many women have you shared before... me?”

The question made me look at the others even though it hadn’t been directed at me. Why would she be asking unless Stuart had told her about it? Was this what she meant by things that scared her?

“Eight,” Drake replied.

“How many of them are alive?”

Francis flinched. Her question had clearly made him think of Chelsea.

“Five.”

“Did you kill them?”

Drake leant forward, resting his arms on his knees.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“They didn’t keep their mouths shut. And judging your questions, another one has ignored the NDA she signed.”

Scarlett’s expression was impassive, making me nervous. It was Drake who had wielded the axe, but we were complicit in the entire affair. He’d made them all look like suicides. It was how we got away with it.

“We didn’t mistreat them if that’s what you want to know. They were paid for their services. They knew what they were getting into. People can be fickle when money is involved.”

She took another sip of her tea.

“He said you almost killed the last one.”

Francis went deathly pale.

“Chelsea talked,” West muttered, his expression turning grim.

Fuck, just what we needed. Another one spilling the beans. I thought we vetted them better.

There was one after Chelsea. Rina Gregory. We’d stopped seeing her before the first night we’d shared Scarlett. She’d gone back to Canada with the money we’d paid her, so there was no chance of her talking.

Drake rubbed his chin and eyed Scarlett for a long moment before he extracted his phone from his pocket.

“Don’t,” Francis said with a desperate note in his voice. “You promised.”

Drake looked at him.

“She broke the rules, Francis.”

“Let me fix it. I need to fix it.”

The way Drake scowled made me flinch.

“No, you won’t do what needs to be done. I don’t trust you with her.”

Scarlett put her hand on West’s arm.

“Who is Chelsea?” she whispered.

“Not my story to tell, little Scar. You need to ask Frankie.”

Her eyes went to him and Drake, the two of them still arguing over the whole Chelsea situation. If she talked to Stuart, fuck knows who else had done. We needed to clean up this mess, starting with her.

“I’ll do what’s fucking necessary,” Francis said. “I’ll fix this shit, okay? It’s my mess. I should be the one to handle it.”

“He’s right, you know,” West said, turning away from us to look at Drake. “Demons have a way of gnawing at us when we don’t exorcise them ourselves. Let him deal with his.”

It made me think of my own demon. My father. And how I had never rid myself of the legacy of abandonment he’d left behind.

“Fine,” Drake conceded after a moment. “Do it tonight and no fucking excuses.”

Francis gave him a nod before he sat down and looked out of the window as if he was contemplating the fact he had to kill tonight. We all knew what he meant by ‘fix it’. How he had to make the problem go away... permanently.

You talk, you die. That was the rule.

West left the table and went back into the kitchen to finish making Scarlett breakfast.

“What else did Stuart tell you?” Drake asked as he turned back to Scarlett.

“He promised me to Mason when this is all over.”

Scarlett’s voice was flat and void of emotion. But me? The horrifying knowledge howled inside me like a fucking storm raging in my soul.

“No,” I ground out. “Fuck no.”

“Pres—” Drake started.

I slammed my free hand on the table.

“No. She doesn’t fucking know about his sick obsession with her. This just

makes it worse. I am not keeping it from her.”

Scarlett looked at me, her eyes widening.

“What? His obsession with me? What are you talking about?”

“He’s wanted you since you were a teenager. He used to watch you when he picked up the twins from school like a creepy fucking stalker. We never told you about it because you didn’t know who he was. But we knew. We saw him.”

“The twins?”

I shook my head. There was too much she didn’t know. And we couldn’t keep the truth from her any longer.

“Mason was their friend. Like we told you, his father is best mates with Stuart. None of this was random. It’s all connected, sweetness, all of it.”

THIRTY TWO

SCARLETT

Prescott looked incensed as he talked about Mason. After all the revelations involving him, I'd lost all interest in being anywhere near the man. He wasn't who I thought at all. Neither were the four men in front of me, but I understood them more now I remembered who they were.

"Mason was Ray and Ryan's friend? Is that why he hates you so much? Because they grew up with their fathers being best friends?" I asked.

Prescott nodded.

"That and you. He hates us because of our relationship with you."

It made me sick to think about him staring at me when I'd been younger and me having no clue.

"And his father?"

"We're pretty sure he's dirty. We just can't prove it. He was the one who questioned us when the twins went missing. Then he became the commissioner years later. We can't touch him for obvious reasons. And his association with Stuart makes it difficult for us too."

I hadn't asked them why they hadn't come to get me when they found out where I was. Guess I was about to find out.

"Stuart has too many friends in high places," Drake said, rising from the sofa and coming closer to the dining table. "We were four nineteen-year-olds with nothing when we found out he had you. We didn't know where he'd taken you or what your life was like, only that, one day, we would get you back somehow."

It took me a second to put his words into perspective.

"You couldn't get to me... even though you wanted to."

Prescott squeezed my hand.

“No.”

“Then why did you do all that shit to me when I did come back?”

Drake looked away.

“You were here to ruin us. We knew we couldn’t trust you, especially when you didn’t remember us. And we were going to use your connection to Stuart to ruin him after we...”

He rubbed his fingers on his chest, like the words physically hurt him to say.

“After you what?”

“Broke you down enough so you’d do what we wanted instead of what he asked you to do.”

The words hung in the air. I didn’t know how to react to it. I’d kept calm this whole time, needing to process everything they were revealing to me.

“You wanted to break me?”

“Yes... and trust me, I’m aware of how fucked up it sounds, given our history with each other. We all knew it was a risk we had to take. Stuart is obsessed with finding out the truth. He’ll never stop coming after us unless we put a stop to him.”

My heart had never ached this much. The organ protested so vehemently in my chest. It was as if someone had their fist around it, squeezing the life out of me. Not just because of what Drake said about wanting to break me. He was right about Stuart. He would never stop coming after them. Never stop wanting the truth. Never stop plotting their destruction.

My fingers went to my chest, rubbing it even though it wouldn’t stop the pain. I could barely even feel Prescott’s hand wrapped around my other one. It was all I could do to focus on not screaming at the four of them about how fucked up all of this was.

“He wants you dead, but not before you admit you killed his sons,” I managed to get out. “He needs that first.”

I wanted to tell them Stuart had called me a wanton whore for being with them, but the words caught in my throat. Even though West had broken me down last night and put me back together with such tender care and affection, I still couldn’t say it. Still couldn’t tell them the truth about Stuart and his treatment. I don’t know what was holding me back. Perhaps it was the fact the four of them had planned to use me in their own revenge plot. They were going

to use me as a pawn, just like Stuart had.

West walked over with a plate and set it down in front of me. I looked up at him. Into those amber eyes I'd loved most of my life. At the man who'd given me comfort and love. Who always stayed by my side, no matter what happened or the things we did. And I needed him. Fuck, did I need him. I wanted his comfort more than anything else.

My heart still recognises you. It still belongs to you.

I was up and out of my chair, ripping my hand from Prescott's before I wrapped myself around West, pressing my face into his chest. Breathing him in felt like coming home. For a moment, I could pretend he was the boy I'd known all those years ago. Feel his heart hammering in his chest and know it belonged to me.

He stroked my hair and leant closer, nuzzling his face into it as if he couldn't help himself, either.

"Little Scar?"

"I need you," I whispered into his t-shirt.

It wasn't a lie. West called me his little warrior, but sometimes I didn't feel very brave. Right now, I was trying so hard to hold it all together. To not cry over the fact my best friends had wanted to break me. They were going to use me for their own means, and I wasn't okay with it.

"You need to eat."

I nodded against his chest. I was running on empty at this point.

West sat down in my vacated chair, setting me in his lap and tipping my face up to his. He stroked my cheek with his thumb. Then he turned me to face the table and placed the knife and fork in my hands. For the next five minutes, no one said anything as I ate the eggs, bacon, and toast he'd made for me. When I was done, I leant back against West's chest and he wrapped his arms around me.

"Better?" he murmured in my ear.

With something in my stomach, I didn't feel so weak. And having him at my back made me feel... braver. That's what the boys had always done for me. They raised me up, so I wasn't scared to be me.

"A little."

"Even queens need someone to lean on when everything gets dark."

I shouldn't be surprised at his perceptiveness. At how he knew what I needed.

“You’re not just someone to me though.”

“I know.”

It was like an unspoken agreement between us. We didn’t need to say it. Open that can of worms between us when I was already dealing with everything else.

I turned to Drake, who was leaning against the table.

“What changed?”

His brow furrowed for a long moment.

“You.”

“Me?”

“You changed everything.”

West stroked my stomach, making me shift in his lap.

“Does that mean when you drugged me, it wasn’t part of your plans to break me?”

None of us had said it out loud before, but facts were facts. They had drugged and fucked me together.

“No. It wasn’t. That came... after.”

“After what?”

“After we all realised we wanted you as a woman more than we wanted to use you,” Prescott said. “We played it off as being a part of our plans, but that’s not the truth. I think we can all admit it.”

When no one disagreed with Prescott’s statement, I looked down at the table. I’m not sure it made what they’d done any better. How could any of this be okay? Then again, I wasn’t expecting anything else. They’d changed in the past ten years. Become darker versions of themselves. Men with a moral compass that didn’t fit society’s standards, only their own. And in a lot of ways, I couldn’t fault the way they were. I was just as fucked up inside. I hadn’t ever been a good girl who did as she was told. I’d always been reckless. And I was my own person. No one else got to tell me how to be or what was right or wrong. I’d forgotten that version of Scarlett, but I knew her now. I was more than aware of who I’d been and who I’d become.

“And making me kill that guy?”

“Like we told you at the time. Loyalty and something to hold over you. It wasn’t a part of our original plans, but it served our purposes in trying to break

you. Except it didn't break you, little Scar, it made you stronger," West said, continuing to stroke my stomach.

It had broken me, but Francis put me back together that night. He made it all okay. And I'd be forever grateful to him for it. My safe place was in his arms with him calling me his little whore. Stuart hadn't taken it from me last night. I wouldn't let him steal these four men away from me again. I couldn't.

"Only because Frankie made sure I didn't fall apart," I murmured.

Francis was still sat on the sofa, staring out of the window. I wanted to go to him because I knew he was suffering on the inside. However, our conversation about the truth wasn't done yet.

"He's good like that," West whispered. "You've always needed him to keep you safe."

I turned to look at him.

"Is that why you're okay with this? Because you know I need them?"

"Yes."

He said it so matter of fact like it was obvious he would give me what I needed. I didn't know what to say. It was something the old West would have done. Maybe the boy West hadn't died the night of my accident. It was traumatic for me. And it must have been so for him too. My mind had protected me. But what had it done to him? It was a conversation for another day when things weren't so... precarious.

I turned back to Drake.

"Okay, so this plan... it's changed now?"

He gave me a sharp nod.

"Then what's next?"

Drake shifted, dropping his hand and curling around the edge of the table.

"You're not... angry?"

"Oh, trust me, I'm not happy, but me having a go at all of you is not going to get us anywhere. It's not going to change what happened. I want to focus on the future... and how you're going to make it up to me."

He didn't respond to me immediately. The furrow in his brow made me want to smooth it away. Yes, Drake and I had a tumultuous relationship, but it didn't change the fact I cared about him. Didn't erase our friendship nor our past.

I leant forward, reaching out and running my fingers over his hand. Drake

looked down at where I was touching him. His indigo eyes held a fuck ton of emotion in them for once. He let me see his pain. It leaked out of him, battering me with its intensity.

“I’m sorry for hurting you,” he all but whispered.

He turned his hand over, allowing me to stroke his palm instead. I ran my fingers over his calloused tips.

“I need to know what else Stuart said to you last night.”

I didn’t look away from him, even though thinking about Stuart made me want to run.

“The memory stick was just a ploy... a test to see if I’d do what he asked of me. And he knows it didn’t work. I don’t think it was meant to. He thinks you got to me because Mason told him I’m sleeping with all of you. I think that’s why he told me about the other women. And before you ask, no, I’m not upset about it. I needed to know the truth from your side of it rather than his.”

Drake gripped my hand in his, reassuring me he understood.

“He said you’d want me dead when you found out I was here to destroy you. He doesn’t realise I know. And he told me it was Mason’s job to keep me alive if he wants me... that Mason plans to punish me for being with all of you when this is over.”

It was all I could tell them. The abuse Stuart had hurled at me wasn’t worth repeating.

“You being dead is the last thing we’d ever want, Scarlett.”

“I know. I’m not worried about that. I don’t want to go back to him again. I can’t. So whatever your plans are, it can’t be that.”

I didn’t care what they were going to do to him. Staying away from Stuart and Mason was my priority. The things I’d learnt about the two of them made my skin crawl. And the fact Stuart had put his hands on me last night. I couldn’t go back to that. Back to my abuser. Never again would I allow him to get to me.

“Are you going to tell us what he’s done to you?”

I looked away. I should tell them. And yet I didn’t want it to make a difference to what they were planning on doing to Stuart. I needed to know what they intended first. I needed to make sure I could trust them to keep me safe. None of them had yet earned my forgiveness.

“I’m not ready to talk about it. And I want to know what you intend to do

about him.”

“We haven’t decided yet.”

My eyes went to Drake again.

“What do you mean?”

“Everything has changed since you remembered us. But I suppose one thing hasn’t...”

“That is?”

He gave me a smile.

“We want Stuart dead.”

THIRTY THREE

PRESCOTT

Scarlett stared up at Drake with a frown. She'd been awfully calm about everything, even though I could see the emotional strain all this was having on her. I wasn't sure what was holding her back from telling us about her life with Stuart. And I planned to find out, but not yet. She clearly needed a little more time.

"I should have expected that," she muttered and shook her head.

She slid her hand from Drake's and sat back against West's chest. I wanted her in my lap, needing me that way. This jealousy shit needed to fuck right off.

"I guess what happened last night changes things," she said after a moment.

Drake gave her a sharp nod. The fact Stuart had played with her mind pissed me off. I wanted to wring his neck. Judging by the state she'd been in when she got back, there was more to the story than what she'd told us.

"Well, in that case... whatever plans you make, I don't want to be left out of them. I'm not a pawn, nor will I allow you to continue using me like one. You left me out of your plans once and look where it got us." She waved a hand around. "And if you want me to trust you... and forgive you, then you're going to start treating me like the fucking equal I am. Is that understood?"

West rested his chin on her shoulder.

"There's my little warrior," he murmured before pressing a kiss to her neck.

I watched Scarlett shiver in his embrace, but her gaze didn't leave Drake's. While we'd always been a democracy, she knew as well as I did, he was the sticking point in this situation. I could see the cogs turning in Drake's mind. Always processing all outcomes before he made a response. It was his way. Totally anal if you asked me, but I was the 'forge ahead without thinking' one of

our group. And I had no issues with including Scarlett in our plans going forward. We were a team, after all. Bound together by fate, need, and desire.

It was plain and simple. We needed her. And she needed us.

“Yes,” Drake said simply after a full minute had ticked by.

“Good.”

Then Scarlett’s attention drifted from Drake towards Francis. He looked like he wanted to be sick. I knew the Chelsea situation weighed heavily on him. It was time he put it to bed once and for all.

“Frankie,” she called softly.

At the sound of her voice, he turned his head, and she beckoned him over with her fingers. It took a few moments before he rose from the sofa and made his way over to us. He stood next to Scarlett, who hadn’t got up from West’s lap. She took his hand and pressed a kiss to his knuckles. He let out a long breath.

“Sit with me?” she murmured, pressing his hand to her cheek.

The way his grey eyes broke in front of us made me aware of just how much Francis was holding onto inside. Scarlett hadn’t mentioned if they’d exchanged those three little words with each other yet, but it was clear by the way they looked at each other, both of them had fallen in love.

He stroked her cheek with his thumb before he shifted away, taking the chair from the end of the table where Drake was leaning and placing it next to Scarlett and West. Then he sat down and leant over, placing his head in Scarlett’s lap. Her fingers went to his hair, stroking the strands like she was soothing a lost child. His hand curled around her thigh in a rather possessive manner.

“We need to talk about a couple of things,” she said a moment later, still caressing Francis’ head. “This relationship between the five of us... I don’t want it to end, but I need you to know I’m not okay with how things have gone down. Especially not the way you drugged me. Both times you’ve... shared me, they’ve been under fucked up circumstances.”

I couldn’t blame her for it. She had been under the influence of Ecstasy last time we’d fucked her together.

“So, this time it’s going to be on my terms. I decide what happens and when. You’re all going to earn my forgiveness by doing what I tell you to.”

None of us said a word. I had a feeling I knew what she was going to ask of

us given the conversation that had occurred between us when I'd fucked her up against my window the day West and Drake brought her home.

She looked between us before taking a breath.

"I want it to happen tomorrow night." Her eyes went to me. "And I want Pres to be in control of what happens. I want him to tell you how to fuck me whilst he watches us."

I shifted in my seat, the thought of it arousing me way more than was appropriate right now.

"You want to put Prescott in charge?" Drake said through his teeth.

"Yes. Is that going to be a problem?"

Scarlett's voice was almost sickly sweet. I put a hand to my mouth to stop myself from snorting.

"It's fine with me," Francis said without moving from his spot in Scarlett's lap. Her fingers were tangled in his locks. "I'll do whatever you want, Scar. I just want you. That's all I care about."

"I'm in," West said, nuzzling Scarlett's neck. "But don't you fucking tell me to do something you know I won't, Pres."

He was warning me not to order him to kiss her. And quite frankly, I had zero plans of forcing him into dealing with his shit with Scarlett. It was between them. She'd address it when she felt the time was right.

"You have my word," I replied, giving him a wink.

He eyed me with suspicion for a moment but turned back to Scarlett when he realised I wasn't joking. She was still looking at Drake, waiting to see what he would say.

"Fine, tomorrow night," he finally said, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Are you sure?" Scarlett asked, with a twinkle in her hazel-green eyes.

I could tell she was thoroughly winding Drake up with her behaviour. His hands flexed on his arms and he looked tense. He couldn't do a damn thing about it. She wasn't going to let him punish her. Not when we were meant to be earning her forgiveness.

"Yes."

She clapped her hands together.

"Good. I look forward to it."

She turned my way and gave me a bright smile.

“We need to talk.”

Her hands went back to Francis’ hair.

“I know, little lamb.”

She gave me a nod before she leant closer to Francis, stroking his hair back from his forehead.

“I need to speak to Pres now,” she whispered.

His hand around her thigh tightened.

“We can talk later,” I volunteered, knowing she would likely say no.

It’s not like I wanted to have a conversation about my stupid jealousy and my father, even though I knew it had to happen.

“It’s okay,” Francis said with a long sigh. “I’ll be fine.”

He sat up, forcing Scarlett to drop her hands from him. She slid out of West’s lap, taking a step closer to Francis. Leaning down, she cupped his face with her hands and pressed her mouth to his. He clutched her t-shirt in his fists as she kissed him. Before she pulled away, she pressed kisses down his jaw and nuzzled his face with her nose.

“Later, okay?”

He nodded, letting go of her t-shirt and looking away. Scarlett had a furrow between her brows as she stepped back and indicated with her hand I should follow her. I got up and walked with her up the stairs to my room. Scarlett lowered herself into my armchair when we got there, leaving me to stand by the window. I placed my hand on it, staring out at the skyline.

“I’m jealous of the fact you went to West last night.”

There was no point in beating around the bush. Scarlett deserved my honesty after everything between us.

“I have no right to feel that way. He gives you things I can’t, and I promise that’s okay, but you have to understand, seeing you so distressed hurt my fucking heart, little lamb. And the way you ran from me...”

I rubbed my chest with my free hand.

“I’m sorry.”

“No, don’t do that, Scarlett, don’t apologise. This is my shit. It’s not your fault you needed him.”

I felt her presence behind me a minute later. Her hands splayed out over my back before her face pressed into the centre of it.

“I always need you, Pres, always. I just... West... you know, I...”

“You loved him first.”

Her fingers dug into my skin. I hadn’t been able to keep the bitterness out of my voice.

“It’s not that. I mean, yes, I did love him first, I still... love him, but it’s not the reason I needed him last night.”

I shouldn’t ask her. I shouldn’t fucking ask her.

“Why did you?”

She turned her face, pressing her cheek into my back as her hands curled around my shoulders, the nails digging into the fabric of my t-shirt.

“I trusted him to break me.”

My breath caught in my throat.

“Break you?” I choked out.

“I needed him to degrade me without safe words or reassurances that I could stop it at any time. It had to be him. West knows me in a way no one else does and I’m not going to apologise for that.” She gripped me tighter, the sharp prick of her nails almost piercing my skin through my t-shirt. “You know I love you. I fucking love you to death. God, Prescott, you have no idea of the depths of my feelings. I ache for you. My heart hurts with loving you. And I can’t help that I love them too, okay? I can’t... but it doesn’t change my feelings for you. It never will.”

Her words ripped my fucking soul right out of my chest. I loved her to death too. I loved her so much it was like I couldn’t breathe without her. Scarlett was the one person in this world who had the power to tear me to shreds, but I trusted her not to. I trusted her with my life.

“Promise you’ll never abandon me, sweetness. I need you to promise.”

And there it was. The truth of the matter.

She let go of my shoulders, instead, wrapping her hands around my waist and encouraging me to turn around. There were tears in her eyes as she came into view. I leant back against the window. Hating myself for this conversation. Hating the understanding in her eyes. She knew. She fucking well knew.

Reaching up, she cupped my face with her small hand.

“I promise I will never abandon you, Prescott Ellis. I will never leave you in the dark. I will never walk away from what’s between us. You have my word, my

heart, and my soul. I love you.”

“Little lamb,” I whispered, pressing my face into her hand.

“This is about Ezra.”

I nodded.

“Oh, Pres.”

She dropped her hand from my face, only to go up on her tiptoes and wrap her body around mine. Her hands went to my neck, cupping the back of it.

“He doesn’t deserve you. Never has. Never will. You are so much more than he will ever know. Look at what you’ve done with your life. This place you’ve built with the others. You don’t need his approval or his praise, okay? I’m proud of you and I’m sure Rosie is too. He does not get to take away from your achievements.”

Fuck, how I craved those words from her lips. The ones having the power to heal the hole in my heart my father left behind when he abandoned me. I hadn’t seen him in years, but there was still an invisible Ezra sized scar etched onto my skin.

“You still have his number on your phone, don’t you.”

It wasn’t a question. It was a statement of fact.

“Yes,” I whispered into her hair as I pressed my face to it.

“I want you to erase it when you’re ready to let go of the pain he’s inflicted on you. When he’s no longer tied to your self-worth.”

“Okay.”

I wasn’t yet, but I had Scarlett now. She’d help me.

“Good.”

She released me, her eyes still shining with unshed tears as she dropped back to her feet.

“I know you can, Pres,” she told me as she took my hand and pressed a kiss to the heel of my palm. “You can do anything you set your mind to. I believe in you.”

“I love you, little lamb, so fucking much.”

She smiled, making me reach up and wipe the pad of my thumb under her eye, catching the tear falling from her lashes.

“And I know you love them. I want you to love them... they need you as much as I do. We all need each other.”

She brushed her fingers over my chest.

“You know, I like it when you’re all jealous and possessive of me. I shouldn’t but I do.”

I bit my lip.

“Is that so?”

She nodded, fisting my t-shirt between her fingers and tugged me against her.

“Yeah, because I’m rather jealous and possessive of you too.”

I leant closer to her.

“Trust me, sweetness, I’m aware.”

She grinned before I kissed her, melting into her embrace and knowing it would be okay. As long as we communicated and didn’t let stupid shit get in the way, we’d navigate this together. Me and my little lamb were meant to be. And I wouldn’t let anything break us apart again.

THIRTY FOUR

FRANCIS

As I raised my gloved hand to knock at her front door, I realised it was long past time I dealt with this entire situation. Deep down, I'd always known it would come to this. I knew what she was like. The way she held grudges. How she allowed shit to fester in her soul.

Chelsea McDonald was twisted in a way I recognised. In a way I knew intimately. It was the same sickness torturing me. And it's why we'd become friends.

The sound of my rapping on the wooden door rang in my ears with its finality. It would be the very last time I came here. And the last time I would ever allow my feelings for someone to blind me to the reality of who they were.

Did I want to do this?

No.

Did I have to?

Yes.

The door opened as I dropped my hand, revealing a tall girl with dark hair and olive skin. Her brown eyes were narrowed and her posture stiff.

"Hello, Francis," Chelsea said, her voice dripping with disgust. "What brings you to this neck of the woods?"

Chelsea lived in Knightsbridge in a house paid for by Daddy. The fucked up part of all this was she didn't need the money. She was a bored, over-privileged twenty-two-year-old woman who had more possessions than sense.

I understood Chelsea McDonald. I recognised the parts of her that yearned for acceptance and not to live in the shadow of other people. I shared them with her. The difference between me and Chelsea was I'd actually cared, whereas I

was a means to a fucking end for her.

“I think you know why I’m here.”

For a moment I thought she would slam the door in my face, but she sighed and stepped back, allowing me to walk into the house where this would all come to an end. She shut the door behind me and led me into the living room.

“Do you want a drink?” she asked, ever the perfect hostess her mother had taught her to be.

“No, thank you.”

“Well, I do.”

I followed her into the kitchen, watching her open the fridge and extract a bottle of wine. She got a glass out of the cupboard, popped the cork and poured the white liquid. As she sipped at it, she leant against the counter and levelled her gaze on me.

“I didn’t expect you to come. I thought it would be Drake. That’s what he told me... he would be the one to end it if it ever came to it. Doesn’t really surprise me. The big stoic one with the blood kink being my executioner.”

She shook her head.

“But not you, Francis. You’re not the type.”

I dug my hands in my pockets. She had no idea. I’d kept the monster hidden from almost everyone in my life. I didn’t want to keep him from Scarlett any longer. And only when I put this to rest would I be able to show her the truth.

“You know, it’s funny you say that, Chels... me not being the type.”

Her doe eyes searched mine.

“What’s funny about it?”

“You’re acting like you know everything about me.”

“Don’t I? I remember you liked to talk... a lot. Especially about her.”

Her voice soured on the word ‘her’. Yes, I’d talked about Scarlett, but I’d never told her who my girl was. I’d never given Chelsea a name nor the full story. It was more about the loss of my best friend all those years ago. How it tore me up inside. Those were the things I’d told her. Not Scarlett’s secrets. And certainly not mine.

“We’re not here to talk about her.”

She sipped at her wine.

“No? You sure about that? You don’t wish to atone for your sins one last

time?”

I shrugged.

“I have nothing to atone for, Chelsea. It’s you who thinks everyone has something they’re hiding. Some kind of darkness staining their souls with corruption.”

There was only one regret I had. Causing this woman physical pain because of my own distracted mind. But I didn’t need atonement. I needed to end this for good. To put my demon to rest.

Perhaps before Scarlett came back into my life, I would have said otherwise. Now Chelsea had betrayed all of us to Stuart Carver, my need to apologise had all but evaporated. I may have been emotional when I told Drake I needed to do this earlier, but now I was resolute. Especially given the petulance in Chelsea’s voice. The way she was looking at me like she could wind me back around her little finger. It was a pity she didn’t know the real me. She had no fucking clue.

“Yeah right. Last time we saw each other, you couldn’t stop apologising for what you did.”

“I see the spoiled little princess is still front and centre.”

She put her glass down on the counter and scowled.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You want me to apologise because you like the attention. It has nothing to do with me or what I need.”

Her mouth thinned. My emotions had been all over the place on the way over here but seeing her had brought it home to me. She didn’t give a shit about anyone but herself. I was merely someone she liked to toy with.

“You’re not even sorry you’re here to kill me?”

“You knew what the price of talking was, Chelsea. Don’t put this on me. And I’m not here to kill you. You’re going to do that to yourself.”

“Excuse me?”

I smiled at her, extracting my hands from my pockets and spreading them.

“Did you think I would finish you off myself?”

“Isn’t that why you’ve come?”

“That’s not how we operate. Not when it comes to people like you.”

“People like me?”

Did she not know? She came from money. While she might be the youngest

of five, she was still spoilt as fuck. All of this shit had been her acting out because the rest of her siblings were always more successful than her. Always achieved more than her. Made her parents proud. Chelsea was the disappointment of the family. The one who could never do anything right. The girl who spent her parent's money on frivolous activities. The one her parents didn't think would amount to much.

At first, I sympathised with her plight. It wasn't like my parents had ever made me feel like I was second best to anyone, given I was an only child. However, I was the quieter one out of me, Prescott, Drake, and West. The one in the shadow of their popularity. It was stupid because they'd never made me feel that way. I was the one who didn't think highly of myself, and it showed.

In that respect, I was the same as Chelsea. Always second best. And yet... I wasn't bitter about it in the way she was. I didn't act out like a fucking child because I didn't get my way. No, I took my shit and dealt with it. I made something of myself off my own back.

I didn't have sympathy for the woman in front of me any longer.

"Yes, you have everything you could have ever wanted, Chels, but the one thing you don't have is a fucking clue about what it's like to really struggle."

She pursed her lips and didn't respond to me for a long minute.

"If you're not here to kill me, then why the fuck did you turn up on my doorstep?"

"I mean, if you want to get technical, I am here to make sure you die. But as for who pulls the trigger? Well, that would be you."

She scoffed.

"You expect me to kill myself?"

I shrugged.

"Pretty much."

"Fuck you, Francis."

I took a step towards her.

"I'm sorry I hurt you, Chelsea. It wasn't my intention. But you talked... and to Stuart Carver, of all people. If it had been anyone else, we may have let it slide, but no, you had to talk to the one person who has a vendetta against us. So, yes, you are going to kill yourself because it's the least you can do for me after the shitstorm you've caused."

“The least I can do for you?”

“That’s right.”

She tried to lunge for me, but I sidestepped her and shook my head.

“Don’t make this harder than it has to be.”

I wasn’t about to leave my DNA anywhere in this fucking place. In fact, I planned to make this as clean as possible, but if she was going to resist, then I would just have to make sure it looked like she’d done it all herself.

“You’re a bastard. All of you are,” she seethed, staring at me with no small amount of irritation.

“And yet you still let us pay to fuck you in ways that would make your mother blush.”

“Screw you!”

She tried to come for me again, but I was wise to her shit. I grabbed hold of her arms and wrestled them behind her back. When she tried to stamp on my foot, I turned her around and directed her out of the kitchen towards the stairs.

“Get the fuck off me!”

“I told you not to make it hard on yourself, Chels. It didn’t have to be this way.”

I picked her up when she struggled and carried her up the stairs. She weighed nothing, so clearly hadn’t been taking care of herself since we last saw each other. Unsurprising really. Probably decided she would fake an illness to spite her parents.

She kicked out and screamed at me the whole way up, but I ignored her. It wasn’t anything I hadn’t heard before. When I got to her bedroom, I dumped her on her bed, held her down and took my bag off. From it, I extracted a rope I’d fashioned into a noose earlier. While it might be extremely fucked up for me to decide this was how she would die, I didn’t care. Ropes were my thing. And knowing I snuffed out her fucking life by choking it out of her, well, that was just a bonus.

“Now, I’m going to need you to write a little note to Mummy and Daddy, telling them all your fucking woes and how you can’t live in the world any longer.”

“If you think I’m going to—”

“I think you’re going to do as I say, because you know if I don’t finish you

off, then Drake will. And he won't be so fucking nice about it."

She shut her mouth then, staring up at me with no small amount of fear in her eyes. I wasn't playing around. Chelsea had talked. She'd fucked things up for me and, more importantly, for Scarlett. If she hadn't said a fucking word, then Stuart wouldn't have been able to tell Scarlett about this shit. It's not like we would have kept it from our woman, but it was our story to tell, not his.

"Go write the note. Now."

She got off the bed and stalked over to her dresser while I prepared the rest of the things I needed. Walking out of the room, I went over to the stairs and looked down at the lobby. Then I knelt down and looped the rope around the railings, tying it off so it was secure. I went downstairs and found a chair from the dining room, placing it underneath the hanging rope.

Chelsea walked out of her bedroom and looked at me from over the railings. Her eyes went to the rope and the noose. She paled a moment later.

"Are you serious?"

"About what exactly?"

She waved at my setup.

"You want me to fucking hang myself?"

I shrugged.

"Yes."

"That's sick."

"It's no less than you deserve for talking. Now come down here with your note."

She stomped down the stairs, making it very clear she was a little sour puss over the whole situation. I didn't pity her fate. If you fucked with my family, I wouldn't hesitate to do what was necessary. Drake thought I wouldn't go through with it. But what he didn't realise was I had one huge fucking incentive.

I was protecting Scarlett.

Not because it was the right thing to, but because I fucking well loved her.

"Give it to me," I demanded when she got to the bottom of the stairs.

She shoved it into my hands. I read it over, shaking my head at the overdramatic nature of it. But it was Chelsea all over.

"Get on the chair."

I left her to do it while I set the note on the side table next to a vase of white

roses. Picking one out of the vase, I placed it by the note. Then I walked over to the woman I had come to despise for her actions.

“Put the noose over your head.”

“Who is going to believe I did this myself?” she asked, her voice full of annoyance.

I smiled.

“Only everyone who knows you have a flair for the dramatic, Chels.”

She grabbed the rope and slipped it over her head, letting it settle around her neck.

“Now, pull it tight or you’re going to have a rather painful death.”

I didn’t tell her she would die in agony, regardless. Didn’t seem to be any point.

Her hands tightened the noose, then she looked at me. For the first time, I saw regret in her expression.

“Are you really going to make me do this?”

“I’m not making you do anything. You’re doing this to yourself, remember?”

“Fuck you.”

I decided I’d had enough and kicked out the chair from under her. Crossing my arms over my chest, I heard the rope snap into place and saw her hands go to it. I watched her struggle as the rope began to choke her, pressing down on her windpipe. Her legs flailed. She started gasping for air and trying to reach for me.

I did nothing, merely waited for the life to drain from her eyes. Witnessed her choking, strangled by the noose until her legs stopped kicking and her arms dropped to her sides. Her head lolled the next moment.

Uncrossing my arms and I walked closer, observing her to make sure she was dead. Chelsea wasn’t breathing. Her chest had gone utterly still. It was done. I’d protected my family.

I went upstairs and collected my bag, keeping things exactly the way they were so as not to leave a trace of my presence. There were other details I attended to, like pouring out the rest of her wine, so it looked like she’d had her last glass before the end. Then I walked out of her house, shutting the door behind me, and eyed the street. No one was about as I walked down the steps from her house.

It was time I returned home to my family now I'd handled that little threat.

It would be on the news soon. Chelsea McDonald, the youngest daughter of Winston McDonald, the owner of McDonald hotels, would be found dead in her house from a suicide. It would be sad, of course, but I didn't give two shits any longer. There was nothing to tie me back to her, but it sent a fucking message to Stuart Carver.

You fuck with us. We'll fuck with you right back.

And I was going to make sure that fucker paid a heavy price for his interference in our lives.

We're going to come for you, Stuart. You better fucking watch yourself.

THIRTY FIVE

FRANCIS

When I got back to the penthouse, I found Drake waiting for me. He asked me if it was done, and I nodded before making my way upstairs. I didn't feel like telling him what happened. It wasn't relevant, anyway. As long as the job was done, it didn't matter how I'd gone about killing her. Besides, if I hadn't been able to go through with it, I would have texted him earlier.

I opened the door to my bedroom, stepped in and shut it behind me, letting out a sigh. There were no regrets in my heart over killing Chelsea. She deserved her fate after she'd betrayed us. I was merely weary from dealing with so much over the past couple of months.

As I turned towards my bed, I stopped dead in my tracks. Scarlett sat cross-legged up against the headboard, her long wavy hair up in a messy bun with a rather tight tank top and a tiny pair of shorts on. The sight of her made my mouth go dry.

"Hey," she said, her voice soft.

I hadn't expected her to be here when I got back. And the fact she was... it gave me a weird feeling in my chest. Like my heart was trying to escape. The cadence of it had me wanting to rub my chest to stop it from being so fucking loud.

Without thinking about it any further, I walked over to the bed, kicked off my shoes and crawled onto it. I lay down and put my head in her lap. My fingers went to her thigh, stroking her soft skin as if to remind me this woman was mine.

"Do you want to talk about it?" she asked, her hands going to my hair.

I'd never enjoyed having it stroked before her, but her small hands playing

with the strands calmed me. It was her. Scarlett quieted my soul.

“Are you sure you want to know what I did?”

Her hands didn't stop stroking.

“I'm not scared of you or what you're capable of, Frankie, nor will it change anything between us.”

My fingers moved higher, stroking along the hem of her shorts.

“I made a girl kill herself.”

“Chelsea.”

I nodded. She'd heard us talk about Chelsea earlier. It was time I told Scarlett the truth about my relationship with the girl whose life I just helped end.

“Chelsea was, I guess, special to me, but in a really fucked up sense. She came from money. Her father owns a chain of hotels. Youngest of five and always in their shadow. Her demons... I understood them. And she understood mine.”

My fingers dipped underneath her shorts, running along the seam of her underwear. Scarlett's breath hitched. I needed to touch her. It grounded me.

“Prescott met her in a club over a year ago. He brought her back here, and we shared her that night. We didn't pay her, but it soon became clear she was okay with our...”

“Your sexual desires.”

I stroked my fingers across her pussy, still hidden by her underwear, making her jolt.

“Yes. And so we set out an arrangement with her like we did with the others. She signed an NDA. We were very clear about the terms. She knew what would happen if she talked.”

I let out a sigh. Chelsea had used us like we'd used her. Our play sessions were an escape. A way to get out of her own head and indulge in something twisted.

“At first, she was like the others who came before her. She would visit us, we'd play, and she'd go home with money in hand. Then she started to linger afterwards. The others ignored her, but I let her hang around. Allowed her to ask me things. Then we started having sessions with just the two of us... and sometimes we talked afterwards.”

I wished I'd never started talking to her. Sometimes you did things when you were desperate for a connection. When you longed for someone you'd lost.

“I told her about you. I mean, not in any real detail, but that I’d lost a girl who was special to me. And the closer it got to us being able to set the bait, to encourage Stuart to send you after us... the more I needed a connection to something... someone.”

My chest ached all over again. I shifted in her lap, turning my head to look up at her. Scarlett’s eyes were on me. They weren’t full of disgust or anger but understanding.

Fuck. She looks just like she did when we were younger.

Scarlett always had that way about her. The one making you want to spill all your secrets because you knew she’d take your hand and tell you it was okay. Tell you she understood what you were going through. She was the one person who had never failed to reassure me.

“What I really wanted was you, but I couldn’t have you.”

Her hand left my hair, her fingers going to my cheek and stroking it instead. I wanted to kiss her. To drown in her.

I love you, Scarlett Nyx.

It was high time I admitted it to myself. I’d fallen in love with her. And there was no reason for me to be scared she couldn’t feel the same way. Not when she looked at me like I was everything she needed.

“Then it happened... the thing that fucked everything up between me and her.”

I looked away from my girl and stared out the window instead. I could see the night’s sky from where I was. It was beautiful, but not quite as stunning as Scarlett herself.

“There’s something I haven’t told you about my desires.”

Scarlett moved her hand from my cheek to rest it on my shoulder.

“I want... I want to wrap you in metal chains, to make them so tight it almost hurts with the strain of being bound by them. I want it so fucking badly sometimes, it makes me crazy, but... but I fucked up with Chelsea and now I’m scared to use them on anyone else.”

She let out a breath, then kept stroking my hair with her other hand.

“What happened?”

“The day we found out you’d applied for a job, I had a session with her. And I was so fucking distracted by the thought of seeing you again, by knowing all of

our efforts had finally paid off... I made the chains too tight. I started the session with her, but I wasn't really in the room. And when I twisted her a certain way, it pulled on her arm to the point where I almost dislocated her shoulder, almost broke her entire arm. She was screaming and crying about the pain. I thought it was a part of the game at first, but it became clear it wasn't and I unchained her immediately."

I swallowed, feeling bile rising in the back of my throat. The whole thing made me feel ill. It was crazy because I killed without remorse several times. Guess when it came to sexual games, it was different for me. They were about pleasure not snuffing out a life.

"She went crazy at me, telling me I was insane and this was all sick... that she only did it to make me happy. Then she ran out. I didn't know what the fuck to do. It messed me up, you know, seeing her like that... having her hurl all this abuse at me like I was some kind of sick deviant who got off on keeping women chained up against their will, which is the opposite of what I want."

Sighing, I turned my face into her lap, not wanting to look at the sky any longer.

"It hurt because I thought she understood me, but no, she just cared about herself and her own sick need to get back at her parents. It's why she was seeing us in the first place. She knew her parents would hate it. Then West had to go make it all worse by giving her pills to help with the pain and she overdosed on them."

Scarlett squeezed my shoulder, but I didn't look up at her.

"The next time I saw her, a few days later, she told us all to go fuck ourselves and she never wanted anything to do with us again. Drake warned her what would happen if she talked, but she told him she wouldn't say a word if we stayed away. So we did. I hadn't seen her until tonight... and knowing she'd told Stuart. How it must have sounded to you coming from him... well, I couldn't forgive her for it. I told you once I would kill anyone who hurt you. Her actions caused you harm. I made her pay the price for talking."

I lapsed into silence when I'd got it all out of my system. There wasn't anything else I could tell Scarlett unless she wanted details. I imagined she wasn't interested in knowing everything that had gone down.

For a long time, neither of us said a word. I relaxed into her touch, feeling the

weight of the burden lifting off me. I'd held onto this pain for so long. Telling Scarlett felt cathartic. Admitting the truth to her... helped me in ways I'd never imagined possible.

"Do you feel better now it's over?" she whispered, her fingers burying deeper into my hair and stroking across my scalp.

"Yes."

"Are you tired?"

"A little."

"Then I'll help you get ready for bed."

I was about to tell her there was no need, but she leant down and pressed her lips to my forehead.

"Let me take care of you, Frankie, I want to."

How on earth could I deny her? I'd spent my whole life looking after everyone else. Making sure they didn't fuck up beyond belief. And I was tired. So fucking tired.

"Okay."

She encouraged me to get up and go into the bathroom to brush my teeth. When I came out, she'd turned out the lights, leaving her illuminated by the city below us. Scarlett sat at the end of the bed as I approached her. Her fingers went to my belt, undoing it before she unzipped my jeans. I allowed her to pull them off me, taking my socks with them. Her hands curled around my hips, drawing me between her legs.

"What happened was an accident, Frankie. You didn't mean to hurt her." She pressed her face to my stomach, nuzzling it with her nose. "I know you would never hurt anyone like that during sex on purpose. You're the kindest, most compassionate man I know." Pulling back, she stared up at me. "It's okay to make mistakes. It doesn't change who you are. And who you are is beautiful in my eyes."

My heart was on fucking fire. My hand went to her cheek. I needed to touch her. To feel her.

"I watch you because I can't help myself. You're a fallen god, carved from the heavens and made to be mine. That's how I see you."

Her fingers went to the hem of my t-shirt, pushing it up my chest. I let go of her hair to tug it off, dropping it on the floor and allowing her to see me. Her

hands ran up my abs, tracing lines along the grooves and edges.

“You are perfect. I never want you to feel like you aren’t everything I need. You’re not second best, Frankie. You belong at the top of the podium. And I will worship you until the day we fade from this world.”

I stroked her face, not wanting to say a word in case it broke this moment between us.

“Thank you for protecting me. For protecting our family tonight. I appreciate everything you’ve done and everything you do for me. Let me show you how much.”

THIRTY SIX

SCARLETT

Staring up at Francis, I couldn't help but feel for the things he'd been through. The pain he'd had to experience without me in his life. I wished I could take it away for him. My heart blazed with it. The need to make him feel better. To let him know he was king in my soul alongside his three best friends. It wasn't a matter of one being favoured over the other. I had enough room for all of them to take up equal places.

My fingers went to his boxers, tugging them down his legs. Francis didn't stop me. He kept staring at me with those silvery-grey eyes I adored so much. The way they changed with his emotions, like two storm clouds rolling in the distance.

There was a desperate need inside me to care for him. To look after Francis the way he did me. He deserved to be worshipped like the fallen god he was.

I didn't care that he'd helped a girl to her grave tonight. Nor that he'd made a mistake with her before I'd come back into his life. It didn't matter to me he was a killer. I was one too. Francis could burn the world to the ground and I would still fall at his feet. I would do it for all of them. And it's exactly what I did. I slipped off the bed and knelt at his feet, running my hands up along his hips.

"I belong here," I murmured, leaning closer to press a kiss to his happy trail, "at your feet."

He sucked in a breath, his hand going to the back of my head and cupping it. My hand went to his cock, stroking it with my fingertips in a teasing motion. The way it twitched under my caress had me wrapping my hand around it. I pressed more kisses to him, making my way closer to it with my mouth. He

started to harden, the blood rushing down to his cock as his arousal grew.

“Do you want your little whore to worship you? Show you how much she appreciates you?”

“Yes,” he choked out on a shaky breath, his fingers tightening around the back of my head.

I licked my way down his length, feeling his dick jump against my tongue. He groaned like he was a man starving for my touch. It sent a tingle rushing down my spine. He’d gone down on me so many times, but I wanted him in my mouth. I wanted his cock to choke me, starve me of oxygen because it was like Francis told me last time we’d been intimate. He was my horseman. The one who liked to deprive me of orgasms until I was a panting, begging mess.

Famine.

“Tell me what you want, Frankie. Tell me how to make you feel good.”

My fingers enclosed around his shaft, stroking while my mouth went to the tip, my tongue flicking out to curl around his crown.

“Wrap your lips around me.”

I did as he asked, sucking him between my lips and swirling my tongue around him. He let out a soft sigh as his fingers stroked along my scalp.

“Good girl.”

I hummed against his skin. Knowing I was making him happy filled the space inside me that craved their praise. It went hand in hand with when they degraded me. I liked it a little too much.

“Take me deeper, little whore. Use your tongue... show me how much you want my cock in your mouth.”

My free hand curled tighter around his hip. I took him deeper until he hit the back of my mouth. My tongue curled around him and I used my other hand to stroke what I couldn’t fit. There was a certain kind of power in having a cock in your mouth, knowing you could make the man it was attached to lose himself in you, in the pleasure you were giving him. Even when he rammed his cock down your throat and made it hard for you to breathe, you were still in control. You had him at your mercy.

I sucked him, making sure to get his dick nice and wet with each slide of my mouth along his shaft. The soft exhales he made and the way he held my head told me how much he wanted this. How much he needed me.

I love you, Francis Beaufort. I love you so much, it hurts my whole damn soul.

My hand slid from his cock to his balls, cupping them and stroking along the skin. He grunted, pressing his hips into me, forcing his cock to slide into my throat as I swallowed.

“Fuck, little whore, that’s it.”

With my mouth full, I couldn’t tell him how much I needed this too. How I wanted to give him everything. Lay myself down and offer my body, my heart and my soul up as a sacrifice. All I could do was keep sucking him. Keep showing him I wanted him this way.

Francis and I had shared so many intimacies, but this was different. He was letting me have control when usually he was the one tying me down. And I loved him even more for it.

He went deeper, making me choke on his length. The way his silver eyes glowed as he stared down at me had my pulse spiking. My nails dug into his skin, but I didn’t pull away. I wanted to give him all of me. Every single part.

“You’re such a good little whore for me.”

I pulled back slightly, slipping him from my throat before I hummed. The groan escaping his lips had me stroking him again with my fingers, wanting to work him up until he exploded. His fingers speared into the bun I’d put my hair in, keeping a hold of me so I wouldn’t go anywhere. Didn’t he know I had no intentions of leaving? I wanted to give him this.

“You feel so good. So fucking right. Fuck, Scar, I want to tie you up so fucking bad.”

His cock popped out of my mouth as I shifted my head back. My tongue ran up his shaft, glistening with my spit.

“Do you want to see the way the metal chains leave indents on my skin?” I asked, cupping his balls again as I continued to run my tongue up and down his dick.

“Fuck, yes I do. I have these small ones to wrap around your chest. They’ll look so beautiful against your skin.”

“I want that, Frankie. It makes me feel beautiful when you stare at the indents. When you mark me with your ownership.”

His resulting groan as I licked his balls made me smile against his skin. Then I sucked him into my mouth again, bathing the head of his cock with my tongue.

Honestly, the thought of him chaining me up turned me on far more than I expected it to. I loved the ropes. This didn't feel that different, only it would put more strain on me. Being at his mercy, feeling the fear, made me wet as hell. It drove me to crave darker, more depraved sex. The next time I asked Prescott to chase me, I wanted it to be dirtier... perhaps when it was raining so we'd get muddy while he fucked me until I cried.

First, I wanted Francis to wrap me up in his chains and make me see stars. He needed it. It was clear this was important to him, especially given he was scared to do it now. I trusted him with my life. I knew he wouldn't hurt me. I wanted to restore his faith in himself.

Francis had fixed me. I was going to fix him right back.

I slid my mouth down his shaft, enjoying the way his hips moved to meet me and his hand in my hair, encouraging me further.

"Fuck, harder, suck me harder."

Doing as he asked, I hollowed out my cheeks and gave him more suction. His head tipped back with his groan.

"What did I do to deserve you?" he muttered.

I wanted to tell him he didn't do a single thing. Francis was someone I could drown in, no matter what.

Working what I couldn't fit in my mouth with my hand, I went faster, wanting him to come. I needed it so fucking bad. My pussy throbbed, but I ignored it. This was about him. Making my man feel good. Soothing him. Bringing him a sense of peace.

He let out a strangled sort of moan before his head dropped down. The piercing look in his grey eyes almost had me stopping in my tracks, but his other hand wrapped around my head and he shoved his dick down my throat without warning. I gagged around it, the sound echoing around the room.

"Fuck," he grunted before erupting, spilling his cum down my throat.

I could do nothing but let him, holding myself there until he was spent, and he pulled out of my mouth. Choking a little, I swallowed. Francis stroked my hair in a gentle motion, reassuring me I was okay. I leant my face against his thigh, still clutching his hip. Letting him go felt like effort.

"Good girl," he murmured. "My good little whore."

I nuzzled his skin, practically preening for his praise. There was a deep-seated

need inside me. One that desperately craved the words from their lips. The ones telling me I'd pleased them.

After a moment, I pulled away and shifted back towards the bed, climbing onto it. I took Francis' hand and encouraged him to get in bed. He pulled back the covers and got settled underneath them. I crawled up the bed, reaching out to grab the glass I'd left on the bedside table and taking a sip. Then I straddled his hips and leant over him, bringing my mouth to his. Francis kissed me, his lips melding with mine before his tongue probed the seam. It wasn't desperate and all-consuming, but reassuring and sweet.

"Take your clothes off," he ordered when he pulled away. "I want to feel you all over me as I fall asleep."

I pulled them off, wanting to give him exactly what he'd asked for. Sliding under the sheets next to him, I curled up against his side, loving the way he wrapped an arm around me, holding me to him. My hand brushed over his chest, coming to rest on his heart as I laid my head in the crook of his shoulder.

For a long minute, we were silent, then I kissed his skin and rubbed his chest.

"Frankie."

"Mmm?"

"Look at me."

He reached over and stroked my cheek, looking down at me with those beautiful eyes of his.

"I need you to know I trust you implicitly. You're not going to hurt me. It'll be you and me in the moment, okay? Nothing but you and me."

He shifted, turning on his side so our chests were pressed together and our mouths were breathing the same air. If I wasn't aware of how much I adored this man before, I certainly was now. He was my sun, stars, moon and sky. I couldn't imagine my life without the place of safety he provided me.

"You have no idea what that means to me, Scar... what you mean to me."

"I think I do."

He smiled, his lips brushing against mine.

"Should I bring the ropes out tomorrow, for... you know?"

He winked, which made me grin.

"For Drake?"

"Mmm."

“Yes... yes, you definitely should.”

“Consider it done.”

He kissed me again before settling back against the pillows and closing his eyes. I reached up and ran my fingers through his hair.

“I’m beginning to think you have a fetish for my hair,” he murmured.

“I like that you stopped gelling it.”

“I only did that for you... I noticed how much you like playing with it.”

Could I love him more? Probably, but my heart was so damn full right then.

I leant closer, rubbing my nose along his cheek, which only made him smile.

“Open your eyes.”

He did it slowly, meeting mine with an intense gaze. I almost got lost in those silver depths, but I had something to say to him. My hand slid down and cupped his cheek.

“Maybe now isn’t the time to admit this, but I can’t keep it locked away any longer.”

His lips parted, but he didn’t make a sound.

“I love you.”

Before he could actually respond, I pressed a kiss to his lips, wanting to cement my words with it.

“I love you,” I whispered, kissing him again. “I need you to know I can’t live without you and I love you.”

His arms tightened around me, his tongue slipping into my mouth to deepen the kiss. His body rubbed against mine, the friction making me ache. When he released my mouth, he flipped me onto my back, pressing between my legs and rocking his hips into mine. He pinned my hands by my head, leaning closer to run his tongue along my jaw to my ear.

“I can’t live without you either,” he murmured. “And I’m going to show you how much by fucking you until you scream my name, claw my back and beg for more.”

I shook underneath him, trembling with the need for him to make good on his threat.

“Please,” I whispered, feeling his dick hard against me. “Sucking your cock made me so wet.”

It didn’t matter if he hadn’t said it back. I had to get the words out. To

reassure Francis, he was in my heart for life. Because I really did love this man to death.

“Then it’s time I took care of this pussy so my little whore doesn’t go without.”

His hand slid between us, notching his cock to me, and with one thrust of his hips, he drove home. He made good on his threat to fuck me until I screamed his name in ecstasy and bliss. When we lay together afterwards, I whispered how much I loved him all over again until his breathing evened out and he drifted off. He’d been through a lot today. Knowing I could help alleviate his worries and pain somewhat allowed me to fall asleep without a single care in the world.

But the world was waiting for us. Waiting to sink its claws so deep and pull apart the pocket of peace we’d forged. And it was only a matter of time before it came knocking on our door to wreak havoc on us again.

THIRTY SEVEN

SCARLETT

I walked into the play space with my head held high. The only stitch of clothing I had on was a little black silk robe that fell to mid-thigh. Considering what I was about to engage in, I should have walked in naked, but I was apprehensive about it. The last time I'd been in this room, Drake had punished me. And I wanted to erase the memory. Replace it with something new. Tonight was about forgiveness and coming together as a unit. The way we were always meant to be.

Well, I wasn't sure our relationship with each other would have grown into this if I'd not been stolen from their lives. If it would have turned sexual with anyone else but West. And yet, I couldn't imagine not having them this way.

My four men were all bare as they waited for me. And they were *mine*. No one else could have them. They belonged to me and I to them. My mouth watered at the sight of their perfect, hard, naked bodies. I was an incredibly lucky woman.

Prescott sat in an armchair facing the end of the bed while the other three were sitting in front of him. They were all waiting for me.

I'd had a very long discussion with Prescott about the dos and don'ts of this evening after we got upstairs when we were done with work for the day. This was about me, after all, and what I wanted and needed. I'd already prepared myself in every way I could before I came in here. I didn't want anything getting in the way of pleasure.

Walking over to Prescott, I laid my hand on his shoulder. His blue eyes met mine as he turned his head up towards me. The smile he gave me set my heart on fire.

"Hello, little lamb. Are you ready to begin?"

I leant down and pressed a kiss to his forehead, stroking his cheek in the

process. It would be a while before he got to touch me, so I savoured his skin on mine.

“Yes,” I whispered in his ear. “Knowing you’re going to be watching has me wet already.”

I pulled away before he could respond, straightened and dropped my robe. The way four sets of eyes darkened as they roamed over me made me feel powerful. It reassured me I was in charge. In control.

I stepped towards the bed, keeping Prescott at my back. My hand drifted to the biggest scar on my stomach from the surgery to bolt my pelvis back together. At some point, I would need to have a conversation about what it meant to me to have lost the ability to have children, but not now. Not when this was about forgiveness. About carving out a small pocket of time for the five of us to come back together now so many of our secrets were behind us.

“Francis, go sit up against the headboard,” Prescott said.

He did as Prescott asked, shifting up the bed until his back was to the headboard. Francis’ silver eyes glinted in the low light with such wickedness, I was hard-pressed to stay where I was.

“Our little lamb told me she’s wet. I want you to check, Drake.”

I stepped closer to Drake, who wrapped his hand around my hip and tugged me closer.

“Slide your fingers between her legs.”

Drake held onto my hip with one hand, staring up at me with those terrifyingly beautiful indigo eyes of his. He ran his other hand up my inner thigh and delved between my lips, letting out a little exhale when he met my wetness.

“She’s soaking,” he murmured.

“Is she? Are you sure? I think you need to inspect further... with your mouth.”

Drake took one of my legs, pushing it up over his shoulder and forcing me up on my tiptoes to match his height. He held onto me as he buried his face in my pussy, his tongue seeking out my wet hole. My hands went to his head to steady myself as he licked me. I let out a strangled moan of pleasure.

“Does she taste good?” came Prescott’s voice.

“She tastes like a wet dream,” Drake said, pulling back slightly to look up at me again. “And she’s ready for cock.”

The deep rumble of his voice sent shivers down my spine.

“Good. Go sit on Francis’ dick, little lamb. Show him how much you appreciate him getting so hard for you.”

Drake released me, setting my leg back down on the ground. I stroked his hair before I crawled on the bed towards Francis. He already had his hand wrapped around the base of his cock, so I could slide right down on it when I reached him. We both groaned in unison at the intrusion. He wrapped his hands around my hips and encouraged me to ride him.

“Lean forward, let us see you fuck him.”

The demand from Prescott had me shifting the angle of my hips so the rest of them could see the way Francis’ dick slid in and out of my pussy.

“I think that pretty mouth of hers is a little too empty. How about you go fill it for her, West.”

I turned at the sound of Prescott’s latest request, finding West moving towards us. He stood, wrapping his hand around the back of my head, and tipped it up to meet his eyes.

“Open, little Scar.”

My mouth dropped open, and he didn’t hesitate to slip his cock inside it. I curled my tongue around the tip, feeling him throb against it. Humming around it, I took his dick deeper, wanting him to give me the whole damn thing. I loved his dick so much. The things he did with it made my insides clench. Francis’ hands tightened on my hips as he let out a grunt.

“That’s it, fuck her mouth. Don’t be gentle,” Prescott ordered, “make her feel it.”

West shunted his hips forward, burying his cock halfway down my damn throat in one brutal thrust. I gagged, my hand going to his thigh as my other curled around Francis’ shoulder. West pulled back and shoved his way in again, doing exactly as Prescott said. He fucked my mouth without mercy. And I was drowning in the pleasure of it.

“You’re looking a little forlorn there, Drake... how about you go fill her last little hole? I know she’s prepped herself well for us.”

I could tell by the sound of Prescott’s voice, he was enjoying this a little too much. I wanted to look around and see if his hand was wrapped around his dick, but West had his hand in my hair now, fisting it between his fingers to

keep me still.

I felt Drake rather than saw him when he moved to sit up on his knees behind my back. The pop of a cap signalled he was about to fill me up real fucking good. One of the things I'd done before coming in here was to stretch myself out for them and lube up so they could fuck me any way they wished. Well, any way Prescott ordered them to.

Drake wrapped a hand around my shoulder before pressing the head of his dick to my hole.

"Bear down," he murmured in my ear, his breath fluttering across it.

I did as he said, stilling my movements to make it easier for him to enter me. I yelped around West's cock as Drake slid inside me, the stretch making me dig my nails into Francis' shoulder. He let out a little grunt but didn't tell me to let go. I couldn't help it, Drake was thick. Combined with Francis in my pussy, it was a lot to take at once.

"Such a good little lamb, taking them all so well. Go slow with her, hmm? She needs a minute."

Drake was careful as he slid deeper, allowing me time to adjust to him.

"Fuck," he grunted in my ear.

I'd asked Prescott for this. Told him I wanted the three of them in me at once, but he got to pick who went where. There were other requests I had. He would oblige me in the order he saw fit. I hoped he would let me watch him stroke himself while the others fucked me. The thought of him watching turned me on. This time I was in my right mind, so I wanted to experience it all. Every single part with a clear head.

When Drake was finally seated inside me, I moaned around West's dick. He'd stopped fucking my mouth so hard while I was adjusting to the others' dicks. Drake pulled out a little way and thrust back in. Then he and Francis were making me rock back and forth on the two of them.

"None of you are allowed to come yet," Prescott's voice cut through our little foursome. "Well, except our little lamb. She gets to come as much as she likes."

"Are you serious?" Drake ground out.

"Yes. This is about her pleasure, remember? We're earning her forgiveness."

"Jesus. First, I get West ordering me around and now you," Drake muttered. West snorted, shoving his dick deeper in my mouth.

“You can’t tell me you didn’t enjoy me forcing her to suck your dick, not to mention all the blood.”

I couldn’t make a comment, considering my mouth was full, but I was amused by their little discussion. Especially Drake’s reaction. He needed to lighten up.

“Wait, you actually allowed West to tell you what to do?” Francis asked.

“It was his punishment for her,” Drake said, his voice sounding all defensive. “I wasn’t going to interfere with that. And he’s right. I did enjoy it.”

“Then quit grumbling about me telling you what to do,” Prescott said. “Also shut up and fuck her, you’re ruining my show.”

The three of them shut up and concentrated on giving it to me. The fullness was unlike anything else I’d ever experienced. As they ground harder into me, I squirmed on their cocks while West continued to ram his down my throat, leaving me lightheaded from the lack of oxygen. He must have sensed it was too much for me, as he pulled out enough to let me breathe properly. Stroking my jaw, he stared down at me with heat flaring in those amber depths.

“Look at you, little Scar, being such a good slut for us.”

“West!” Drake interjected.

“She likes it, don’t you, Scar? You’re our good little slut.”

I moaned around his cock. I more than just liked it, I loved the way he degraded me. We’d crossed over a line the night Stuart had threatened me and I’d gone to West. He’d broken me down while still making me feel like a queen in his eyes. His little warrior. It’s what I felt like when he called me his slut. I reclaimed the word as my own. And I wasn’t the least bit ashamed of it.

“Mmm, she does like being our whore,” Francis agreed, his hand leaving my hip and digging between us, seeking out my clit.

“Our dirty slut is loving being filled by three dicks. I can see it in your eyes, little Scar. You want us to use and abuse you.”

I moaned again.

I want it so badly. Please use me.

This was exactly how I imagined being with them while Prescott told them how to fuck me. And it felt so good. Even better now it was on my terms. It was me who had initiated it. I wasn’t on anything. It wasn’t for some fucked up game. It was because I wanted it. We wanted it. We needed this together.

And as Francis stroked me while I got fucked by the three of them, I found myself unable to hold back. My body shook as I cried out around West's cock. The waves of my orgasm rushed through me, leaving me boneless and limber. It was almost too much, but I didn't try to pull away from them. I didn't ask them to stop because I trusted Prescott to know how much I could handle. He knew what I needed, not only because I'd told him, but he knew my body like the back of his hand.

When I came down to earth, I leant back against Drake, feeling him wrap his arm around me to keep me upright. The three of them stilled and West slid his cock from my mouth, letting me pant, sucking in breath after breath.

"I would call you good boys, but you might deck me for that," Prescott said.

I snorted while I felt Drake let out a low sound of annoyance.

"Now, it's time to switch it up a little. West, you sit in the middle of the bed. Francis, you tie Scarlett's hands above her head. Make her ride West."

It hadn't escaped my notice that West's preference was to fuck me from behind. And I had specifically asked Prescott to address my little issue with West. I wanted to see his face. Needed to see how he came apart as he gave it to me. I wasn't going to force the kissing thing, but this... this needed to be remedied.

Once upon a time, West had made love to me when we'd been sixteen. Tonight, I wanted to see if that side of him still existed. The only way I could do it is if I could see his face. And I hoped it would go a little way to healing the breach between us. I would do anything to fix West and me.

Prescott had been right when he said I loved West first. I loved him so fucking much, I bled with it. And somehow I had to find a way to reconcile the man he was now with the boy he'd been when we were kids.

THIRTY EIGHT

WEST

I did as Prescott told me, sitting in the middle of the bed. Unlike Drake, I wasn't going to complain about being ordered around, considering I knew all of this was Scarlett's doing. She wanted this. She and Prescott had spent an hour talking before dinner, going over the details. And I was trying to make her happy by not being combative. There was no point when this would be enjoyable for all of us.

Things between Scarlett and me had started to improve, but I knew we had to have a long conversation about the past. It was a black cloud hanging over the two of us, making it impossible to move forward in the way we both wanted.

Drake slid out of Scarlett and sat against the headboard. She got off Francis and came closer to me. I was on my knees and she made no bones about sitting in my lap, facing me. Her hand went between us, stroking along my cock before she rubbed it against her pussy. I stared at her, aware this was the first time we'd be facing each other when she was in her right mind. The last time we'd all fucked her together, she'd sat in my lap, but she was high on E, so it wasn't the same.

Scarlett lowered herself down on me, making me grunt as my cock was encased in her hot, wet little pussy. She had her other hand on my shoulder to steady herself. My hands went to her hips, wanting to keep her upright.

Francis got up, picking up the ropes he'd left on the bed and came over to us. He gathered up both Scarlett's hands, binding her wrists together and attaching the rope to the metal ring above us. Her arms were raised up in the air, leaving her at our mercy.

"Are you going to fuck me?" she whispered as her eyes met mine.

Our faces were so close together, within kissing distance, and it fucked with me. I couldn't look away from her. My hand slid from her hip, up her chest, until I met the scars I'd given her. I stroked them, then wrapped my hand around her neck, holding her in place.

"Is that what you want? For me to fuck you real good, my dirty little slut?"

"Yes," she breathed, her eyes going to the word she'd carved into my skin. The cuts were still healing, but I was proud as fuck of it. Of her name on my skin.

The rest of them knew about it, but tonight was the first time they'd seen the word in the flesh since Scarlett cut into me. And none of them said a word about it. It's like they finally understood why me and Scarlett needed this. They were our unspoken feelings displayed on our skin.

"We better ask Pres if I can give it to you then."

It took her a long moment before she broke eye contact with me to look over at Prescott, almost as if she was reluctant to. We sat side on to his position. My eyes went to him too, finding the guy with his hand around his dick, watching us with lust-filled eyes. I almost rolled mine. Typical Prescott getting off on watching us. I couldn't deny it was hot, but I wasn't into voyeurism the way he was.

"I think she needs gagging, don't you, West?" Prescott said, with a twinkle in his eyes.

My dick twitched at the reminder of how hard I'd fucked her while she moaned through her arousal drenched knickers. It was the hottest sex I'd had in my entire life. And I craved more of it with her.

"Fuck yes, she does."

"There's one in the drawer."

He waved a hand towards the drawers we kept next to the bed. Francis moved over to grab it, pulling it out and bringing it back over. He fit the ball-gag in Scarlett's mouth, securing it behind her head.

"Now you can fuck her and make sure to draw it out... make her want to beg to come even though she can't."

I gripped her hip tighter and thrust up, making her take all of me. She moaned around the gag as I did it again.

"And our edging king can help you along there. Touch her, Francis. Make her

crazy whilst he fucks her.”

Francis knelt behind Scarlett and ran his fingers up her back while I continued to give it to her, my fingers tightening around her neck. Then I shifted back on my knees, changing the angle to give Francis better access to her body. The ropes around her wrists kept her from moving too far with me. He leant his chin on her shoulder. His hands cupped her breasts, caressing them.

“This is what you want, little whore?” he murmured in her ear.

I stroked her neck with my thumb, making her tremble while Francis pinched her nipples. Scarlett moaned around the gag, drool pooling at her lips. He gripped them harder. She bucked, her pussy clenching around my cock with the movement. I grunted and gave it to her harder in response, my hand around her hip almost bruising with my grip on it.

Francis let go of one of her breasts, ran his hand lower to meet her clit, and stroked it in the most gentle and teasing manner I’d ever seen. She wriggled in our grasp, trying to encourage him to go faster, but he was deliberately keeping her on the edge. Her unintelligible noises behind the gag had me grinning.

“Look at that. Our little slut is so needy. She wants to come so badly, but we’re not going to let you quite yet.”

I watched her cheeks flush with embarrassment at my words even as she tried to rock against my cock while I fucked her. My fingers around her neck tightened to the point where she started almost choking around the gag.

“Your blushes are so fucking cute. Pity we all know how much of a desperate slut for cock you are.”

“Jesus,” I heard Prescott mutter. My eyes darted to him, finding his eyes fixed on the way Francis and I were playing Scarlett’s body. I smirked before looking at Drake, who was also similarly fixated on us, his pupils completely blown, hiding away the indigo of his eyes.

Francis stroked her harder, making Scarlett squirm in her restraints. Not that she could go very far since she was sandwiched between us. I loosened my hold around her neck so she could breathe properly again. Tears ran down her cheeks as her chin dripped with drool.

Fuck, you’re beautiful like this, little Scar.

“West, you have permission to come in her. But not before you two make her come,” Prescott said a moment later, waving a hand at the three of us.

I redoubled my efforts to give it to her, making Scarlett yelp behind the gag. Francis pinched her nipple while he stroked her clit and kissed her shoulder.

Scarlett's eyes went to me. I could see the need in those hazel-green depths I loved so fucking much. The want. And I had a sneaking suspicion she'd asked Prescott to make this happen. To have me fuck her in a position where she could see me fall apart. Despite the fact, we were surrounded by the others and Francis was touching her, I couldn't help feeling as though the two of us were lost in our own bubble. It was the way those little whimpers behind her gag sounded like she was desperate to tell me how much she needed me.

"It's okay, little Scar," I whispered. "I've got you. Let go."

My fingers stroked down her throat, reassuring her I was right there fucking her the way she deserved. More tears slid down her cheeks, but I knew they weren't ones of pain. They were a cathartic release for her like she could finally embrace the side of herself that craved this kind of sex. The dark side of her little soul was on fire and it burnt for me. It burnt for all of us.

Her muffled cry signalled her climax right before she clenched around my cock. Her body bucked between me and Francis, making me growl in response. I was so close as she came, needing to fall apart with her, but something deep down made me wait, made me want her full attention on me when it happened.

The moment her body stilled, my hand left her throat, gripping both her hips as Francis pulled away. Then I fucked her harder, using her hips as leverage to give it to her without mercy. Her eyes remained on me.

"Take the gag out of her mouth," I demanded, not even caring what Prescott had to say about it.

Francis must have seen the determination in my eyes because he did as I said. Scarlett sucked in air before her tongue darted out of her mouth, licking up her dripping spit.

"I want you to come for me," she whispered. "Please."

Her words set me off. My cock erupted, making me let out a grunt, but my eyes remained on hers. I let her see what she did to me. I let her watch me come apart for her. And all I could see was her adoration reflected back at me. It reminded me of the day we'd lost our virginity to each other. The day we'd declared our love. It felt so fucking right to be with her like this. And then it was over all too soon as I slowed the thrust of my hips until we both were sitting

there staring at each other, unable to look away.

Fuck, I love you, Scar. I love you so much it hurts to breathe. You are my world.

Perhaps the others realised this moment was significant, as none of them said a word. I reached up, cupping her cheek in my palm.

“My perfect little Scar,” I whispered, drawing closer so I could wrap my arms around her and hold her close.

She let out a soft sigh as I buried my face in her neck and kissed her skin. We stayed like that, locked together until I softened and she shifted against me.

“Let her down,” Prescott said.

Francis immediately started untying her, letting Scarlett drop her arms to my shoulders. She crawled off me, but not before planting a kiss on my cheek.

My attention went back to Prescott who had a rather devious smirk on his face. I wondered what the hell he had up his sleeve next. His eyes were on Drake, leading me to think what happened next was going to cause a ruckus.

“Give her the rope.”

Francis handed Scarlett the rope he’d used to tie her up with. She tested the weight before giving Prescott a smile.

“A little birdy told me you’ve been practising knots, little lamb. I think it’s time you showed us your skills.” He pointed at Drake. “Tie him to the wall.”

Drake’s eyes widened, and he sat up straighter.

“What the fuck, Prescott? No.”

“Excuse me? No is not allowed in this room.”

Scarlett moved closer to Drake, ignoring his refusal as Prescott had given her a command.

“I don’t give a shit. I’m not letting her tie me up.”

“Drake,” Scarlett’s soft voice sounded, “don’t you want to make me happy?”

That made him freeze in place. She crawled into his lap, laying the rope down on her legs. Then she was reaching up and stroking her fingers through his hair.

“I think you need to let me have control for once,” she continued. “I want to find my Drake in there. And I promise I’ll make it good for you.”

He let out a breath. I could see the conflict in his eyes. He wanted to please Scarlett but giving up control was a big deal to him. I could understand his reluctance. However, he and Scarlett had to find a way to overcome the shit between them. And perhaps this was exactly what both of them needed.

“You really want this?”

“Yes, please... sir.”

For a long moment, we all held our breath, wondering which way this would go. Then Drake raised his hands and put his wrists out to her in supplication. And that was a miracle in itself.

THIRTY NINE

PRESCOTT

I watched Scarlett take hold of Drake's hands and press a kiss to each of the insides of his wrists. Unable to stay in the chair any longer, I got up and moved to the bed in time to watch her pick the rope up and bind his wrists. The little furrow of concentration in her brow was so fucking cute. This woman. She was fucking everything. And getting to do this with her was a whole experience in and of itself. It wasn't like the other times I'd watched, not when she and I were in control of everything.

"Where's your knife?" I murmured to West, who was sitting next to me.

"On top of the drawers."

"Get it for me."

West shifted off the bed, eyeing me with a curious expression. Scarlett was busy tying Drake's hands to the ring above him. He looked distinctly unimpressed by proceedings, but he had no idea what I had planned for him next.

"Is this okay?" Scarlett said, turning her attention to Francis.

He moved closer and reached up, checking over the knots she'd made. He gave her a smile and stroked her hair when he was done.

"They're very good, little whore."

She leant closer to him. Francis took her cue and kissed her, letting their mouths meld together for a long moment. She was smiling and glassy-eyed when he released her. Then he moved back and sat next to me. He'd get his reward in a little while, but for now, it was Drake's turn.

Scarlett ran her hands down Drake's chest, giving him a smile. She reached out and grabbed the lube sitting on the shelf next to them. Then she squirted it

out on her hand and coated Drake in it. He let out a harsh exhale at the way she was touching his cock. After wiping her hand when she was done, she leant towards Drake, pressing a kiss to his lips. Scarlett pulled back, her eyes full of mischief before she palmed his dick again and positioned herself over it, right where he'd taken her before. He grunted when she sunk down onto it. She arched her back, holding onto his shoulder to steady herself until she was fully impaled by him.

West was twirling the knife between his fingers, watching them with a raised eyebrow next to the bed.

“Give her the knife,” I said.

West knelt on the bed and passed the knife to Scarlett. He sat down and watched her flip it open before she ran her finger along the blade. Drake's eyes fixed on the metal. I could see the cogs turning in his brain before heat flared in his expression.

“Cut yourself, little lamb, let him see you bleed for him.”

She put her palm out and set the tip to the edge of her hand before she sliced downwards. It wasn't too deep, but she winced with the action. Red liquid pooled in the cut she'd made. She handed the blade back to West when she was done.

“Fuck,” Drake hissed.

Without being prompted to, Scarlett took her bloodied palm and pressed it against her breast, rubbing the blood over it. She did the same with the other one. Then she pressed her palm to Drake's face, streaking blood across it before she offered her hand to his mouth.

“Do you want to taste me?” she murmured as she rocked her hips into him, giving them the friction they both clearly needed.

Drake didn't answer her. His tongue darted out and drew a line up her bloodied palm. She let out a little gasp. The way he groaned made her press her hand against his face so he could continue to lick at her wound. This could be considered incredibly fucked up, but it was Drake all over. This was his thing. He liked blood. And I certainly wasn't going to judge him for it.

Her other hand went to his chest. She moved up and down, riding him. They were watching each other intently until Drake closed his eyes and nuzzled his face into her hand.

“This is what you wanted to give me?” he asked in a low voice.

“Yes,” she replied with a nod. “I wanted to show you I’m okay with it.”

He opened his eyes and stared at her for a long moment.

“Kiss me.”

She cupped his face and leant closer, pressing her mouth to his. Her hips moved faster as their tongues tangled with each other in a heated kiss. I’d never seen Drake attack a woman’s mouth the way he was doing to her. He strained against the restraints, trying to get closer to her. It was so unlike the man we’d all come to know. The cold-hearted and emotionless Drake, who’d closed himself off from the world. No, this was Drake from before Scarlett’s accident coming back to life in a small, but very significant way.

“Fuck, you’re going to make me come.”

“That’s the idea,” she murmured before kissing him again.

I wasn’t going to tell her no. In fact, I needed to see it. Watch the indomitable Drake fall apart for a woman. For our woman.

“Well, fuck,” Francis muttered next to me. “Never thought I’d see the day.”

“Did you doubt her?” I murmured back.

“No, but... it’s Drake.”

I grinned, but my attention was fully on the scene in front of us. Scarlett was moving faster now, her forehead pressed to Drake’s as she fucked him. There was nothing he could do but let her set the pace. Let her have full control over him.

“Come for me,” Scarlett ordered, increasing her movements and digging her other hand into his hair. “Do it. Come inside me.”

His harsh pant was the only warning she got. I watched him close his eyes and his body jerked with the impact of his climax. Scarlett pressed her mouth to his again, kissing him through it until he stilled.

Scarlett pulled back, giving him a gentle smile when he opened his eyes. She stroked his face when he smiled back. Drake never smiled unless he was with us. I gave them another moment before I decided it was time to move this along.

“West, can you please clean up Scarlett’s hand and chest? Francis, let Drake go. When you’re done, come over here with her. I’m done watching.”

The two of them immediately got started on the tasks I’d given them. Scarlett sat in West’s lap while he cleaned her up and wrapped her hand. He cleaned her

chest of blood with a wipe before cleaning her up a little below too, considering she'd had two of them come inside her. Francis let Drake go, then came back to sit by me, waiting for Scarlett. Drake didn't move. I had a feeling he wanted to savour what just happened.

Scarlett came over to us when West was finished.

"How would you like me?" she asked with a tilt of her head.

"Sit on Francis."

She crawled into Francis' lap and took him in her arms, sinking down on his still hard cock. He let out a grunt, his hands going to her hips. West chucked me over the lube. I slathered my cock in it, setting the tube down and settling myself behind her back. Scarlett encouraged Francis to lie back against the covers and leant forward, allowing me better access. I gripped her cheek and spread her for me, notching my dick to her tight little entrance. Pressing against her, I felt resistance for a moment before I slid inside. She let out a little groan of pleasure. Scarlett was becoming quite adept at taking two of us at once. In fact, I was pretty sure she enjoyed it more than we did, the corrupt little thing she was.

"Fuck me, Pres," she hissed. "Please, fuck me."

I gripped her shoulder and pulled her upright, flattening her against my chest and pushing into her.

"Is this what you want, my little lamb? You want my cock?"

"Yes, yes, yes."

I thrust up, going ever deeper inside her.

"You want us both, don't you?"

The whine from her lips was her only answer. Pulling back, I did as she asked and fucked her.

"Watching you is so fucking hot, you know. Makes me so hard for you," I whispered in her ear as Francis began to fuck her too, his movements slower than mine. "You're stunning. The most beautiful creature I've ever seen. You're like a goddess, especially when they fuck you with no mercy. Watching you in all your regal glory is the best sight in the whole damn fucking world. You're our queen, sweetness."

"Pres, quit being so perfect."

I let her go then, grinning as I pushed her forward and gripped her hips.

Francis moved his hands down to her thighs to allow me to fuck her harder. She pressed her body to Francis' and took his lips in a long, lingering kiss. Her hands curled around his shoulders, holding on for dear life while I took her, driving her and Francis ever higher.

“Harder, give me more,” she whimpered a minute later. “I need to feel it tomorrow.”

I pulled her up again and encouraged Francis to sit up too. The three of us held onto each other, our bodies moving together in unison to give her what she needed. Francis buried his face in her neck as I gripped his side to give us both more leverage. His hand was around me, bracketing Scarlett between us.

“Fuck,” she cried out. “Yes, like that. Fuck!”

The way she was bucking against us had me hard-pressed not to come. I'd watched them this entire time, becoming more and more aroused by the sight of naked bodies pressed together in ecstasy. It wasn't just anyone, though. It was her and my best friends. That was all I wanted for the rest of my life. Us and her. I'd never wanted anything more.

“Come for us, little whore,” Francis ground out. “Let us feel you.”

“Frankie,” she whined.

“Do it. Come. Now.”

She ground against him a moment longer, then she was crying out and clamping down so hard on the two of us, my orgasm burst forward without warning. I let out a low grunt, erupting inside her. She clenched harder and then I could feel Francis throbbing through the thin wall separating us. His groan let me know he was unable to hold back, either. We shuddered against each other, never wanting it to end. It was a moment I didn't think I would ever forget.

This whole night had changed something between us. The way they'd allowed Scarlett control of the situation through me was a turning point. It showed the five of us wanted to make this work even though we had so many dangerous waters to navigate before we'd be free. And we needed to cement our bond this way. It felt natural for it to happen like this.

I let go first, pulling out of Scarlett and sitting back on my hands, panting wildly. Scarlett didn't move off Francis straight away. Her hands went to his hair, and she pulled him back to stare into his eyes. Unspoken words passed between them before she kissed him. Releasing him, she pressed her mouth to

his ear. I couldn't be sure of what she whispered to him, but it sounded very much like "I love you."

Scarlett slid off him and came to me, curling herself around my body and holding me tight against her. I watched Francis' expression. He seemed to be reeling from what had passed between them. Then he shook himself and schooled his features.

"Thank you," Scarlett said, "all of you... I needed this."

I stroked her hair.

"You're welcome, little lamb."

"Take me to bed, Pres. I want to stay with you."

"You going to let me clean you up first?"

She nodded before letting me go. Before we left, Scarlett hugged the others and kissed Drake and Francis, saying goodnight to each of them. She took my hand and let me lead her out of the room, back to mine. We went into my bathroom. I set her on the counter before cleaning her up thoroughly. Then I did the same to myself.

The two of us got into bed after I dressed her in a sleep shirt and shorts. I'd pulled boxers on, as they were what I usually slept in. Scarlett curled up on my chest, her hair brushing across my skin.

"Did you just tell Francis you love him?" I asked, unable to help myself.

"Yes, but it wasn't the first time... that was last night. He hasn't said it back yet, but I'm not worried. I know he loves me."

"You sound awfully sure of yourself."

She raised her head and looked at me.

"Frankie needs something before he can admit it to me. And I'm okay with that."

I stroked her hair back from her face.

"And what's that?"

"To chain me up so he can erase what happened with Chelsea."

I smiled.

"Well, aren't you a perceptive little thing. I take it he told you what happened."

She leant her chin on her fist where it was resting on my chest.

"He's been hurting over it for a long time. And I want to make it better for

him. He deserves that, especially after the way he's taken care of me."

If I hadn't been aware of it before, it was very clear now. We all needed Scarlett. She was the missing part of us. The light in the darkness. Except our girl was just as dark as we were. She just shone with it in a different way.

"You're exactly what all of us need, you know that? Our perfect girl."

She blushed but didn't look away.

"I forgive you, Pres... I forgive you for everything. I don't want to live in the past any longer. Our future is what's important." She flattened her palm on my chest where my heart lay. "And I want it with you and them. We belong together."

My heart burnt with her words.

"I don't think I deserve you."

Not after everything we've done to you even though you've forgiven me.

"Too bad you don't have a choice in deciding what you deserve. That's up to me. And I've decided we're going to make it through this with each other. So you just have to deal with it."

Then she clapped three times, turning out the lights and laid her head back on my chest. I didn't have a response for her, so I kissed the top of her head and closed my eyes.

"Goodnight, my king," she whispered against my skin.

"Sleep well, my little lamb."

And tomorrow, we would start on that journey to the future she wanted... I hoped.

FORTY

SCARLETT

As my phone rang in my hand, the sound blaring in my ears, I knew I couldn't hide from this forever. A part of me had known it wouldn't be the last I heard of Stuart after I kicked him in the balls and ran. Perhaps the boys would have told me not to answer it, but I didn't want to run or hide from this. If the boys wanted Stuart dead, then we had to face this head-on. We had to move against him. It meant taking this risk and having a conversation with the man who'd stolen the last ten years of my life from me.

I brought the phone up to my ear and sat down on the sofa. The boys were still asleep, but I woke up early and slipped from bed. Prescott had been flat out on his back, the morning sun dappling his face. I stared at his handsome features, memorising every last one. The love I had for him was unfathomable. I didn't know it was possible to love one person so much, let alone four. The truth was... I was in love with Prescott, West, Francis, and Drake. No matter what they'd done in the past, I couldn't help the way I felt about them.

Last night had meant everything to me. It changed things between the five of us. It went a long way towards showing me they were willing to do anything for me. Their giving up control had given me more confidence in myself. I wasn't weak. And I wasn't going to allow Stuart to make me feel that way ever again.

"Hello, Stuart," I said, pressing to accept the call. "You took your time."

I had expected him to be on my case straight away, but clearly, he'd taken some time to think about what he was going to do about me.

I heard him scoff before he answered.

"Perhaps you're just not that important, Scarlett."

I pressed my lips together. He was trying to put me on the back foot. Of

course he was. I shouldn't have expected anything less.

"What's more important to you than destroying the Horsemen?"

"That ridiculous nickname. Honestly, I would have expected better than for you to fall for that malarkey. Then again, you've always been a disappointment, haven't you?"

Don't let him affect you. Don't do it.

"What do you want?"

"I know you're hiding in that ivory tower of theirs so I won't come after you."

I hadn't left the building since I'd run from him. Not even to go out and get Drake lunch. Instead, I'd made it here. In fact, I did it for all of us. The boys had decided they weren't going to replace Tonya, and I'd work for all of them. It wasn't exactly taxing considering I'd learnt their routines in the time I'd been here.

"You've always needed someone else to protect you, haven't you, Scarlett? It's pathetic really, that you've been so blinded to their charms."

"I haven't been blinded to anything except doing what you wanted me to. But that's what I get for being locked away in a prison for ten years, isn't it?"

"Do you think they're not going to throw you away the moment you're no longer useful?"

I gritted my teeth, clenching my fist in my lap.

"No. They aren't."

They care about me. They were and still are my best friends, but we're more now. So much more.

I was tired of hearing him railing against them. Tired of him acting like he was better than my four men. Stuart wasn't any better. Who kidnaps a sixteen-year-old girl from a hospital on a hunch she might know something about his sons' disappearance, then keeps her captive? It was just plain fucked up on so many levels.

You could say the same about the four boys who killed for you.

I could and I would, but somehow, it was different. They'd done it to protect me. Stuart wanted to hurt me and the boys. He didn't care about me at all.

"Your delusions are going to get you killed."

It was my turn to scoff.

“The only person who wouldn’t care if I died is you.”

“After your little stunt on Saturday, I should kill you. You’re worthless to me now, Scarlett. Absolutely worthless. I would say you’re their perfect little whore who will only give them heirs, but you can’t even do that, can you? No, you’re fucking damaged goods now.”

My throat constricted with his words. I put my hand to it. Of all the things he could throw at me, that was the very worst. I’d never got over it. Never. While I might have buried my emotions regarding the fact the accident had stolen my ability to have children, he knew where to hit me the hardest.

“Shut up,” I whispered.

My mind registered the sound of footsteps, but I didn’t look up. My eyes were fixed on the floor. His words hurt me so fucking much. They made me feel broken. Like I really was damaged goods after the accident.

“Such a pity, isn’t it? The only other thing you’d be good for and you can’t even do that. I suppose they’ll just have to wear you out until they get bored with you, won’t they?”

You’re not worthless because you can’t have kids. You’re just not.

The surgery they’d performed to bolt my pelvis back together had left me with damaged fallopian tubes. There was too much scarring. If they hadn’t performed it, I would have never been able to walk again, but losing my ability to conceive was a heavy price to pay. I hadn’t even had a choice in the matter, either. All of it happened while I’d been unconscious. It had to have been my mother who told them to save my life. Told them to do whatever was necessary to allow me to walk again. But I didn’t know that for sure.

“Shut up,” I said, a little louder this time.

“You never really had much value, that’s why you felt the need to whore yourself out to them.”

Something inside me snapped. Enough was enough. He’d been my abuser and my worst nightmare for far too long. I wasn’t going to stand for it any longer.

I jumped up from the sofa, my hand balled at my side, and my whole body flooded with rage.

“Shut up! Just shut the fuck up. I’m not worthless. I’m not a whore and I’m not fucking damaged goods. I’m not going to sit here and listen to your shit any

longer. I'm fucking done. You don't control me anymore, Stuart. I will never forgive you for all the shit you put me through. Never, you hear me? Fucking never. I hate you. I fucking well hate everything about you and your fucking wife. You are both liars."

I'd practically screamed it down the phone to him, not even caring when I looked up and found four sets of eyes on me. There was no going back now. Prescott, West, Francis and Drake had heard every word of my diatribe against Stuart.

"What did you just say to me?"

It was as if the red mist had settled over me the same way it had done when I'd stabbed a man to death. I wanted to rip Stuart's face off.

"You fucking heard me. I hate you. I am never doing anything you say again. In fact, you can go fuck yourself."

"You little bitch. If you think I'm going to stand for this, you are out of your fucking mind."

"I don't give a fuck any longer. You kidnapped me and kept me locked up like a fucking prisoner, tried to brainwash me, beat me and locked me in a cold fucking cell when I did anything you didn't like and made me feel like I was nothing. So go fuck yourself. I hope you fucking die."

I could hear him suck in a breath like he couldn't believe I would say such things to him.

"What?"

"You heard me. I know the truth, Stuart. I fucking know you kidnapped me and held me captive for ten years."

For a long moment, there was silence on the other end of the phone. My chest heaved with the anger coursing through my veins. My eyes were fixed on the four men of my past. I'd admitted so many things in the space of a few minutes. And I had no idea what they felt about me telling Stuart I knew the truth.

"So, it's come to this, has it? You remember who they are." He let out a little chuckle. "Did you know that's what I wanted? For you to remember them and what they did so you could tell me the truth. But I think you have no intention of doing that, do you?"

I would never tell him what Prescott, West, Francis and Drake had done to

his twin sons. It was a secret I'd take to the grave.

"No."

"Then listen very closely, Scarlett. Your days are numbered. I'm going to come for you and you won't survive it. None of you will, but I'm going to start with you. They stole my sons from me. Keeping you for ten years wasn't enough. I will end you permanently. Only then will they understand what they've done."

I didn't want to listen to him any longer. I couldn't. Not when he'd threatened my life. And the lives of my men. Without even ending the call, I threw the phone halfway across the room, letting out a roar of fury. Then I was running towards it where it had landed on the floor near the dining table. I stared down at it, hating the very sight of that damn phone and the man on the other end of it.

"Go to hell, you piece of shit!" I screamed before I picked up a chair.

I slammed down the leg of it on the phone again and again.

"I hate you. I fucking hate you."

The phone was a mess of bent plastic and metal by the time I was done with it. The screen was practically annihilated. I panted and realised I'd started crying as tears slid down my cheeks. Setting the chair down next to the demolished phone, my chest caved in and before I knew it, my legs buckled. My knees slammed into the wooden floor and horrifying sobs erupted from my mouth.

"I hate him. I hate him so much."

Pain, hatred, and fury raced through me. I couldn't deal with all the emotions driving through my system. It hurt so fucking bad. My chest constricted and my whole body shook with the violence of them. It ruptured my very being and splintered it into a thousand pieces. The person who'd abused me had threatened to kill me. And not just me, he was going to kill the men I'd fallen in love with too. I couldn't take it. I couldn't.

A pair of arms wrapped around me from behind. And that warm body pressed into me, pulling me back into their lap. I kept crying, my hands grasping their forearms. Through my tears, I could see tattoos across them.

West.

He didn't say a word, merely held me to him while I broke down. The horrors of the last ten years washed over me, drowning me in the memories of

everything Stuart had done to me. All the beatings. All the name-calling and taunting. Everything.

“I hate him,” I sobbed, my tears blurring my vision entirely.

“I know, little Scar,” West murmured in my ear. “Do you remember what I told you?”

I choked back another sob.

“You’ll kill anyone who’s hurt me because I’m yours.”

“So what am I going to do?”

“Kill him for me.”

“That’s right. We’re all going to end his life for you.”

And while it shouldn’t have made me feel better, it did. Knowing they were going to rid the world of Stuart for me had my broken pieces stitching back together. They’d killed for me once before. They were going to do it again. And this time... I would help them.

FORTY ONE

DRAKE

My hands were balled into fists at my sides. While I was sure Scarlett had been through hell and back, hearing the truth of what Stuart had done to her was far worse than I'd ever imagined. He'd beat her. Fucking beat her. A girl who almost died. He made her life worse.

Francis, Prescott and I stood helplessly as West held onto our girl. Her pain bled from her pores. Her sobs echoed around my skull. And I couldn't take it.

I need to make it better for her. I have to.

Before I knew what I was doing, I'd walked over to them, undid my suit jacket button and knelt between West and Scarlett's spread legs. I took her face in my hands, tipping it up towards me. The tears falling from her beautiful eyes almost decimated me. She'd been in so much pain for so long. I couldn't begin to fathom the depths of it.

"One of you get me some tissues," I said to Francis and Prescott before levelling my gaze back on our girl.

She blinked as a little sob fell from her lips. I stroked her wet face with my thumb, wanting to show her I was here. Fuck knows I was terrible at comforting people. To be honest, both West and I were, but we were trying. Both of us had to try for her. Perhaps we should have left this to Prescott and Francis, but I didn't give a fuck. I couldn't stand by and watch her fall apart. My chest ached with a need to make the pain go away for her.

Leaning forward, I pressed a kiss to her forehead.

"I promise I'll make it hurt when he dies," I whispered. "I'll make him suffer for everything he's done to you."

"Drake," she whimpered.

“You’ll never have to go through that again, Scarlett, not as long as I’m still breathing. I’ll be your executioner. Let me do that for you. Let me make this right.”

For a moment, she said nothing. I pressed more kisses to her face, desperately wanting her to know I would do anything to fix her broken soul. I’d fucked up so much with Scarlett. This was the one thing I was good at. Ending people’s lives. And I’d do it for her in a heartbeat.

“You don’t even know everything he did.”

“Will you tell us?”

She nodded slowly. I don’t know what Stuart said to make her break like this, but I was determined she wouldn’t suffer at his hands or his words any longer.

“He... he threatened to kill me. He said he’s coming for me. And all of you, but he’s going to take me first so you can suffer like he has.”

I sucked in a breath. There was no fucking way we would let Stuart get hold of her.

“That’s not happening, you hear me? We won’t let him have you. We’ll keep you safe.”

“I know you will. I trust you... all of you.”

Her admission made my heart ache. All this time she’d kept saying we didn’t have her trust, but now... now we’d proven we would do anything for her. She was going to trust us with her truth, and it meant everything.

“Will you let West take you over to the sofa?”

She nodded again, a fresh set of tears spilling down her cheeks. Even crying with red eyes and a blotchy face, Scarlett was still the most stunning woman I’d ever beheld. It was her inner beauty. She shone like a fucking beacon, guiding us to her, keeping us captive under her gaze. And I no longer wanted to fight the pull. I wanted to drown in it. Drown in her.

“Good girl,” I murmured without thinking about it.

She let out a shuddering breath, then let go of one of West’s arms to grab hold of me. Her fingers speared into my hair, dragging me even closer until her damp lips brushed mine.

“You have no idea how long I’ve waited to hear that from you,” she murmured, pressing her mouth against mine.

Her kiss was urgent, like all of her feelings were pouring out of her with it.

The longing, the need, the lust. And it was over all too quickly. She sat back against West's chest, closing her eyes and putting her fingers to her lips. Her other hand dropped from my hair, allowing me to stand up and straighten my clothes out.

West didn't immediately get up with her, seemingly content to let her decide when she was ready. Prescott had brought over the tissues, but I waved them away towards the sofa. We could clean her up there. He and Francis walked over to them and sat down. I followed them and tried not to allow my rage out. The anger built inside me like a ticking time bomb, just waiting for me to unleash it. It was directed solely at Stuart. What Scarlett had said to him on the phone was only the tip of the iceberg.

West finally helped Scarlett up. She wrapped her arms around him and whispered something none of us could hear. He nuzzled her hair before taking her hand and bringing her over to the rest of us. I expected her to sit with him, but she crawled into my lap instead. Francis handed me the tissue box. Pulling a few out, I took a hold of her chin and cleaned her face with them. She was still dressed in a sleep shirt and shorts, so hadn't got ready for the day yet.

Dumping the sodden tissues on the coffee table, I sat back and let Scarlett lean against me. Her hand tucked under my suit jacket and her head rested on my shoulder. I kept an arm around her while my other hand went to her bare thigh, stroking her soft skin with my fingertips.

"It didn't start immediately," she said, loud enough for all of us to hear. "After I woke up from my coma, they told me they were my adopted parents... but they always got upset if I tried to ask them about my biological ones."

Her fingers rubbed along my chest like she was worrying at it. It reminded me of every time she was nervous and she'd rub something between her fingers in her agitation.

"It took me months of rehab to learn to walk again. They got me a speech therapist to help me learn to speak again too. It was gruelling, but I was determined not to let what happened to me destroy my entire life." She sighed, her body deflating with the sound. "I guess it started when I was eighteen or nineteen. I can't really remember. I mean, the first time he got angry with me, that is. Like truly angry, to the point where I was sure he would hit me. I asked if I could leave the estate. I was tired of being cooped up and not allowed to go

anywhere.”

She shifted in my lap. No doubt the memories were painful for her to recall.

“He went ballistic, shouting and raging about how it was dangerous for me to leave. I didn’t understand it at the time, but he scared me so much, I didn’t ask again. A year later, I tried to run away. I just wanted to see something else, something new. I took my horse, Chocolate, and we rode for miles. It was so freeing... but then Mason found me and brought me back to the estate.”

She stopped, turning her face into my neck and letting out a shuddering breath.

“Stuart hit me in the face repeatedly, leaving me with a swollen black eye. He shoved me down and kicked me in the ribs for good measure. Then he threw me into a room with no windows. It was just bare concrete walls and floor. The only thing I had was a bucket. That was it. He left me there for a week. His staff fed me and gave me water. It was the only time I saw anyone. He finally let me out when I agreed to apologise... and things were never the same again. I can’t count the number of times he beat me up and threw me in there for stupid reasons. Like every time I woke up screaming from a nightmare... that’s why I taught myself not to make a sound, so he wouldn’t have a reason to put me in the cell.”

Scarlett fell silent. My hand tightened around her thigh with my fury. How fucking dare he treat her that way. Like she was an animal, less than fucking human. I couldn’t call myself a good man. But this? This was going too far. I maimed, tortured, and killed those who deserved it. Stuart hurt my girl for no good fucking reason.

I pressed my face to the top of her head, trying to push down the anger inside me. No fucking way I would take it out on her. She didn’t deserve it. All I wanted to do was cherish Scarlett. To give her everything she needed. To make up for everything I’d done to her.

“No one stopped him,” she said after a few minutes had gone by. “Not Phoebe and not Mason. The only other people I was allowed to interact with were his staff, and they turned a blind eye to it. I suppose he pays them enough to keep silent. After I tried to escape, he refused to let me go riding by myself and he upped his security. I never attempted it again after that, but it didn’t stop the beatings. It didn’t stop his rage. He... he made me feel worthless like I was

nothing. His words hurt me worse than his fists. I knew I could recover from the beatings, but the things he said... they were worse.”

She pulled her head from my neck, sitting up and meeting my eyes for the first time since she'd started talking.

“When he dangled the chance of freedom in front of me, I took it. I had to... the thought of staying locked up on the estate made me die a little inside.” She let out a breath. “I’m so sorry for everything. For doing the things he told me to. For wanting to hurt all of you. I didn’t know... I didn’t... I’m... I’m sorry.”

I let go of her thigh to reach up and cup her face.

“There is nothing for you to be sorry for, Scarlett. Nothing at all,” I told her, trying to keep my voice even. “We didn’t help matters either. This mess... it’s our fault, not yours.”

She shook her head.

“I don’t blame any of you for what happened that night... you were protecting me. And my fall was an accident. I decided to come after you. I’m just as responsible for everything that went on as all of you are. Placing blame isn’t going to get us anywhere. It’s not going to change what happened. I just want... I want to move on.”

My eyes went to West when she said it. His amber eyes were full of pain, like her saying what happened was an accident drove the knife in further. He blamed himself for being unable to save her, but none of us ever had.

“But there is one thing I have to talk about... I have to say.”

I dropped my hand from her face, wondering what it was.

“The reason Stuart upset me so much on the phone was... was because he told me I was damaged goods.” She looked down at her lap. “Because I can’t... I can’t have...”

She seemed to visibly steel herself.

“I can’t have children of my own.”

Scarlett had no idea we knew about it. We knew her life-saving surgeries had robbed her of her fertility. And I didn’t want to say anything right then. Not when she’d been through too much today already.

“I hate that he uses it against me. It digs at the wound the whole thing left inside me. I know it doesn’t make me any less of a woman, but it still hurts.”

“You know we will never see you any differently because of that, don’t you?”

I said when she volunteered nothing further.

A tear slid down her cheek.

“I... I wasn’t sure what you would think.”

I looked at the others. All we’d ever needed in life was each other. Nothing else was necessary.

“I won’t speak for anyone else, but I don’t need that from you. I just need you, Scarlett. Only you. The rest doesn’t fucking matter.”

She looked up at me then.

“Are you sure?”

I stroked her cheek with my thumb, brushing away the wetness.

“Yes, but if you need to talk about it more, we’re all here for you.”

She shook her head.

“I’m... I’m not ready.”

“When you’re ready then.”

She took my hand from her face and pressed a kiss to my palm. Her hand was still bandaged. The way she’d cut herself for me last night only made me fall deeper for this woman. She was so willing to accept the things we needed. And I wanted to give her the same courtesy in return.

“You can stay up here today, okay? I don’t want you to come down to work. We’ll manage without you.”

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“And I meant what I said. I will be your executioner. You just tell me who and I will end them for you.”

Scarlett said nothing, but she gave me a sad smile. Then she slid out of my lap and went to Prescott. He enfolded her in his arms and kissed her hair.

“I love you for you, little lamb,” he told her. “You’re perfect to me.”

“I love you too,” she whispered before she let him go and crawled over to Francis, burying herself in his chest next.

He stroked her back and murmured something in her ear that I couldn’t hear. She gave him a nod and rose to her feet. Her attention went to West then. He’d sat silently through this whole thing. She went over to him and dropped to her knees at his feet. Scarlett took a hold of both his hands and looked up at him.

“Will you stay with me... please?”

West was notorious for taking random days off during the week. I didn’t care

in all honesty. West was good at what he did. It wasn't so much he slacked off. When he was at work, he was laser-focused. He got things done in less time than most people because of it, so I never got on his case about his lack of attendance.

“As you wish, my little Scar.”

I imagined those two were in for quite the conversation when the rest of us left to go downstairs for the day. All of us needed a discussion about what we were going to do regarding Stuart, but it could wait a day for her to recover. I didn't think Stuart would try anything straight away. Besides, she was safe in our penthouse. We wouldn't allow anyone to get to her here. No matter what, the four of us would protect our girl with our lives, just as we had done ten years ago when we ended the lives of Stuart's twin sons. Nothing would stop us from ending him and putting this whole thing to rest so we could get on with our lives without the threat of Stuart fucking Carver hanging over our heads. Nothing at all.

FORTY TWO

WEST

When the other three left to go downstairs after the five of us had breakfast, Scarlett sat next to me on the sofa and took one of my hands. She ran her fingers down the skull on the back of it. Then she took my other hand, touching the tip of her forefinger to the Gemini symbol on mine.

“This is for the twins... isn’t it?”

“Yes,” I replied, eyeing her warily.

She wanted to talk, that much was clear, but whether or not it was about us, I didn’t know. Last time she’d told me if we talked about our relationship and the past, it might break us. Did she still feel that way? Or did she want to repair the breach ten years had left in its wake?

“Will you tell me about the rest?”

I took her hand and made her point to the next finger.

“The teardrop is for the girl we killed when she accidentally came upon us torturing someone for information about you.” I directed her hand to the next one. “Five for the men I killed when we were searching for you. And the sword is for the last man who gave us the missing piece to the puzzle of where they were keeping you.”

“That’s ten people, including Tonya.”

I shrugged. I hadn’t yet decided about how I would honour her death in ink, but when I did, I’d take Scarlett with me to Penn’s place to get it done. She should be there with me.

Penn Harlow didn’t tattoo just anyone. He had to like you for him to be willing to get his tattoo gun out. And Penn didn’t like many people in this world. He did say he’d be more than willing to ink up my girl if she was ever that way

inclined. Scarlett had made quite the impression on him. He'd told me the woman who stole my heart had to be a special kind of crazy and Scarlett was definitely that. I'd laughed, but I guess it was true. She was special. And a little fucked up.

"Those are the ones that died by my hand, Scar. It doesn't include the ones I tortured and Drake ended. I might like violence, but he likes death... he's fucking ruthless. There's a reason he told you he'd be your executioner."

She shivered and looked away.

"I don't know how I feel about that."

"That he'd kill for you?"

She shook her head as she slid her fingers in between mine.

"No. I shouldn't be okay with the fact you all would kill for me... but I am."

"Then what's the problem?"

"Is it my fault he's like that? I mean, he told me about Oscar and what happened, but I can't help feeling like I bound him to a promise and this is the result."

I frowned and stroked the back of her hand with my free one.

"What promise?"

"I think we were like eight or nine and I made him pinkie promise he would never leave me. He told me it's what made him never give up on me. He didn't want to break his promise."

Drake took his word seriously, but even so, a promise they made when they were that young? I was beginning to think I should have paid attention to Drake and his feelings for her a lot sooner.

"You didn't turn him into the person he is, little Scar. He did that all on his own. People react to pain in their own way. It's his coping mechanism. To shut down his emotions. You aren't responsible for it."

She looked at me then, a multitude of emotions flickering in her hazel-green depths.

"Is it wrong of me to miss the way we were? And I'm not talking about Drake. I miss us. I miss... you."

"No, it's not wrong."

It could never be wrong. I missed us too. The closeness. Our connection. The way she calmed my warring soul and how I made her reckless. Everything about

her and me was beautiful and fucking tragic at the same time.

“What happened after I disappeared? What happened to you?”

There was only one way this conversation was going to go. And that was to give her the undiluted truth.

“I lost myself without you. It broke me. I became... cruel and violent. It was as if all the goodness had been ripped away and left me with nothingness.”

The way tears brimmed in her eyes at my words had me pressing on. None of this was her fault. Not really.

“I blamed myself for not being able to save you. It consumed me. My... guilt. And the longer it took to find out where you went, the worse I got. It’s like nothing mattered any longer. I did fucked up shit, didn’t care about anything or anyone. I turned into someone no one recognised.”

My fingers tightened around hers, not wanting her to go anywhere.

“Henry and Cynthia couldn’t deal with me the way I was. They did try to get me help, but when I was...” I faltered and looked down at our hands.

You have to tell her.

There was no way out of this. She needed to know.

“I was diagnosed with an antisocial personality disorder when I was eighteen and they disowned me for it. The last time I saw them in person was the day they kicked me out. And I’d prefer to keep it that way. You know what Henry was like. He just got worse.”

Scarlett let go of my hand, only to cup my face with both of hers. She tilted my face up, so I’d meet her eyes.

“Do you think that makes you broken?”

“Doesn’t it?”

“No.”

I didn’t know if I believed her. Anyone who found out about my issues thought I was broken. They thought I wasn’t right in the head. Well, the boys never treated me like I was a fuck up, but they were different. We were each other’s family. Everyone else? They plain fucking sucked with their judgemental attitudes.

“I don’t think you’re broken, West. I would never think that about you despite all the shit that’s happened since I came back.” She dropped a hand from my face to her collarbone. “Even this doesn’t make me think any less of

you.”

“But you told me I’m not your West any longer. I’m not the person you... you...”

I couldn’t say it. I couldn’t bring myself to.

“Do you think I would have come to you after the shit Stuart said to me if I didn’t still want you?”

I swallowed. She had done that. I’d not hesitated to give her what she asked. In fact, it had changed things between us. Made me feel as though she trusted me a little more than she had done before. And now I knew she liked degradation, I made no bones about doing it in front of the others. Scarlett wasn’t ashamed of her kinks, even if me calling her my little slut made her blush.

“You never told me what he said that night.”

She sighed and stroked my cheek.

“He said many things about me being a whore and a slut for opening my legs for all four of you, but that’s not the point. You were who I felt safe with after it happened. You helped me. I trusted you to break me and fix me again afterwards. I still need you so fucking much.”

My heart ached like someone had wrapped a fist around it and squeezed. It was her tiny one, taking my breath away and stealing my ability to keep my feelings a secret any longer.

“I need you too.”

There was no one on this earth I needed more than Scarlett. She was my one.

“Do you think we can ever get back to where we used to be?”

I ran my fingers along her bare thigh.

“I don’t know... but I want to, or at least, to be in a place where we’re okay.”

Before I could stop her, she let go of me and crawled into my lap, straddling my thighs and wrapping her arms around my neck. I put my arms around her, feeling her soft, warm body pressed to mine. It calmed the part of me that craved destruction and violence. Put me on a more even kilter. She was my balm.

“I don’t want you to feel guilty over the accident, West. I don’t blame you for it. It was an impossible situation.”

My arms tightened around her.

“I didn’t save you,” I whispered, “and you almost died, Scar. You almost

fucking died... and—”

“It wasn’t your fault. Please stop blaming yourself for something you had no control over.”

“But you can’t...”

She pulled back and looked at me as my hand drifted from her back to her stomach.

“I know I can’t, but it’s still not your fault.”

The sadness in her eyes cut me.

“Do you want them, Scar? Tell me the truth. I need to know I didn’t ruin everything for you.”

Her hands went to my hair, stroking through the strands and brushing against my scalp.

“It’s a moot point. It doesn’t matter if I do or not. I can’t.”

“I don’t care. I need to know.”

I kept my hand on her stomach. Her worth had nothing to do with her ability to conceive. She was perfect in my eyes, no matter what.

“When you can’t have something, your idea of the future changes. It might take me time to deal with my feelings on the matter, but it doesn’t change the facts. I don’t need children, West. I need you, Drake, Frankie and Pres. We are a family.”

She pulled me closer by my hair, resting her forehead against mine.

“You ruined nothing. And if we’re ever going to get past this, you need to forgive yourself.”

How fucking true were her words. I wasn’t blind to the fact.

“I don’t know how.”

“I’ll help you... but you have to let me.”

My hand slid up from her stomach to grip her throat. I stroked my thumb down her pulse point. She sighed into my touch.

“Don’t you know I’d do anything for you, little Scar?”

“Even burn down the world?”

“Especially that.”

She smiled and shook her head against mine.

“I don’t want you to burn the world. Just make it safe for us to be together as a family.”

It's not like I wouldn't have done it before, but now she'd specifically tasked me with it. Make it safe for us. It meant destroying everything and everyone who threatened us. I had two people front and centre on our kill list.

Mason and Stuart.

I would quite happily off Phoebe as well, but she wasn't as important as the other two. If I put Mason's father on that list, no doubt Drake would tell me why it wasn't an option. We would have to find another way to get him off our case, especially when we wanted to kill his son and his best friend. Those were things we'd have to discuss, but not today. Not when Scarlett had been through too much already.

"As you wish."

She turned in my lap and rested her head on my shoulder. A little noise of contentment sounded in her throat. All I could think about was how she'd cuddle up to me when we were younger at every available opportunity. And how it felt so right to have her in my arms now.

"Tired?"

"Yeah," she sighed, nuzzling my chest.

Her affectionate gestures were something I hadn't been expecting. Hell, I didn't know she would be so okay with my diagnosis, either. It's not like I went around telling people about it, but this was Scarlett. She had a right to know the truth.

"Should I take you to bed?"

"Only if you're in it with me."

I pressed my face to the top of her head.

"I wouldn't want to be anywhere else."

I picked her up off the sofa with me and carried her upstairs to my room. Pulling back the covers, I set her down on the bed and tucked her in. I undid the top few buttons of my shirt and sat down next to her. She reached out and placed her hand on my thigh after I dragged my laptop off my bedside table. Just because I wasn't going downstairs, didn't mean I wasn't going to work while Scarlett was sleeping.

I stroked her hair, watching her close her eyes and drift off. When I was sure she was asleep, I leant down and pressed a kiss to her forehead.

"I love you," I whispered.

Prescott had told me I needed to say it out loud. After my conversation with Scarlett, I couldn't help but utter the words, even though she couldn't hear me. It was a start. A steppingstone towards a better future with her. And I just hoped I would learn to forgive myself with her help so I could tell her when she was awake.

FORTY THREE

FRANCIS

My fingers brushed over the various chains I'd laid out on the bed in our play space. I had been concerned about doing this tonight when Scarlett had been through an emotional upheaval earlier. Prescott had assured me it would be exactly what she needed. And according to West, she'd spent half the day asleep, and the rest curled up on his chest while they watched a film together. My girl was well-rested and wanted me to give her an experience she wouldn't soon forget. I was so fucking ready for this, even if I was nervous too.

I heard a noise from behind me and turned around to find Scarlett closing the door behind her. Swallowing, I watched her approach me. She didn't have a stitch of clothing on her body. It was all I could do not to grab her, pin her down and do deviant things to her body. I clenched a fist to attempt to keep my cool.

"Hello, my little whore, are you ready for our game?" I asked when she stood before me.

The way she shuddered at my words had me fighting a smile. It was even harder not to when she knelt at my feet and bowed her head.

"Yes."

She'd braided her hair as I requested so it wouldn't be in the way or get caught up in the chains. My hand went to it, fisting it and forcing her head back. Those hazel-green eyes told me she was truly submitting. She would do anything I said.

"What's your safe word, Scar?"

"Red."

"Good girl."

I wanted her to know she could stop this at any time. It was important after the disaster that was Chelsea. But I wasn't going to think about her. It was time I put my demons to rest.

"Get on the bed."

I let go of her hair and she obeyed my command, crawling onto it, dodging past the chains and kneeling in the middle right where I wanted her. My hands went to the smaller chains, picking them up before I walked around to the side of the bed and knelt on it. I wrapped the small chains around her torso. They were set out a little like a harness and wrapped around her breasts, highlighting them on her chest. Then I put a leather collar around her throat. It had several metal rings around it.

Taking both her arms, I pushed them behind her back and attached metal cuffs to her biceps. They were joined in between by a metal bar. I secured another set around her forearms, then I cuffed her wrists together too. Through loops around each of the cuffs, I ran chains up from her wrists to her neck.

The next chain I attached was one to the front of her collar. It would act as my leash and a way for me to hold on to her if necessary.

"Is this too tight?" I asked, needing to reassure myself I hadn't hurt her.

"I'm fine, Frankie," she murmured, giving me a nod.

"Do you trust me?"

"Always."

Picking up a small silk item from the bed, I set the blindfold over her eyes. Scarlett let out a shuddering breath. Perhaps she was scared of what would happen next because the last time we'd blindfolded her, it had been when we'd taken her for the first time. I wasn't going to hurt her, though. I was going to drive her wild.

Carefully, I encouraged her to lie on her stomach. Then I cuffed her ankles, attaching a chain to each. I secured those chains to her collar, forcing her to bend up in a rather unnatural position, although I gave her a little leeway, so it wasn't too uncomfortable.

I stepped back and looked her over. She was so fucking beautiful it almost hurt to see her this way.

She would heal me. Set me free from all my fucking pain. This woman was my everything.

“You are... words can’t describe how I feel right now. Is it okay for you?”

She couldn’t move with the way I’d chained her up.

“I... I like it,” she responded a moment later, “being bound by you... it makes me feel safe and free.”

I let out a long breath, relieved she wasn’t in pain or averse to this. Kneeling on the bed again, I ran my fingers up her calves, making her shudder in response. I intended to stroke her body around the chains until she was begging me to touch her pussy. My fingers went to the backs of her thighs, gently running along her skin.

“Frankie,” she panted.

She could hear me, but she couldn’t see. I was going to use it to my advantage. Shifting around to her side, I stroked her elbow right below where I’d secured the cuffs. Then my fingers went to her shoulder. My touch was so soft, it was likely tickling her. While I could use a crop or something else to do this, I preferred my hands on her. Skin on skin contact. With each stroke of my fingers, her breathing got heavier, like she was anticipating my every move.

Leaning closer, I pressed a kiss to her shoulder and made my way down her arm until I reached the first cuff. Scarlett squirmed as much as she could against her restraints.

“Oh god!”

“I’m not your god.”

“No... no, you’re not.”

I kissed between her shoulder blades right between where her arms were bent back.

“What am I, little whore?”

I ran my fingers down her side, making her jerk.

“Frankie, please.”

“I won’t touch you where you want me to until you say it.”

My fingers reached the curve of her arse. I brushed my fingers along her cheek. Scarlett let out a low whine.

“My horseman.”

I moved lower until I was between her legs. Then I kissed my way down the inside of her calf towards her thigh.

“Which one, little whore?”

She tried to shift in her restraints. I kissed down her thigh, nearing her pussy, but not quite reaching it.

“Tell me if you want my tongue on your clit.”

I blew on her pussy, making her tremble.

“Fuck,” she cried out. “Please!”

“You know how to make this torture end.”

I stroked her thighs, brushing my thumbs close to her pussy, teasing her with my touch. Perhaps it’s what she wanted, for me to torture her like this. My hand slid up her cheek and grabbed hold of the chains attached to the cuffs on her wrists, pulling on them to put pressure on her throat.

“Or do you like it when I tease you, hmm?” I tugged harder. “I can see how wet you are, whore. You like this.”

“No, no, I don’t.”

I chuckled and blew on her pussy again.

“A little liar as well as a whore. Such a bad girl.”

“Frankie,” she choked out. “Please touch me.”

I tutted and smacked her across her behind, making her jolt again.

“Bad girls don’t get rewards, whore. You should know that by now.”

When she didn’t respond to me, I smacked her again and again until she let out a little cry of distress, like it was too much for her.

“Have you had enough yet?”

I stroked her cheeks, tugging on her chains again. Then my thumb dipped between them, stroking just above her tight little hole.

“Please,” she whined.

“Say it and I’ll make you come so fucking hard.”

Her pants got louder as I kept stroking her. My hand drifted from her behind, closer to her pussy. Closer to where she wanted me, but she hadn’t said it. She hadn’t given me what I’d asked for. I was desperate to hear it from her lips. This was me embracing who I was inside. Letting go of the past and forging ahead with the future. And I needed her to unbind the last chain wrapped around my heart.

“Frankie!”

I pulled even harder on her chains.

“That’s not it, whore. I’m your fucking horseman. Tell me which one I am.

Say it out loud.”

I held the chains in place, almost choking her with them.

“God, please, Frankie, I need you. I need you so fucking bad.”

“Say. It.”

“Famine! Fuck, you’re my Famine.”

Releasing my hold on her chains, I spread her with both my hands, and then my tongue was between her legs, sliding between her folds and seeking out her clit. She moaned loudly when my tongue flicked over it. I shoved two fingers inside her pussy the next moment, making her squirm. There was no mercy to the way I pumped them inside her as I sucked her clit into my mouth. I wanted her to come hard before I fucked her. And when I did press inside her with my cock, I would deprive her of this all over again.

“Please, oh god, oh... oh, fuck.”

I didn’t say a word, kept fucking her with my fingers and tonguing her until she was gasping for air. And when she was on the precipice, I removed my tongue, leaving her hanging. She let out a pained whine as her body strained against her bindings.

“Did you think I was going to make it easy?” I murmured, pressing a kiss to her pussy as I continued to slide my fingers in and out of it.

I watched her shake her head.

“Mmm, are you going to be a good girl for me, little whore?”

“Yes, yes, I am. I promise.”

Removing my fingers from her pussy, I stroked her clit with one. She let out a little sigh followed by a low moan when I spread her cheeks again with my other hand and tongued her little tight hole.

“Oh, oh, Frankie, fuck.”

Her encouragement had me continuing since she was clearly enjoying the sensation. I rubbed her clit harder, making her body shake. Then I speared her pussy with two fingers. I ducked my head underneath my hand so I could tongue her clit again. This time, I didn’t pull away when she was close. No, I sucked her clit into my mouth and ran my teeth over it.

“Shit, fuck, oh, oh, Frankie!”

She exploded, her pussy clenching hard around my fingers as she bucked in her chains. They rattled with her movements, making my cock throb in

anticipation. I wasn't sure I could wait any longer. I needed inside her. Wanted to see her face as I thrust into her pussy over and over. I needed her to know how, even though I was the one tying her up, she was the one in control of my fucking heart. She owned every inch of me. And I would do everything in my power to be her safe space for the rest of our lives.

When her body stopped shaking, I shifted back, releasing her entirely as I sat up on my knees. Then I reached out, unchaining her legs from her neck so she could relax. She laid her head down on the bed as I lowered her legs. I released the chains, joining her collar to her arm cuffs and removed the cuffs from her ankles. I didn't need those any longer.

I flipped Scarlett over onto her back, my eyes roaming over the small chains clinging to her body. They'd left such delicious little marks all over her. I ran my hands down her chest, flicking her nipples and making her whimper in response.

"Are you ready for more, little whore?"

She nodded, biting down on her lip. I leant over her and licked her nipple.

"Use your words."

"I want more, please."

Biting down on her nipple, she arched into me as best she could, with her arms still bound behind her.

"Tell me exactly what you desire."

She planted her feet into the covers and pushed her hips up into me. Even though she couldn't see, she could feel me there. And there was no clearer sign of what she needed from me than this.

"I want you to fuck me."

I ran my hand down her stomach and dipped my fingers between her legs.

"How hard?"

"Make it hurt."

I almost groaned at her words.

Such a kinky little whore.

"And what do you want me to fuck you with?"

My fingers slid inside her wet little pussy, making her shift against the intrusion.

"Your cock. I want your cock so fucking badly. Please, please fuck me. Show me I'm your little whore, please."

How could I deny my sweet but fiery woman when she asked me so fucking nicely for it? When she told me exactly what she wanted.

“Please, don’t deny me any longer... please, Famine... please fuck me.”

FORTY FOUR

FRANCIS

I released Scarlett and shifted off the bed. My fingers went to my clothes, pulling them off until I was bare. There was nothing else I wanted more right now than to feel her wrapped around me. She'd done so beautifully. Having her fully restrained by chains was something I never imagined she'd allow. Scarlett surprised me at every turn. And yet I shouldn't have been. My girl had a reckless streak. Always willing to try new things, no matter the danger. Such a curious little thing. Needing to go one step further than anyone else.

I knelt back on the bed and ran my hands up her legs. She made a little sound of pleasure under her breath, clearly waiting for me to do more.

"I like denying you," I murmured, gripping her hips and pulling her up into my lap. "Seeing you all worked up is the highlight of my day."

Her pant in response was due to me rubbing my cock along her folds.

"Is this what you want, little whore? You want me to give you my dick?"

"Please."

"So fucking needy, aren't you?"

"Frankie, please."

She shifted her hips, rubbing against me. I dipped the tip into her pussy, making her moan from the small intrusion. Giving her a couple of shallow thrusts to tease her, my girl arched up, trying to take more.

"No wonder West started calling you a slut when you're so fucking desperate for dick."

I slid deeper, trying not to groan at the delicious sensations engulfing my cock.

"Only for you, Drake, Pres and West."

I settled my hand across her hip, sliding my thumb to her clit and rubbing gently.

“I should fucking hope so. You’re ours.”

She arched up into my touch.

“You’re mine too. No one else is allowed to touch you.”

I raised an eyebrow. Not that she could see.

“No? What would you do if they did?”

The way her lip curled up into a snarl had me thrusting deeper.

“Rip their fucking face off.”

The vehemence in her voice had me rubbing her clit harder. I’d threatened violence to anyone who touched her, so for her to do the same? It made the emotions inside me expand. Made me fall ever deeper in love with this woman. The owner of my soul.

“Well, remind me never to get on your bad side.”

One final thrust had me impaling her completely. I held myself there for a long moment, adoring the way she rippled around my cock. Then I let go of her hip to wrap my fist around the chain attached to her neck, tugging her up until she was seated in my lap. I held on and stroked my other hand down her body, pressing the small chains into her skin.

“I wouldn’t hurt you, Frankie... I love you.”

I shuddered at her words. Yes, she’d said it before and I believed her, but every time she told me how she felt, my heart ached with a longing to say it back.

My hand went to her blindfold, pulling it from her head. She blinked a few times before her eyes adjusted and focused on me. I ran my thumb along her bottom lip, rocking my hips into her to keep the friction between us.

“Do you?”

If I let go of the chain, she would flop back down on the bed, but I didn’t want that. I needed her close. To be honest, I wanted her arms around me. It was so unlike me, with my need to restrain and bind who I was with. Scarlett was different. She was the balm to my burning soul.

“More than anything.”

My hand slid behind her head, cupping the back of it so I could move her closer. Scarlett watched me with such an open expression of love, I was hard-

pressed to keep my fucking cool. In fact, I was losing it. And I didn't care.

"Thank you for giving me your heart," I whispered, my voice growing hoarse.

Then I was pulling her off me and flipping her onto her stomach. My hands fumbled with my need to uncuff her. One by one, they came off, and I discarded them on the bed. Scarlett stretched her arms out, but I didn't give her much time to do it. I turned her back over and pulled her into my lap again, sinking her down on me. I took her hands and placed them on me, wanting her touch so fucking much, it almost hurt.

Her brow was furrowed when I looked at her.

"What's wrong?"

I undid the collar from around her neck and threw it away. Then I cupped her face with one hand, stroking her jaw.

"Nothing."

"Why did you take them off?"

How to answer that... how to begin to explain... fuck. I just need you, Scar.

I shifted and laid her down with me, covering her body with mine while remaining deep inside her.

"Frankie?"

"I... I need you to hold me."

The way her expression grew soft had my heart slamming against my ribcage. She wrapped both her arms around me and slid her legs over mine, holding me close. A part of me felt complete with her pressed against me this way.

"Like this?"

I nodded, resting my forehead against hers. Her hands stroked along my skin. I trembled under her touch, feeling so fucking vulnerable and exposed as she stared up at me.

"I'd do anything for you," she murmured. "All you need to do is ask."

"I know, Scar... I know... I'm just..."

"Just what?"

"Scared," I whispered.

"Of what?"

"The way I feel about you."

Being in love with her wasn't terrifying, it was the depth and level of my devotion to this woman. The way she completed me. How she never judged or

made me feel like I wasn't her everything, despite the fact she cared for three other people the same way.

I would die for you, Scarlett Nyx. I would lay down my life in place of yours.

"Why?"

"Because... because I'm so in love with you, it hurts to look at you and feel these things. To know I would give up everything to be near you. I love you, Scar. Loving you is like breathing fucking air. I can't live without it."

I moved inside her, needing to drown in her after I'd admitted the truth.

"I need you. I've always needed you and it's only now I realise how much."

My mouth found hers, kissing her deeply until we were both breathless. She moved back against me, angling her hips to give me more access. I planted a hand next to her head, rising up a little to get better leverage.

"You have me," she told me before kissing me again. "You always have me. Forever. I promise. I love you. I love you. I love you." She punctuated each one with a kiss. "You're the safest place I'll ever have. I belong with you."

I buried my face in her neck, pressing harder against her while I continued to pound her deliciously wet pussy. The relief I felt inside me at finally being able to tell her I loved her was making me all the more desperate to come inside her. To claim what was mine.

"Harder," she moaned beneath me.

My free hand wrapped around her hip, gripping her to angle her upwards, giving me access to fuck her deeper and give her more. She pressed her feet into the covers to help me, matching me thrust for thrust.

"Fuck, Scar," I groaned against her skin.

One of her hands clutched my back while the other slid between us so she could stroke herself. I only continued my rhythm, wanting to make sure she reached the edge too. Needing to feel her as she came.

"I'm going to... fuck, Frankie, I'm..."

Her words set her off, making her clench hard around me. I choked out a breath, sinking deeper inside her to feel the waves of her climax washing over her body. Then I fell too, feeling it drown me. Her. She was the wielding force behind the eruption. I slammed into her again and again, wanting it never to end. Wanting her this way forever.

"Scar," I whispered, "I love you. I love you so much."

I didn't care that I hadn't kept her chained up the whole time. This feeling. This moment. It was worth it. Worth everything. I didn't need anything else but me and her together. Scarlett did the fucking impossible and set my demons free. My whole soul felt lighter from the experience of being with her like this. From showing her my true self. And giving her my heart.

The comedown was slow and winding, neither of us wanting to let go of each other. I kissed her up her jaw and met her mouth. Scarlett's hands speared into my hair, pulling me closer. We kissed, tongues curling around each other like they belonged this way. Then I finally released her, pulling away and laying down beside her on my back. She curled up against my side, stroking my stomach in slow circles.

"Was that everything you needed?" she asked after a long moment of silence.

I turned my head to look at her.

"Why wouldn't it be?"

"I guess I just want to know that it helped with... you know."

Reaching over, I ran my finger down her cheek.

"It did."

She pressed a kiss to my collarbone.

"But that's not the only reason I wanted to chain you up. I wanted you, Scar. You are who I need."

Her smile made my chest squeeze.

"Don't worry, you made it very clear how much you wanted me. All that teasing and making me wait only made me come harder."

I snorted and stroked her shoulder.

"That's the idea. Maybe next time I'll make you wait longer. Or... perhaps I'll get one of the others to help me tease you."

Her eyes widened.

"Who?"

I tipped her chin up with my fingers.

"That's for me to know and for you to find out."

She pouted.

"That's not fair."

"I'm not a fair guy when it comes to you in my bed."

I kissed her gently to soften my words. There were a few ideas knocking

around in my head. I knew she liked to be spanked, so perhaps I would enlist Drake's help next time. He wouldn't object to punishing her with his palms while she was chained up and helpless. I had to shove the thought away before it made my dick hard again.

We lay together for a few more minutes before I sat up and helped her out of the rest of the chains. The indents all over her body were beautiful. I stared at them for a long time before I picked her up and carried her out of the room. I'd tidy the place up tomorrow. We went along the hallway to my bedroom and I set her down in my bathroom. We cleaned up together, making sure to be thorough.

She stood by my wardrobes a few minutes later looking over her clothes while I lounged on the bed in my boxers.

"You not coming to bed?" I asked when she slid her fingers over a blouse.

"I'm not tired if I'm honest."

"No? Planning on staying up late like Drake always does?"

She turned her head towards me and frowned.

"What do you mean?"

I probably shouldn't have said anything if he hadn't told her, but Drake wasn't big on giving up his secrets. And given I couldn't get him to take his fucking sleeping pills, maybe she could.

"Drake is a bit of an insomniac. That's why he had the rooftop garden built. He plays up there at night so he doesn't disturb the rest of us."

"He has insomnia? So that's why he's awake at weird hours?"

"Mmm. And he refuses to medicate it because he's a stubborn bastard who overthinks all the damn time."

She smiled.

"I've never met anyone more stubborn than him... except perhaps West, but he's more determined than stubborn."

Determined was one word to describe West. He was single-mindedly hell-bent on a path of destruction. And in all honesty, I couldn't blame him. Life hadn't been kind to any of us, but especially not him.

"Well, perhaps you can talk some sense into him. He let you tie him up, so maybe he'll listen to you about this."

She laughed and shook her head. Then she pulled out a little floaty black

dress, sliding it over her body without putting anything on underneath it. She came over to the bed and leant over me, pressing a kiss to my lips.

“You don’t mind if I go speak to him about it? I’ll be back, I promise.”

“Of course not. Go deal with my idiot best friend. I’ll be waiting.”

She smiled and kissed me again.

“I love you, Frankie.”

I stroked her cheek.

“I love you too, my little whore.”

She visibly shivered before she pulled away. I picked up the book I’d left on my bedside table and tucked myself under the covers. If Scarlett could help Drake with his little problem, then I had no issues with her disappearing for an hour or so. I looked forward to her return. Falling asleep with her in my arms after declaring my love would be a perfect end to this evening.

I’d be forever grateful to my girl for helping set me free from my past and reassuring me we would remain together for the rest of our lives.

FORTY FIVE

SCARLETT

My feet carried me up the stairs towards the roof. I slipped on a pair of sandals before I came up here. They were soft on the concrete floor as I made my way towards Drake's glass structure. He hadn't been anywhere in the penthouse, not that I'd checked his bedroom. I'd never been in there before and I wasn't sure if or when Drake intended to allow me access to his private space.

Drake sat in his armchair reading on his tablet. His hair was messy like he'd run his hands through it several times. He'd changed out of his suit into a plain white t-shirt and dark jeans. His feet were bare as usual.

Drake looked up when I approached, his brow furrowing as he took me in.

"What are you doing up here?"

"Well, hello to you too. Did you turn into Mr Grumpy between now and dinner?"

He scowled at my words.

"No."

"Am I not allowed up here?"

He rubbed his cheek.

"You are."

"Then what's the problem?"

I stopped next to his feet, looking down at the supposedly not grumpy and very stubborn man who drove me crazy at times with his cold-heartedness. We were working on that. On getting him to open up to me completely.

"There isn't one. I was merely asking why you are here."

“I wanted to see you.”

He looked stumped.

“Oh.”

“May I?”

I waved at his lap. He set his tablet down on the arm of the chair. I slid into his waiting lap and stroked his chest.

“Is something bothering you, Drake?”

“Other than the obvious, no.”

My fingers left his chest and curled into his hair instead, stroking his scalp. Drake’s lip twitched at the contact, telling me he liked it even if he wasn’t willing to admit it.

“Are you sure? I can help you if it is.”

He gave me a suspicious look. I didn’t want to come out and straight-up tell him Francis had disclosed his insomnia to me. Then again, I wasn’t sure how else to broach the subject. Drake wasn’t exactly the most forthcoming person. It’s not as if I’d forgotten what happened with Stuart earlier but being with West all day and then Francis this evening had made me feel better. I was less anxious about Stuart’s threats. The boys would protect me. I was safe here with them.

“I’m fine, Scarlett.”

I leant closer, pressing my lips to his jaw.

“I don’t think you are. In fact, I think I know what you need to help you feel better.”

He didn’t stop my advances.

“What’s that?”

“To punish me for making you let me tie you up.”

He let out a breath. Then his hand fisted my braid, and he pulled me away from him. Those indigo eyes became hard.

“That’s only one of the things I want to punish that bratty little mouth for.”

I smiled at him. It only made his demeanour that much more terrifying. And my pussy throbbed in anticipation. Yes, Francis had thoroughly fucked me and made me feel on top of the world, but it didn’t stop me from reacting to Drake this way. Fear made me wet.

Over the past few days, mine and Drake’s relationship had turned over a new leaf. If I was ever going to get him to keep opening up to me, then I needed to

push him harder.

“This mouth?” I licked my lips.

“Yes. Get on your knees.”

He didn't let go of my braid as I slid off the chair, instead, leaning forward with me. His other hand curled around my jaw, gripping it in an iron hold. It hadn't taken much for me to provoke him into punishing me. And I was rather pleased with myself for getting him on board so quickly.

“You're going to put this bratty mouth to good use rather than taunting me with it. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Now get my cock out and suck it. You better make it good or I'll be very disappointed in you, Scarlett.”

I shivered with his words. The deepness of his commanding voice had me trying not to rub my legs together.

“Yes, sir.”

He released me and sat back, putting his arms on either side of the chair. I leant forward and undid his jeans, stroking my hand along his length. It jerked under my touch. He was already hard. I tried not to smile. This turned him on. And I couldn't any longer deny I liked it when he ordered me to do his bidding. I liked it when he punished me. And I liked it when he made me afraid of what he'd do next.

When I freed him, I licked around the crown. He didn't outwardly react to it. His cold, hard stare made me shake. I wrapped my hand around the base and sucked him into my mouth. The way he watched me with a rather impassive expression as I took more had me wanting to put my hand under the skirt of my dress. I wouldn't. No doubt if I started touching myself, he would put me across his knee.

You want that.

I tried to shove the thought away, but it blared in my head.

Do it. Provoke him into spanking you. You want it. You want him to do it then fuck you with that cold expression of fury on his face.

What was getting into me? Was I turning into the brat he kept telling me I was? Did it even matter when I craved this? It had been far too long since he'd seriously punished me. After what happened in the playroom between us, things

had been shaky. Now I'd accepted I liked the way he treated me, how he would teach me a lesson for misbehaving, I wanted us to get back to that. And what better way to start than deliberately taunting him.

Smiling around his dick, I slid my other hand under my skirt. His eyes registered the movement almost immediately. Then they blazed with annoyance. I'd hit the mark.

"I didn't say you could touch yourself, Scarlett."

I popped off his dick.

"I can't help it, sir, sucking you off makes me so wet."

He didn't need to say a word for me to know he was even more turned on by me disobeying him than he wanted to admit.

"Such a brat," he muttered, then leant forward, grabbing my braid again and hauling me into his lap. He lay me across his spread legs and ran his hand along my behind. The next thing I knew, he'd flipped up my skirt and found me knicker-less.

"Have you been walking around with a bare pussy again, Scarlett?"

"Yes, sir."

"So brazen. I see I'm going to have to teach you why that's inappropriate."

"Don't you like knowing you can fuck me at any time?"

I heard him stifle a groan. He did like it but he wasn't going to admit it.

His palm came down hard on my behind, making me jerk in his lap.

"I expect you to wear underwear at work. If I find you without, I will put you over my knee and punish you until you're crying. Then I'll leave your bare little pussy unfulfilled for an entire day until you've learnt to keep yourself in check."

I shuddered as he continued to spank me, each slap harder than the ones before.

"And before you think about coming up with a loophole, I'll inform the others they're not allowed to touch you either. It won't just be a punishment for you, it'll be for them too."

I whined under the strain of the pain radiating from my backside. Not to mention what he'd just threatened.

"Yes... sir," I choked out as the slaps kept coming.

This spanking he was giving me felt like a long time coming. It had been building between us ever since we'd established this new branch of our

relationship. I desperately wanted to tell him how much I needed it. How I desired the pain he dished out. How it made me wet and achy for his thick cock inside me.

When I thought I couldn't take it any longer, he stilled, rubbing his hand over my cheek. The movement aggravated my sore, abused skin. I whimpered, shifting in his lap. His cock was still out. I could feel it digging into my stomach.

“Get on your hands and knees facing away from me.”

The command had me scrambling to obey. I crawled onto the floor and presented myself to him. I didn't look back, but I felt him kneel behind me. Both of his hands landed on my cheeks, making me wince. Then his cock was nudging my entrance, sliding back and forth across it.

“Is this what you want, Scarlett?”

“Please, sir. Please fuck me.”

Drake could probably see all of the impressions on my skin Francis' cuffs and chains had left when he shoved my dress further up my body, but he didn't comment on it. His hands were back on my backside, kneading the sore flesh. I bit my lip, trying to hold still while he punished me all over again with the movement. It was made worse by the way he thrust against my pussy, the head of his dick knocking against my clit repeatedly.

“Fuck, Drake! Fuck me, please.”

I earned another slap across my raw behind. Calling him Drake had been the wrong thing to say, but I didn't care. I wanted him more than I gave a shit about being punished.

“Please,” I all but cried.

And finally, Drake gave me the relief I so desperately craved. He sunk his dick inside me. I let out a harsh pant. The wetness of my pussy allowed him to slide inside me with absolute ease. He went deeper, making my fingers curl beneath me. I winced when he gripped my behind yet again instead of my hips. He began to thrust, holding my raw skin like he wanted to further punish me. I was so over sensitised from Francis' teasing earlier and Drake's punishment, I arched my back and tried not to come instantly. Usually, I needed external stimulation, but my body was hyper-aware of every part of him that was touching me. The way his hips slapped against me with each of his thrusts, making me take him deep and hard.

“Fuck!”

If he stroked my clit right now, I would fall apart on the spot. The way he was mercilessly ramming his dick into me, pressing against the right spot with each of his strokes was a pleasure overload.

I dared to look back at him. Drake’s cold and stoic expression had my heart stuttering in my chest. He was so focused on fucking me, making me feel every inch of him inside me. There was such brutality in the way he gave it to me. Like he was doing this to punish me too. And I loved every moment no matter how much my body strained to take the unrelenting force of his body pounding into mine.

Then he adjusted his angle. It was like a fucking firework went off inside my body, sending waves of pleasure and pain up my spine. Drake hammered into my most sensitive spot like he was hell-bent on driving me into oblivion. I cried out, my hands scrabbling against the wooden floor below me.

“If you want to be a good girl, you’ll come for me,” he gritted out. “Come all over my cock, Scarlett.”

His hand tightened around my punished skin while the other slid underneath me. All I could focus on was his words and the untold pleasure building inside me. A good girl. I could be a good girl for him. His fingers were on my clit, stroking across it without mercy. And I was fucking done. My elbows gave way as my climax rocked through me, I slid to the floor, my hips only held up by Drake’s hands on me and his dick impaled in my trembling body.

I was lost to him. I never wanted us to go back to the toxic push and pull between us. All I wanted was this. Him being unrelenting in the way he fucked me after he dished out punishment. I wanted Drake to open up to me fully. For us to be a mix between how we were as friends when we were younger and how we were now in our rather tumultuous sexual relationship. I just wanted him to be... mine.

When I came down from the clouds, Drake pulled out of me and tugged me up by my braid. He spun me around on my knees and shoved me down on his dick. I opened my mouth in time for him to slide into it. A few sharp thrusts and then he was coming down my throat.

“Swallow it,” he demanded in a low growl that had me shuddering.

I did as he asked the best I could with him still erupting in my mouth. When

he pulled away and tucked himself back in his jeans, I swallowed hard. Tipping my head back, I looked up at him. His expression was no longer so fierce and unyielding. In fact, he looked at me with tenderness as he put his hand out to me. I let him pull me to my feet and didn't object when he wrapped an arm around me to hold me against him. My legs were still a little shaky.

"Did you come up here to provoke me?" he murmured as he ran the fingers of his free hand down my throat before curling them around the back of my neck.

"No... I came up here to talk to you, but then you seemed grumpy so I thought you might need me to help you relax and get your mind off whatever it is that's bothering you."

He let out a sigh and pressed me harder against his body.

"Apparently you know me better than I do."

"Do you have trouble sleeping?"

I decided I might as well come out and ask him about it. Drake wasn't the type to beat around the bush.

He narrowed his eyes.

"Who told you?"

"Frankie."

He let out another sigh and looked away over the city skyline.

"Yes, I do... it's like my brain doesn't stop whirling. I have a very hard time shutting off."

"Does nothing help?"

I wanted to know if there was anything I could do for him. Thinking of him up here all alone night after night made my heart ache. His loneliness was too much for me to handle. All I wanted to do was be there for him the way I had been when we'd been kids.

"A few things do. And you just gave me one of them."

I grinned.

"Oh? Sex helps, does it?"

He rolled his eyes and looked at me again.

"Yes, but it's more than that... it's you. Even though I worry about you all the time, having you here next to me makes it... better."

My hands went to his chest, sliding up it.

“I make you better?”

He nodded.

“Well, allow me to help you even more in that case.”

I went up on my tiptoes and kissed him. He gathered me up against his chest, kissing me back with the intensity that was uniquely Drake. The very stubborn ice king of my heart devoured my mouth, making my toes curl and my chest ache with the way he attacked me with his tongue.

When he let me go, I dropped back down to my feet, but Drake cupped my face with both his hands.

“I’m trying,” he whispered, staring at me with no small amount of affection in his eyes. “I’m really trying to let you in, little wisp.”

I bit my lip, attempting to process what he’d just called me. The other three had given me pet names, but Drake having one for me was new. He was the one who came up with my Little Nyx nickname. It didn’t feel quite like me any longer even though I was Scarlett Nyx. I preferred their individual names for me. They made me feel special.

“That’s new,” I whispered back.

He actually smiled at me.

“It’s how I see you in my head. A little wisp of a woman come to drive me to distraction.”

His little wisp. I can’t believe that’s what you call me in your head, you beautifully stubborn man.

I didn’t want to press him further on it, but it made my heart hurt. Drake was trying, and it was all I could ask for.

“I’m not sure you’d be very impressed if I told you how adorable I think you are when you’re being sweet.”

He didn’t stop smiling, but he shook his head. Leaning closer, he pressed a kiss to my forehead. It made me relax further into his body. The gesture meant everything to me. Then I tried to hold back a yawn as tiredness settled over me. I’d been thoroughly used this evening, and it was starting to hit me.

Drake chuckled as he pulled back and saw me putting my hand over my mouth.

“I think someone needs to get some sleep.”

“I guess you’re right.”

He stroked my face and dropped his arms from around me.

“Go to bed, little wisp. We’ll talk more tomorrow, hmm?”

I nodded, stroking his arm and gave him a smile. Then I turned and walked away towards the stairwell, feeling on top of the fucking world. Yes, there were a thousand things going on that were so wrong, but everything between me and the boys was good. I finally felt like we were on the right track with each other.

I practically skipped into the stairwell, completely ready to curl up in bed with Francis. My head was in the clouds as I descended the first lot of stairs. As I turned the corner to go down the next set to get to the penthouse floor, a coldness washed over me, making me shiver a little. Before I had a chance to glance around to see where it came from, I was forcibly slammed against the wall by a large solid body. I let out a yelp, surprised by the sudden movement. A hand slid over my mouth, muffling the sound.

The next thing I knew, a hood was shoved over my head and tightened around my neck after the person slid their hand from my mouth. They pressed it back over on top of the fabric, stopping me from making another sound. I struggled against them, regaining my senses.

What the fuck is happening?

Something sharp dug into my neck. I cried out against the hand over my mouth, continuing to wriggle and try to push them off me. The body was too fucking solidly built for me to do much. They held me against the wall as my movements grew sluggish. Then I knew what the fuck the sharp prick was. Whoever this was had drugged me. This was a kidnapping. I was being kidnapped yet again.

Fuck. Holy fuck. No. No! This can't be happening! It can't be!

I was almost desperate with my struggles but my body grew weaker until it almost gave out.

The last thing I thought about before I lost consciousness was that I should have heeded Stuart’s warning about him coming for me. Perhaps the boys weren’t able to keep me safe after all. And I might need to save myself before this war was over.

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CATAclysm

FOUR HORSEMEN
BOOK FOUR

SARAH BAILEY

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Please note the spelling throughout is British English.

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PLAYLIST

Spotify Playlist

Twisted – The People’s Thieves
V For My Vendetta – Alter.
Messed Up – Once Monsters, Chloe Adams
Autumn – No Kind of Rider
Hourglass – Hex Cougar, AWAY, josh pan
Chemical – KRANE, Lemay, Ahsha, Hex Cougar
Burn – Hex Cougar, Pauline Herr
Riot! – Arrested Youth
Darkside – Sam Tinnesz
Dancing with the Devil – Alter.
Sin (Demo) – Labrinth
Heat Seeker – DREAMERS, grandson
Sweat – Zayn
Thunderstorm – Rivals
LOVELOST – margø
King of the Damned – Barren Gates, Alter.
Fuck You – Silent Child
Freak – UNDREAM, Silent Child, Hannabelle
IDGAF – Besomorph, Silent Child
Bow to Me – TRACES
Playing with Fire – Graffiti Ghosts
Tears of Gold – Faouzia
Animal In Me – Solence
Death Do Us Part – Solence
VILLAIN – MePemuro
Kerosene – Rachel Lorin

Vendetta – UNSECRET, Krigarè
Alpha – Little Destroyer
Fall To My Grave – SVRRIC, ruindkid, Silent Child
Can't Stop Me – State of Mine
Animal – EMELINE
Coquette – Kuoga., Ivy
Hate You + Love You – Cheat Codes, AJ Mitchell
Wrong – MAX, Lil Uzi Vert
Six Feet – Call Me Karizma, Mike's Dead
All This Time – Chris Lanzon
Victim – Halflives
Villain – Spencer William
True Love Is Violent – Allie X
7 Billion – Marina Kaye
Girl On Fire – DaWave
Comatose – Negative 25
Speechless – Solence
Drop Dead – Holly Humberstone
vicious – Tate McRae
knees – E. Alvin
Necessary Evil – Motionless In White, Jonathan Davis
FOR YOUR LOVE – Måneskin
Dancing After Death – Matt Maeson
Riptide – Saint Chaos
Sinner – DEZI
Heavenly Side – ILLENIUM, Matt Maeson
Dark Eyes – N3WPORT, braev
Fallen – Gert Taberner
Stay Here – The Nües
My Love Will Never Die – AG, Claire Wyndham
Dies Irae – náttúra, Vila
BODY – LICK, LUNA AURA
tell me a lie, won't you – nctrn
Won't – Tanerélle

Nasty – Bryce Fox
Your Blood – Nothing But Thieves
Lose My Breath – Rhea Robertson
Set Me On Fire – Birdmask
Regrets – Dream on Dreamer
Paradox – Jaymes Young
Let It Die – Rival, Philip Strand
Trapped – Levianth, Harley Bird
Hurt – Gallant
On Fire – Once Monsters
HALF HEARTED – We Three
Undone – Howard Kaye
Demons on the Side of My Bed – Teflon Sega
Long Suffering – Eliza Grace
Hunter – Power-Haus, Christian Reindl, Eivør
Forever & Always – Written by Wolves, Becks
Change Me – 8 Graves
World on Fire – The New Shining
Breaking My Bones – Friday Pilots Club
Like Lovers Do – Hunter Plake
Dead Tomorrow – Solence
With You – Dotan
Burn it All Down – League of Legends, PVRIS
Flames – MOD SUN, Avril Lavigne
Phoenix – The New Shining
Exhale – Laffey, Dillan Witherow

*To those who live under the night's sky, who experience darkness in every corner,
who have been through hell and back and who are ready to walk into the abyss
with me*

*You are who this tale of the men fated to bring the apocalypse and their goddess of
the night is dedicated to
Blessed be your dark little hearts*

ONE

SCARLETT

ELEVEN MONTHS AGO

“One more day in the darkened cell. One more day in hell. One more day in the pitch-black cell. One more day...” I sang almost brokenly, my voice hushed and hoarse.

The room was cold. There were no windows. No way of letting the light in. Only me and the darkness.

I curled in on myself in my corner, trying to preserve what little heat I had. Who the hell knew how long I'd been in here? The minutes passed slowly, time ticking away without me. The world outside was nothing to me. I hadn't left the estate in nine years. This prison where my parents held me under lock and key. It was a lonely existence. One marred by violence and pain when I stepped out of line. Like now. That was the reason I was here in the darkness. I'd done something they didn't approve of.

Arguing with my father was always futile. The older I got, the less patience I had for his rule. This time it had been about me refusing to stay out of sight when they had guests over. Dad caught me sneaking down to the kitchen. I'd been thrown in here for my sins.

Now I was cold and utterly alone, wishing I was anyone else, anywhere else. All I'd ever wanted was to leave the estate. To see the outside world. I'd only ever seen it on a fucking TV or computer screen.

I sighed and buried my face in my knees, curling my arms tighter around them. Everything hurt with the chill in the air seeping into my bones. Closing

my eyes, I tried not to let the agony consume me. Tried not to allow myself to fall apart. The futility of my life was most pronounced when I was in this room. It haunted me. Made me feel like I was nothing. Nothing and no one.

I faintly heard a noise coming from a few feet away. The sound of the door opening and closing. The shuffle of footsteps was followed by someone placing things down on the floor. Then a body settled next to me.

“Scar.”

I opened my eyes slowly. Mason sat beside me. He’d brought in a lamp with him. I didn’t turn to look at him, but I could see him out of the corner of my eye.

“Let me see.”

I didn’t want to show him. All I wanted was for everything to go away. I wanted to... die. Then perhaps I would be free of this hell.

Letting out a sigh, I raised my head and met his brown eyes. There was so much sympathy in them, it threatened to decimate me further. He leant closer, capturing my chin between his fingers. There was a small damp cloth in his hands. With absolute gentle care, he wiped away the blood from my chin. I’d accidentally bitten my tongue after Stuart smacked me in the face. I’d spat the blood at his feet. It only earned me another fist and the reward of being thrown in here.

My face hurt, but I was used to the pain now. Used to being beaten and left to nurse my own wounds. Well, Mason usually snuck in here when everyone else had gone to bed and cleaned me up. He was the only person who gave a shit about me, even if he never protected me from Stuart’s temper. His violence. His fists.

After wiping my face up, he applied some cream to the bruise forming on my jaw. Then he sat back, having put both the cloth and the tube of cream down next to me.

“Do you know what day it is?” he asked, his voice hushed.

I shook my head.

Mason shifted, turning to grab something from behind him. When he presented it to me, I stared at the plate with the little cake sitting on it with a lit candle.

“Happy birthday, Scar.”

I took the plate from his hands, stretching my legs out and staring at the cake he'd clearly had the chef, Gio, make for me. I could see it had little chunks of apple running through it. Leaning closer, I inhaled the scent. Apples and cinnamon. It made me bite my lip. My favourite scent in the whole wide world.

"Go on, blow it out and make a wish," he encouraged me when I didn't say a word.

There were so many things I wished for in this world, but two things stuck out more than anything else.

I wish for freedom and to remember who I was.

I blew the candle out and set the plate in my lap.

"I hope it was a good one."

"It was," I whispered.

My eyes remained on the cake, staring at it with abject misery. My chest ached with a longing that threatened to have me turning into a sobbing mess. I couldn't cry in front of Mason on a day like this. He had no idea of the void inside me.

I was missing something. Missing something huge. It left a giant gaping hole in my heart. In my whole soul. There was no escaping it. No hiding or running away. It annihilated me every single time. Today marked the tenth year I'd had to experience it. And for the first time, I could admit to myself it wasn't only one thing. It was four separate voids. My missing pieces. I didn't know what or who they were, only they weren't here with me.

Shoving all of my emotions down, I plucked the candle from the cake and picked it up, taking a bite. The burst of flavour soothed me a fraction. It couldn't heal the holes in my heart, but it could make me feel less... empty. Even if it was just for a moment.

"Good?" Mason asked.

I nodded around my mouthful.

"Gio made it especially for you."

I swallowed and picked at the cake.

"Thank him for me... please."

Mason would have asked Gio to do it in secret, considering I was in the doghouse with my parents. No doubt they'd forgotten it was my birthday. I didn't care about whether they did or not. I spent most of them with Mason. He

was the only friend I had.

Mason nodded as I bit into the cake again. It was the only food I'd had in god knows how long. A small slice of heaven. A small treat in my otherwise lonely and tragic existence.

We sat in silence as I finished the rest of the cake. I handed him the plate when I was done. He set it beside him and took my hand, running his thumb along it.

"I'm sorry I can't do more to help you celebrate today."

I shrugged.

"S'okay. It's not your fault... it's mine."

"Scar..."

"I should have done what Dad said and stayed in my room."

His sympathetic look made my chest ache. I didn't want his pity. I just wanted to leave this place and be free. For this void inside me to be filled. To find the missing pieces of my soul.

"You shouldn't blame yourself."

"I know better, Mase. I've always known better. I'm just tired. So tired of everything. Sometimes... sometimes I want to disappear completely."

He reached out and put his hand on my thigh, giving it a squeeze. I looked down at it, feeling slightly uncomfortable from the direct contact.

"I don't want you to disappear."

I didn't ask him to help me escape my parents. It was another futile endeavour. I'd tried before and he'd told me to stick it out. Said he couldn't interfere with what Stuart wanted. Mason gave with one hand by taking care of me when things got out of hand but took with the other by refusing to do anything about the abuse. And so my feelings towards the man I thought of as a brother figure were all fucked up. A mess of conflicting emotions I buried to survive.

"I'm still here, aren't I?"

He withdrew his hand as if sensing it made me uncomfortable. Then he shifted to his feet, picking up the things he brought in here, including the lamp.

"Yeah, you are. But I wish you wouldn't say things like that."

I didn't answer him. He didn't understand my pain. I don't think anyone could. Turning away, I stared at the wall, wishing he would leave me alone again.

While I appreciated his gesture, I wanted to cry myself to sleep and pretend it wasn't the one day of the year that made me feel like I was dying. Birthdays should be a happy event. Not for the first time, I wished I didn't feel so empty from it.

"I'm sorry I can't make today better for you."

When I continued refusing to respond to him, Mason left, taking all the light with him. The door shut and tears slid down my cheeks.

Please... if there's someone out there, set me free. Please, set me free.

One day... one day I'd find my freedom. I'd find those missing pieces. And I'd hold on to them tight. Then we'd never be separated again.

TWO

FRANCIS

Setting my book down on the bedside table, I looked over at the clock. My brow furrowed when I realised Scarlett had been gone for well over an hour. I didn't think her conversation with Drake would take that long. It needed to happen, but the Scarlett-sized void in my bed had me feeling off.

I got up, slipping from bed and stretched. My gut told me to find out where she'd got to. My feet carried me over to my bedroom door. I yanked it open and stepped out, almost running headlong into Drake. He stepped back and gave me an odd look.

"What's wrong?"

I rubbed my face before looking up and down the hallway. My eyes went back to Drake. Unease spread across me, gathering speed like a tsunami was about to hit. Like it was about to drown us all in a fresh new hell.

"Isn't Scarlett with you?"

He blinked.

"No, I sent her to bed like twenty minutes ago."

My stomach churned.

"She was meant to come back to me after she spoke to you."

Drake's brow creased, his indigo eyes filling with concern.

"I didn't see her downstairs. You don't think she got intercepted by Pres or West?"

I couldn't imagine why. She'd spent all day with West. And Prescott wouldn't have wanted to interrupt my night with her.

"No, but we should check with them."

Somehow, I knew she wouldn't be with Prescott or West, but where else would she have got to? Scarlett had no reason not to come to bed with me. I'd told her I loved her. I already knew she loved me, but us exchanging those words had been a profound moment for me. Now, I wanted my girl in bed, curled up against me while I fell asleep. I already missed her beautiful face.

Drake nodded and walked towards Prescott's door as it was the closest and knocked rapidly. A minute later, a rather rumpled looking Prescott dressed only in boxers appeared and openly glared at Drake.

"What do you want? I was asleep."

"Is Scarlett with you?"

"No, why would she be? She's spending the night with Francis." His eyes darted over to me. Then his expression changed. "Why isn't she with you?"

Drake's expression grew grim, but he ignored Prescott and strode towards West's door, slamming his hand down on it twice. It took less than thirty seconds for the door to be wrenched open.

"What the fuck do you want?"

West looked ready to go to battle, even if he was also only in his boxers.

"Scarlett."

"What about her? I thought she was spending the night with Frankie."

It was then I finally allowed myself to panic. To truly feel the dread curling in my gut.

"She's not with you."

"No."

"Fuck."

West stepped out and looked at the three of us, his irritation morphing into concern.

"What is going on?" Prescott asked, putting his hands on his hips.

Drake didn't respond. His hands clenched and unclenched at his sides as if he was trying to control his reaction to learning Scarlett might be gone. Hell, I knew it in my fucking bones. She wasn't here.

"We are not going to jump to conclusions. She could still be here."

"Drake, what the fuck is going on?"

I rubbed my arm before deciding I wasn't going to stand here and hash it out with them. We needed to find out what happened. And we needed to do it now.

“She went to see Drake on the roof an hour ago and was meant to come back to me. Drake said he sent her down to bed twenty minutes ago. So excuse me if I want to jump to fucking conclusions,” I ground out.

Then I was moving towards the stairs, heedless of the fact I wasn't fully dressed. Nothing was more important than finding her.

“You can't go around the building dressed like that,” Drake called after me.

“Get me some fucking clothes then,” I shouted back, taking the stairs two by two.

Scarlett would have left the roof by the stairwell. Only very few people had access to it. You had to have the right code to open any of the doors. Of course, in an emergency, they would unlock. There was another stairwell in the building, but this one was for our personal use.

I shouldered open the door, walking into it and looking around. Drake hadn't noticed anything untoward, but maybe he hadn't been paying attention. I walked up the first flight of stairs, trying to see if there was anything different. I don't know why I was so sure she was gone. My body felt her absence. It was as if I was attuned to her on some cellular level, which was fucking crazy. When you grow up with coincidence like the circumstances of our birth, it made things like fate and destiny seem real. Feel fucking real. I didn't care if it was crazy. I fucking knew.

“Francis,” came Drake's voice.

“I'm up here.”

“We should check the security footage to see where she went.”

“Where's Pres and West?”

“Getting dressed.”

My eyes searched the stairwell, but I couldn't see anything out of place. Quietly cursing to myself, I searched up the next set of stairs. Drake had closed the roof door. I wasn't going to check outside. There was no way she was still up there.

I made my way back down the stairs and found Drake with a pile of clothes in his hand.

“Put this shit on and we'll go down to my office to pull up the security feeds.”

Taking the clothes out of his hands, I hurriedly pulled on the t-shirt and shorts before following Drake down to our office floor. We walked along to his

office. The place was silent. No lights were on, just as we'd left it earlier. He sat down at his computer while I stood next to him.

It took him a few minutes to get into the security feeds. West and Prescott joined us as Drake brought the feeds up on the screen. He found the cameras in the stairwell and rewound it back until we could see Scarlett entering from the roof. We watched her walk down the first set of stairs. As she approached the second, a body slammed into her. They wore a hood. We couldn't see their face and their back was to us.

"Do we have another angle?" I asked as the person put a hood over Scarlett's head and looked like they jabbed something into her neck.

"Yes," Drake replied, fiddling with the screen and bringing up the camera covering the next part of the stairwell.

We still couldn't see who it was, but what they'd done to Scarlett was clearer. They'd covered her mouth with their hand and stabbed her with a needle.

"They fucking drugged her," West ground out.

I glanced at him, finding a furious expression on his face and his fists clenched into balls at his sides. Anger was simmering in my veins too, but there was worry there too. Worry for our girl.

My eyes went back to the screen. Scarlett had stopped struggling. The person picked her up in their arms and carried her down the stairs, disappearing from view.

None of us were going to state the obvious. Someone had taken her from us. Again. Fucking stolen her. Again.

"How the fuck did they get into the stairwell? No one should be able to do that," Prescott said, waving his hand at the screen.

"We need to check everything surrounding the stairwell from the last hour and a half. And I mean everything," Drake said, ignoring Prescott's question.

He sounded like he'd shut down all of his emotions and was trying to stay level-headed, but I wasn't fucking level-headed right now at all. Our girl was gone. Fucking gone. And I wanted to kick some fucking heads in.

You sound like West.

I didn't care. Scarlett was the most important person in my life. I'd do whatever it took to get her back and keep her safe.

"We should be going after her," West said.

“How the fuck do you think we’re going to find her if we don’t know who took her and how?”

West didn’t respond, glaring at Drake even though he was right. We couldn’t find her without knowing who took her.

“What if it was Stuart?” Prescott said. “He threatened to come after her. To come after all of us.”

It was the logical explanation, but Stuart wasn’t the type of man who acted quickly. He had always been calculating in his approach to us. However, perhaps now he knew Scarlett had remembered the past, the thing he actually wanted, he may have acted faster. Somehow, it didn’t sit right with me. We couldn’t rule it out, but we needed to look at every possible avenue.

“It could have been him, but we have to find out how they gained access to the building and the stairwell first.”

Drake sighed and started bringing up more cameras.

“Look, I know. Someone has taken our woman and I’m fucking mad about it, but I am not going off half-cocked without a plan or knowing what happened. Our position is already precarious in the first place with Stuart threatening her. We need to be thorough. Now is not the time to be reckless.”

West paced away towards the window. The tension lining his shoulders spoke volumes. This was not what any of us wanted. It was the second time she’d been stolen from us. We were meant to protect her from any and all threats, but how the fuck could we have known someone would infiltrate our building. We had security to prevent this shit from happening. Clearly, we needed to re-think it. Maybe increase it in the future.

“What about Mel? Shouldn’t we check in with him?” I asked.

Melvin was our weekday night-time security guy.

“You’re right. Call him. I’ll keep going through this. There’s no point checking the tracker on her phone since she didn’t have it on her, did she?”

“No, she left it in my room.”

It had been on my bedside table before I left my room. We couldn’t track her, and it frustrated me no end. I should have insisted she took it with her. Maybe then we wouldn’t be on the back foot. Then again, whoever took her would have probably checked her for a phone and got rid of it. We were going to have to work out a better way to track our girl. Something more discreet. I’d talk to

the boys about it when we got her back. We were going to find her. I was in no fucking doubt of that. We would move heaven and earth to get to her. This time, we wouldn't fail Scarlett. We would never fail her again.

I picked up Drake's office phone and rang down to the front desk. The longer the phone rang without being answered, the more concerned I grew. Melvin normally answered straight away unless he was taking a toilet break.

"He's not answering."

"Go down and check on him. Take West with you."

We could have checked the feeds, but it was going to take Drake long enough to go through the footage as it was. I moved over to West, pulling him by the arm. He came willingly, even if he looked about ready to unleash hell upon the world. I was fully on board with that fucking idea. Heads were going to roll when we found out who had taken her. This time, we weren't going to allow her to go missing for ten years. Even ten fucking seconds was too long.

I swear to you, Scar, I swear on my fucking life we'll find you and bring you home.

"I know Drake's right," West murmured as we walked along the hallway towards the lifts, "I know he's fucking right, but I am going to murder the motherfucker who took her. I will tear him apart."

"How do you know it's a him?"

West gave me a look.

"I have a very good idea of who took her, Frankie. In fact, I will put fucking money on it."

I eyed him as I pressed down on the button to call the lift.

"Who?"

"Think about it. Think long and fucking hard and you will come up with the same idea I have."

"Why didn't you say anything to Drake?"

West shrugged.

"You know what he's like. He will need proof. But I know in my fucking gut." He pointed at his chest. "I fucking know."

The lift arrived and the two of us piled in. I didn't ask him again as we rode down to the ground floor. West wasn't going to share his thoughts with me when he was in this kind of mood.

When the doors opened, both of us stepped out and walked over to the

reception desk. My eyes darted around, seeing no one about. West made his way behind it.

“Frankie.”

He disappeared from sight, making me race over to find out what was happening. The marble floor was cold under my bare feet, but I didn’t give a shit. West was kneeling down next to Mel, checking for a pulse. There were no visible injuries on his body.

“Is he...?” I asked, pausing by his chair.

“He’s alive.” He slapped Mel’s face lightly. “Hey, come on, wake up.”

Mel didn’t stir.

“He must have knocked him out with the same shit as Scarlett.”

West put his arms under Mel and hauled him up, getting him sat down in the chair. Mel’s head lolled on his chest. There wasn’t much we could do about that. I picked up the desk phone and called up to Drake.

“Yeah?” Prescott answered.

“Mel is unconscious, but he’s alive. We think he was drugged like Scar.”

“Fuck, okay... Drake’s still checking the footage... wait, hold on, go back.”

I stood, my body tense as I waited for Prescott to say something else. Pressing down, I put the phone on speaker so West could hear too.

“There... stop there,” Prescott said a moment later. “Isn’t that...?”

There was a muffled voice from next to him, so I assumed Drake was answering. When neither of them said another word, I prompted them, wanting to know what the fuck they’d found.

“Who is it?”

And when Prescott replied to me, my blood ran cold. My eyes met West’s, who had a rather grim expression on his face.

“Is that who you were thinking?” I asked.

“Yeah. It fucking well is. And mark my words, he’s a dead man walking.”

THREE

SCARLETT

My neck was stiff and achy when I regained consciousness. For a second I lay there, trying to remember what the fuck happened, then my eyes flew open. Above me was a white ceiling with swirly decorative plastering. I blinked twice, then sat up. My eyes went around the room, trying to work out where the fuck I was.

I was on a bed with a ridiculous amount of throw pillows on it. It was a wooden four-poster with white see-through material suspended from the top end to the bottom. The room was decorated in light blue pastel colours. The covers had little blue sailing boats all over them. A dressing table sat to my left with a glass top and under it was one of those resin images of a beach and a swelling tide. On the opposite side sat a wall of wardrobe doors. At the bottom of the bed was a driftwood ottoman. The whole room was light and airy. And it gave me the fucking creeps if I was honest.

Looking down at myself, I found I was still in the same dress I'd put on when I'd gone up to the roof to see Drake. Still with no knickers or bra on. It made me feel even more uneasy, but at least I hadn't been touched... I hoped.

I wasn't tied down to the bed, so I got up and walked over to the door. My hand went to the handle. It turned. Swallowing hard, I pulled the door open and looked out into the corridor. It wasn't very long. There was a door opposite it, then another at each end. I stepped out and went towards the open one where I could hear the faint sound of a TV. My bare feet on the carpet made very little sound as I padded towards it.

Why haven't I been locked up? This doesn't feel right.

I'd been kidnapped from Fortuity by an unknown person. I thought it might

be one of Stuart's men, but in reality, I had absolutely no idea. And the fact I was in a well-kept home made me nervous. I was going to be brave, though. I had to. Not just for me, but for the boys. I had to make sure I could get out of here alive, so I could go back to the men I loved. There was no other option. I didn't want to be separated from them again.

The moment I thought about them, my chest caved in. They would be going crazy knowing I'd been taken again. After what it had done to them last time, I dreaded to think of how it would affect them this time. I knew in my heart they would do everything in their power to find me. And I would do my best to escape, regardless.

I reached the door and peered into the room beyond. It was an open-plan kitchen/living space. I could see the flickering screen of the TV and a figure sitting on the sofa watching it.

My breath caught in my throat. My lungs constricted painfully, and my hands shook.

Sat on that sofa was someone I recognised. I would know the back of their head anywhere. And it made me sick to my stomach.

"Hello, Scar."

Mason turned his head and looked over at me standing in the doorway. His expression was open, and he smiled at me. It made me want to retch. My trembling hand went to my stomach, trying to fight back the urge. Trying to process what I was seeing. Trying to understand what the hell was going on.

He stood up from the sofa and walked around it, coming closer to me. His hands dug into his pockets as he continued to smile with a horrifying glint in his eyes.

"How are you feeling? Are you hungry?"

You fucking kidnapped me and you're acting like there's nothing wrong. Like this is just a normal fucking day. What the fuck?

"You look a little pale. Come, sit down and I'll make you some breakfast."

He went to take me by the arm, but I stepped back out of his reach. How on earth could he be so casual about this? The man had kidnapped me. Actually taken me away from the men I loved. And now he was being nice, like we were... a couple. That would never happen. In fact, I would rather die.

His expression darkened even though he kept smiling.

“Come now, Scarlett, you need to eat.”

I couldn't find my voice. It was all too fucked up and surreal.

This time when he reached for me, I was too slow. He gripped my wrist and forcibly dragged me into the room. I barely had a chance to resist. He tugged me to the dining room table just off the kitchen and physically sat me down in a chair.

When he let go, his expression cleared, and his eyes softened.

“What would you like for breakfast?”

I stared up at him, feeling completely out of my depth. This man had cared for me for ten years and yet the things I now knew about him made my skin crawl. They made me want to run as far away as possible.

“I know, I'll make your favourite, shall I? You deserve a treat.”

I flinched but didn't respond to him. The fact he knew those things about me was a blessing and a fucking curse. He gave me a warning look before he moved into the kitchen. My eyes went to the table, staring down at it as I tried to process everything. I could hear him banging around in the kitchen, but I didn't look back. I didn't move.

There were things I had to establish. First of all, I needed to know where he'd taken me. Where the hell I was. Then I could make a plan to escape. And I needed to find out why he'd taken me. Was he keeping me here for Stuart? What was his plan?

You need to stay calm. Don't make him angry.

The last time I'd angered Mason, he'd hurt me. The risk of it happening again was far too great. I had to keep a level head. Had to keep him onside until I made my move.

“Where are we?” I asked, trying to keep the panic out of my voice.

“Home.”

“Home?”

“Mmm, yes, home, Scar. Do you like it? I decorated it especially for you.”

My eyes roamed around the space, finding everything was exactly my style. And it made me feel worse. So much fucking worse because I didn't like it all. I hated it. Everything about this situation was horrifying.

“It's nice... but where is home exactly?”

“Look out the window.”

I didn't know if I was allowed to get up from the table, but when I looked back at him, the man was smiling at me. He waved towards the patio doors to our right. Slowly, I rose from the chair and walked over to it. My eyes darted around the landscape, finding we were set off a little way back from the edge of a cliff. And beyond that? It was the sea. A very rough sea. The waves were high with whitecaps, and the water looked grey. Rain battered against the glass as a storm raged outside, but I couldn't see anything else near us.

We were on the coast somewhere. And we were isolated.

Fuck. Oh... oh fuck!

"Mason, where are we?"

This time, I couldn't keep the rising alarm out of my voice.

"The northwest coast of Scotland."

My stomach was on the floor in a matter of seconds. Mason had basically taken me as far away from my boys as we could get without leaving the country.

"And this place is yours?"

"Ours, and yes, I bought it five years ago. I finished redecorating it earlier this year, so it was ready for you."

I turned around and met his eyes.

"Ready for me?"

Then I remembered what Stuart had told me. How he intended to hand me off to Mason like I was a prize for his loyalty. A fucking trophy.

"Yes, this is our home, Scar."

He said it like it was something I should have known already. And it was the creepiest fucking thing I'd ever heard come out of his mouth. This man had bought this place with the sole intention of bringing me here and keeping me under lock and key. Of that, I was certain.

"Mason, this is..." *It's creepy. It's so fucking creepy.* "Really lovely of you. Thank you."

His smile made me want to throw up.

"I'm so happy you like it. Now, sit back down."

I did as he said on automatic. If I did anything sudden right now, I didn't think it would end well for me. My mind was rioting, rebelling against everything I was seeing and hearing. This wasn't Stuart's doing at all. Mason had taken me for his own reasons.

He's obsessed with you.

I realised it was probably hypocritical of me to be alarmed by Mason's obsessiveness when West was obsessed with me too. However, I'd grown up with West. I knew him inside out. He wasn't a threat to me. He'd killed for me, and he would do it again. In fact, I was relatively sure this would be the final straw when it came to Mason, regardless of the fact his father was the Met Police Commissioner.

Besides, I was in love with West. Even after he told me about his diagnosis, it didn't change my feelings. He might be a little psychotic, but I could see how the past had shaped him. How guilt had eaten him up inside. To me, he wasn't crazy or lacking remorse or empathy. He had those two things in spades... for me. No one outside of me and the boys knew the truth of the night I'd fallen. They didn't understand him. I did.

Fuck, I miss you. My heart burns for you. All of you.

Mason brought over a cup of tea for me, along with French toast with apples and cinnamon. I didn't want him to think I was ungrateful, so I thanked him. It was one of my favourites, and I couldn't fault him for it. He sat down across from me and watched me eat. It tasted like ash in my mouth. Only because this whole situation had me on edge.

"Good?" he asked me after I'd finished, having forced the food down. I needed to keep my strength up.

"Yes, thank you."

He gave me a smile, getting up and collecting my dishes. I watched him walk into the kitchen.

"Um... is it okay if I have a shower?"

Mason was turning the taps on for the sink.

"Of course, it's the room across from our bedroom. And there are clothes for you in the wardrobe."

"Thank you."

I got up, giving him a nod. Then I walked out of the room, trying not to break down on the spot. My feet carried me to the bedroom. I pulled open the wardrobe doors. The sight I was met with made my body tremble. He'd bought me so many clothes, I could barely count them. Not wishing to think too hard about it, I pulled out some jeans, a t-shirt and a jumper, along with underwear. I

hurried into the bathroom and locked the door. There were towels on the rack and all the toiletries I could need.

Dumping the clothes on the floor, I stripped out of my dress and got in the shower. I turned it on, not caring that the water was cold at first. When it warmed up, I stood under the spray and allowed myself to feel the fear seeping into my veins. Tears mixed with the water as I washed, wishing I could rid myself of the horrors awaiting me outside the door of the bathroom.

Mason had planned this for years. He'd watched me, bided his time and waited until he could take me away from my life. So he could hold me captive, just like Stuart had done. Only I had the distinct feeling he wanted to play house with me. It meant he would expect me to be his... girlfriend? Wife? Neither of those things sat well with me. The implications had me clenching my fists at my sides.

I will not break. I will not fall apart over this. I will be strong.

West called me his little warrior. I was going to be exactly that. A warrior. All I had to do was bide my time and play nice. Then I could question him about what the fuck he thought he was doing. And I would find a way to get myself out of this situation. I wasn't going to wait for them to find me, but they would come for me. They would fight tooth and nail to get to me.

I was going to rescue myself too. I wasn't a fucking damsel in distress. I was a queen. And it was time to put on my crown.

I finished washing, dried myself and got dressed. Instead of drying it, I braided my wet hair and left the bathroom. I walked back into the living space and found Mason watching TV again. Going over to him, I sat down and curled my legs up underneath me. He gave me a smile as if to show he was pleased with me.

Time to begin with a charade. You will think I'm compliant. And I will make you let your guard down. When you least expect it, I will burn you to the ground, Mason. Just fucking watch yourself.

FOUR

SCARLETT

I was climbing the walls after only two days of being here with a man I could no longer stand. Everything about this wore on me. When I'd been kept prisoner by Stuart, it had been all I'd known. There was nothing I had to compare it to. Now, I knew what freedom was like. Being denied it again had left me with very little patience.

While I knew the boys would come for me, I didn't know when. It made my situation precarious. I didn't know how long Mason would tolerate not sharing the bed with me. For now, he was content to sleep on the sofa bed in the living room. No doubt it wouldn't last long, and he'd want to share the bed with me. It meant he would try to do things to me. Things I didn't want from him under any circumstances.

The only people I wanted to be sexually intimate with were my boys. The four men who owned my heart. The thought of Mason trying to kiss me, let alone touch me, made my skin crawl.

I'd remained obedient since I'd been here. Perhaps that was why he hadn't tried anything with me. It didn't mean the whole experience hadn't creeped me the fuck out. The way he talked about this place being ours and how we'd live the rest of our days out here was unnerving, to say the least.

I took a seat next to him on the sofa, turning his way as he fiddled with something on his laptop. I wasn't allowed to touch it. He kept it locked up in his office when he wasn't using it. A place he'd refused to show me.

There wasn't exactly much I could do in the house. I couldn't go outside as it had been raining non-stop, battering the house with its intensity. It made this whole experience even more miserable. I had to hand it to him. If you wanted to

hold a girl against her will, what better place? It was remote and the nearest neighbours were miles away.

“Mase?”

He glanced at me.

“Mmm?”

“Can I ask you something?”

He put his laptop on the arm of the sofa and turned to me fully.

“Of course.”

I fiddled with the hem of my jumper, rubbing it between my fingers. Having to wear the things he'd bought gave me an icky feeling, but I had no other choice. At least it was my style and not skimpy dresses or underwear. I didn't know what I would have done if I'd found that in the wardrobe. Maybe run away screaming.

“Are you taking me back to Stuart?”

“No. He wants to kill you. I can't allow that. You're too precious to me.”

I wanted to look up at him, but I didn't. Better he thought I was scared and meek right now. He might be more inclined to be candid if I wasn't confrontational.

“When did he tell you?”

“The day I rescued you.”

Rescued me? You didn't fucking rescue me. You kidnapped me like a fucking thief in the night. Drugging someone doesn't make them compliant.

I had to stay calm and not alert him to my real feelings.

“What else did he tell you?”

I glanced at him under my lashes. His brow was furrowed, but he didn't seem put out by what I was asking.

“You remembered.”

“The past?”

“Yes... have you?”

I nodded. There would be no point keeping it from him. I didn't want to hide it either. I was me again. Perhaps a different version of the Scarlett from ten years ago, but I was her. And I wasn't going to pretend I was someone else.

“Do you know what happened to his sons?”

“No.”

My answer was automatic. There was no way in hell I was telling Mason I knew what my men had done to Ray and Ryan. They were his friends, according to the boys. I couldn't put them in danger by revealing the truth.

"Are you sure about that?"

"Yes."

"Stuart seems to think you do know."

"Well, I allowed him to think that. It doesn't matter, anyway. You're not taking me back to him, so I'm safe, aren't I?"

Mason reached out and patted my thigh. It took everything I had not to react. Not to flinch and move away from him.

"Yes. I won't let anything happen to you, Scar. Not like what he did before."

My eyes met his.

"Why did you let him hurt me for all those years?"

Mason's eyes darkened and his expression turned grim.

"You know why. I couldn't do anything about it. What did you want me to do?"

"You could have told me the truth."

"The truth is complicated."

I dug my nails into my thigh.

"Trust me, I'm aware. The truth is way more fucked up than I could have ever imagined."

There was a wariness to Mason's face I hadn't been expecting. Like he was trying to work out if I knew everything or not and he wasn't sure whether to ask me about it.

"You didn't want me to take you away from them."

He knew the answer to that question. It was obvious. I wanted to stay with the Horsemen. They were my family. The loves of my life.

"Why did you?"

"You're not safe with them. Not with Stuart planning to come after you."

I almost laughed, but then again, Mason had got to me at Fortuity. What's to say no one else could have? I didn't blame the boys for what Mason had done. They couldn't predict that someone would manage to get into their building given all the security they had in place. I hoped they found out how. Asking Mason didn't seem like a good idea right now.

“Are you sure it’s not because Stuart promised me to you?”

My tone came off accusatory. I couldn’t help it. The knowledge had stung. It drove the knife in further. Mason wasn’t on my side. He was on his own.

“You weren’t supposed to know about that.”

“Well, I’m so sorry Stuart decided to spill your sordid little secret.”

He didn’t exactly look pissed off at my sarcasm, but I could tell he wasn’t happy.

“That’s not the only thing I know about you, Mason. Oh no, I’ve found out many things and you’re going to be honest with me about them.”

As much as I wanted to launch myself at him, tear his fucking face off and give him hell, I would settle for the truth. I needed to know if everything the boys and Stuart had told me was accurate.

“What else did he tell you?”

“Stuart? Nothing. Though, I suppose he doesn’t know about you and Phoebe, does he?”

Mason sat up straighter, retracting his hand from my thigh and giving me a pained look.

“What about me and Phoebe?”

I raised an eyebrow.

“Your affair with her. And don’t try to deny it. I’ve seen evidence. How long has that been going on, huh? Real smart to fuck his wife behind his back. Oh, and let’s not forget she was your best friends’ mother too. I mean, that’s just the icing on the cake.”

Perhaps I shouldn’t have said it like that, but I didn’t care. If he was going to attempt to hide the truth from me, I wasn’t going to give him a fucking inch. While this was playing a dangerous game, the ten years I’d known Mason had to count for something. We’d been friends. Or at least, what counted for friends under the circumstances. He knew way too much about me, and I knew nothing about him.

“She came on to me.”

At least you’re fucking admitting it.

“Right... that makes it so much better and explains everything.”

His eyes drifted away from me to the window, where the rain was still hammering down.

“It happened after the twins disappeared. She was lonely. Then there was you to contend with too. The fact you didn’t remember. And Stuart’s decision to pretend they were your adoptive parents. She didn’t want to go along with it at first, but he was so determined to find out the truth. He knew those four had something to do with the twins going missing.”

Mason rubbed his arm.

“He became so single-minded about the whole thing. It’s like his need for the truth and revenge was fuelled by his grief. He directed all of that at them. And... took it out on you.”

I flinched. Stuart had taken it out on me all right. He’d done it with his fists. But it wasn’t enough for him, clearly. He needed to destroy my men. He wouldn’t be satisfied otherwise.

“He neglected everything else, including his wife. So she turned to me, the only connection she had left to her sons. That’s how it started. It’s not like it has been a constant thing for the past ten years, Scar. Just when Stuart got too much for her.”

I didn’t feel sorry for Phoebe, but I could understand her situation.

“What did you get out of it?”

“Guess it was my way of saying ‘fuck you’ to him over the way he treated you.”

“You could have stopped him.”

“I didn’t have a choice.”

For a moment, I wondered why on earth he wouldn’t have a choice in the matter. Then it became clear. Mason was complicit in my kidnapping. He was complicit in everything going on. Stuart likely held it over him.

It didn’t make it better. The fact was, Mason had been interested in me when I was a teenager. He was six years my senior. It made it creepy and downright disturbing. I wasn’t going to forgive him for it. Mason couldn’t redeem himself in my eyes.

“You had a choice. I didn’t. I’ve had no agency in my life for ten years. And just when I get some...”

Mason’s eyes narrowed. I wasn’t going to finish my sentence. It was clear. He’d taken me against my will and was holding me here. It would be stupid and dangerous for me to try running. Where would I even go? He’d come after me

unless I could incapacitate him. And given he watched me most of the time, I wasn't sure how I could do that without hurting him. It's not as if he let me near any of the kitchen knives or anything sharp.

I shouldn't have qualms about hurting him, but the memory of thinking I was killing him the night the boys had forced me to prove my loyalty left me feeling reluctant to take it that far. Going through the pain afterwards wasn't exactly worth it. It would be more darkness staining my soul. Another thing to feel guilt over. Taking a life wasn't easy for me the way it was for the boys.

Are you going to leave it for them to do?

I didn't have an answer to that question. I hadn't considered how it would feel to kill again, given I didn't think I would be put in that situation. And I had unresolved issues regarding having thought I'd killed Mason. Sitting here in front of him made me see that. My conflict remained. I wasn't sure what it would take to push me in either direction.

"There are no good choices in life, Scar. I thought you would have realised that by now."

His words made me shiver. My life hadn't had any good choices in it, but I knew what side I fell on in this war.

"Does Stuart know you took me?"

"No. He can fight it out with them. They can burn for all I care. I'm done with Stuart and his revenge shit." He reached out and took my hands. "I have all I need right here."

His response made me feel worse. I wanted to pull away. His touching me had my skin crawling. And I had a feeling my time would be up very soon. Mason wasn't going to let me get away with keeping him out of the bed.

"Isn't it lunchtime?" I asked, wanting to divert his attention away from me. The look in his eyes made me ill.

He dropped my hands and smiled.

"It is. Stay here, I'll make us something nice."

As he got up from the sofa, I shrank back into it. There was a lot I had to think about in light of what he'd said to me. Hearing about Stuart's reasoning for everything made me hate him even more. Yes, the boys had taken away his sons' lives, but it didn't justify the things Stuart had done because of it. Especially when he didn't know what the boys had done to the twins. He didn't

have any evidence or proof. He had made a bunch of assumptions, and not knowing the truth had only fuelled his need for revenge. There was nothing Stuart wouldn't do to bring down the Horsemen and destroy me in the process. He'd more than proven that now.

Grief did funny things to people. It twisted them into people their former selves might not recognise. I had a feeling when I finally dealt with my own grief regarding my mother, I wasn't sure I would recognise myself either. And I wasn't sure how I felt about that... at all.

FIVE

SCARLETT

The wind whipped my hair around my face as I stood close to the cliff's edge, staring out at the sea. Three days had passed since my conversation with Mason. It meant I'd been away for a week at this point. Mason told me it took him a day to travel here from London when I'd asked him about it.

I hugged my woollen cardigan closer around my body, shielding myself from the breeze. It was freezing out here, but I didn't care. It had finally stopped raining and glimpses of the sun broke through the clouds every so often. Being locked up in that damn house for days on end was wearing me down.

The sea was rough, the waves crashing against the cliffs. Birds were flying around, cawing, but those were the only sounds in the air. The wind, the sea and the wildlife. Having spent half my life in a city and the other half in the countryside, this place felt far bleaker than anywhere else I'd been. The thought of existing here for the rest of my life, cut off from everything I once knew, had tears springing to my eyes. I didn't want that again. To be locked up. Only this time, it was far more remote.

There was another reason I was out here all alone with my thoughts. Last night my luck ran out. While Mason hadn't tried to touch me, he spent the night next to me. I'd been so terrified he would do something to me in my sleep, I'd been awake for most of it. After he got up, I was able to sleep the morning away. Of course, he could have done something to me at any point but having him right there left me feeling vulnerable and unprotected.

I needed to get away from here. I had no other choice but to find a way to escape him. Who knew how long it would be until he decided he wasn't going to wait any longer? Was he planning on trying to woo me or something? There was

no way in hell I would ever willingly sleep with him. The thought of it made me ill. His friends had tried to force themselves on me. Did he even know about it? I hadn't asked. It didn't matter in all honesty. What fucking difference would it make? It wouldn't change the situation I was in. It wouldn't make him buying this house away from everyone else to keep me in any less disturbing. I think that was the worst part of all. He'd planned this for years. He knew how I felt about being locked away. He fucking knew. And even knowing that, he'd done this.

I shivered, shoving it all out of my head. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to cry. The more I wanted to run and never look back. But Mason would come after me. He'd chase me the fuck down and then where would I be? In a worse situation. He would probably stop being nice to me. I couldn't have that.

I turned to look out over the landscape behind the house, trying not to judge how far I'd have to run. There were hills everywhere, but it didn't mean there were many places for me to hide. The track to the house was dirt. Who knew how far the main road was from here?

Movement in the distance caught my eye. I blinked, then squinted. Unless I was seeing things, four figures were walking this way. My heart lurched, imagining it might be my men.

Had Prescott, West, Francis and Drake found me?

"Scarlett."

My head whipped around to the house. Mason stood by the patio door. My eyes went to what he was holding. I swallowed. My heart thumped hard against my ribcage, making me even more nervous.

Why the fuck does he have a shotgun?

I'd never seen a gun in real life before. The sight of him with one made me fear for my life.

"What is it, Mason?"

"Come inside."

I didn't want to. Not when he had a fucking gun on him. Why did he even need that? What was the reason he had it out right now?

My eyes went back to the figures I'd seen, but they weren't there any longer. I must have been seeing things.

“Now, Scarlett.”

Letting out a sigh, I made my way towards the house. I couldn't take any chances. Not when he was brandishing a shotgun like it was normal behaviour.

When I reached Mason, he looked down at me with annoyance written all over his face.

“Get in the house.”

“Why on earth do you have that?”

He looked down at the gun.

“I was cleaning it.”

“No, I mean, why do you have it in the first place? I didn't know you owned a gun. Do you even have a licence for it?”

He looked slightly taken aback by my questions. They were valid as far as I was concerned. The only reason people in this country owned rifles or shotguns was for hunting or sport. Mason wasn't interested in either of those, as far as I knew.

“Of course I have a licence for it.”

“Well, how am I supposed to know? You could have a stash of illegal handguns.”

He let out an exasperated noise.

“Where do you think I'd get hold of one?”

“Well, you shouldn't have one, considering who your father is. But oh wait, you helped a man kidnap me, so excuse me for being sceptical.”

I probably shouldn't have been giving him attitude when he had a shotgun in his hands, but I didn't think it was loaded. He said he was cleaning it. Didn't make me feel any better about him having it. Not to mention I was a little on edge after thinking I saw four people in the distance.

“My father...” he paused and scowled. “They told you.”

“Of course they fucking told me, Mason. How do you think I found out about you and Phoebe?”

He stepped closer.

“What else did they tell you?”

“That you used to watch me when I was a teenager and have been obsessed with me since before my accident.”

I didn't mean to blurt those words out, but apparently, my common sense

had fled. Mason's eyes narrowed on me. I didn't step back. Despite the fact he had a weapon on him, I wasn't going to be a meek, obedient girl any longer. It was time to stand my ground.

"And you believed them?"

"What's not to believe? Unlike you, I've known them my whole life."

"They lied to you for months about not knowing who you are."

"I was there to destroy them. They couldn't trust me. I couldn't trust them. Go figure. You've lied to me too, so don't you stand there and act like you're on some moral high ground."

His expression hardened to stone.

"Get in the house, Scarlett. Now."

"Or what?"

"Or I will use force and I don't think you want that."

I wanted to fight him. I really fucking did, but I didn't think I would win. Besides, this argument wasn't getting us anywhere.

I shoved past him and went inside. Mason glanced around outside before he followed me, shutting the patio doors and locking them.

"You're not going back outside without me. Is that understood?"

"Why? Do you think I'm going to run off?"

"Yes."

I crossed my arms over my chest.

"Well, you shouldn't exactly be surprised considering you're keeping me here against my will."

His hands tightened around the gun. I should be scared, but I wasn't. He wasn't going to kill me.

"I've had about enough of your attitude today. Get in the bedroom and stay in there."

"You've had enough of me, huh? Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but this is what you're getting. I did not ask for this. And I don't fucking want you."

Mason walked into the kitchen and placed the shotgun down on the counter. Then he turned and approached me, his hands clenched into fists at his sides. I didn't back away. He needed to understand I wasn't going to be a willing victim.

"Get in the bedroom, Scarlett, before I do something I regret."

I raised an eyebrow.

“What a way to take responsibility. Blame your inability to control yourself on me because you don’t like how I’m talking to you. Did you think I would be the same sad little meek girl once I remembered who I am, hmm? Did you think Stuart broke me so I’d be an obedient girl for you?”

I saw it coming from a mile off and yet I did nothing to stop it. His hand came up, and he struck me across the face. My head snapped back, but I took it. I let him do it because it proved my point. He was as bad as Stuart.

I turned my face back towards him. Then I smiled before I spat blood at him. He glowered, then took me by the arm and dragged me along to the bedroom. He threw me into the room and slammed the door shut behind him.

I went over to the mirror on the dresser and looked at my face. Opening my mouth, I found the source of the bleeding. The impact of his fist had knocked my cheek into my teeth. I rubbed my jaw and got a tissue to wipe the blood from around my mouth. Stuart had hit me in the face enough times for this to be a minor assault as far as I was concerned.

Provoking Mason hadn’t been my smartest idea, but I was no longer in the mood to be nice. Not after the way he’d behaved. Not after he’d kidnapped me. I was done being a pawn for other people. No, I was a warrior. I’d survive this shit and get back to my men.

I went over to the bed and lay down, staring at the wardrobe, and wondered how long Mason intended to keep me in here. He needed to cool off, so I wasn’t going to go out and ask him.

I must have fallen asleep because I jolted awake to a faint tapping sound. Looking around, I couldn’t locate the source of it. It had got dark, but the room was lit by the moon streaming in through the windows.

The noise came again. I hopped off the bed. Something was tapping against the glass. I walked towards it and realised there was a hand there. I looked out, but I couldn’t see who the hand belonged to. I almost jumped out of my skin when something slammed against the glass. It took me a second to register that it was a piece of paper. I peered at it, wondering what the fuck was going on.

Open the bathroom window. Get the shotgun. Bring it to us.

It was gone a moment later. I stared at the space it had been for a long moment. There was only one logical explanation for who had written that. They

were here. They had to be here. The four figures I'd seen in the distance had been them.

Oh shit!

They'd found me. My heart burnt in my chest, but I shook myself. I had to do what they'd asked of me. I couldn't let them down.

Turning away, I walked over to the door and carefully opened it. I could hear the noise of the TV coming from the living area. Hopefully, it would mask the sound of my footsteps. My feet were silent as I crept into the bathroom. I had to lean over the sink to reach the window. Thankfully, this one opened as the ones in the bedroom didn't. It wasn't big. I didn't know if anyone could actually fit through it. I took it off the latch and pushed it open. Then I retreated into the hallway, pulling the door to behind me. As far as I knew, Mason had left the shotgun on the kitchen counter. I wondered if he'd moved it. Then again, they wouldn't have asked me to get it if it wasn't still there, would they? No, they wouldn't have. I didn't think it was loaded, but we couldn't take any chances.

I got to the doorway of the living area and looked in. Mason was sitting watching TV. He didn't look around, so he hadn't heard me. My eyes went to the kitchen, finding the gun resting on the counter. He hadn't moved it.

Lowering myself to the floor, I shuffled into the room, trying to be as quiet as possible. I kept checking the sofa to make sure Mason had stayed where he was. It took me some time to make my way to the counter. I hid behind it for a long moment before carefully peering over it. Reaching out, I gripped the gun with both hands and lifted it off the counter. I slowly brought it towards me before dropping back down behind the counter again.

My heart raced at a million miles an hour as I crouched there with a fucking shotgun in my hands.

You can do this. You can get back into the hallway without him noticing. You have to. This is the only way you'll escape.

I looked out at the sofa. Mason had his gaze fixed on the screen. I moved, inching along towards the door while keeping my eyes on him. It wasn't exactly easy with a gun under my arm, but I had to make do. Mason let out a noise, making me freeze until I realised he was laughing at something on the TV. I tried to keep my breathing even as I moved again, a little faster this time.

By the time I made it into the hallway, I was panicking and wanting this to be

over with. I rose to my feet and crept back along to the bathroom. The moment I reached it, a hand reached out and yanked me inside. The gun was removed from my hands before I had time to blink.

Standing in the small space were Francis, Drake, West, and Prescott. Drake held the shotgun. He checked if it was loaded. There were no shells inside. He looked at me for a second, then he was signalling to the others to move.

“Stay here and be quiet,” he told me in a hushed whisper before they all piled out of the room, leaving me staring after them with my heart in my mouth.

They were here. They’d come for me. And now... they were about to confront Mason.

Oh fuck.

SIX

WEST

I wanted to fucking storm the place and kill the son of a bitch for taking Scarlett, but Drake had put a stop to that when we saw Mason and his shotgun earlier. Instead, we'd waited until nightfall, hatched a plan to enlist Scarlett's help, and got into the house without Mason's knowledge. Now we were going to fuck that cunt up. Well, I had no intention of allowing him to leave here alive, but I'm not sure Drake would agree with me on that point. I didn't care what he had to say about it. Mason had got away with his shit for far too long.

Kidnapping Scarlett from Fortuity was the last fucking straw.

I was done with excuses.

Mason Jones was going to die.

And that was fucking that.

The four of us walked into the living area. Drake aimed the shotgun at Mason's head while Francis and Prescott stood behind him with me. Francis already had the ropes we intended to restrain Mason with. It was time to show this fucker he wasn't going to get away with shit.

"Hello, Mason," Drake said, his voice completely calm and very much at odds with his expression. He looked like he was ready to rip Mason to pieces.

Considering he was the last person to see Scarlett before Mason took her, he'd taken it personally. Drake had been a boar the whole week, but we'd all been stressed out and on edge, so I didn't exactly blame him for it.

Mason whipped his head around, his eyes going wide when he spied us. Then he was up off the sofa and backing away until he hit the TV.

"Did you think you could hide from us?" Drake continued, taking a step forward. "You should know we would tear apart the world for her by now. Or

maybe you thought we wouldn't find out it was you. After all, Stuart threatened her life. Isn't that why you took her?"

Mason flinched, then glared at the four of us.

"Fuck you. That's not even loaded."

I scoffed and stabbed a finger in his direction.

"What a fucking comeback. I'm so scared. What you going to do now, Mason? Four of us and one of you. Those odds aren't really in your favour."

Mason didn't say a word, just continued to glare.

"Tie him to one of those chairs," Drake said.

I stayed back while Prescott and Francis approached Mason. They knew I would probably rip his face off if I went near him. Drake had warned me about us not causing any further trouble for ourselves. The last week had been fucked up enough with us trying to track down where Mason had taken Scarlett after we'd seen him on our security footage.

He didn't struggle as Prescott dragged one of the dining chairs over and Francis pushed him into it. Our rope boy tied Mason up, securing him to the chair so he couldn't go anywhere. Then Prescott put tape across his mouth because we weren't in the mood to hear what the fuck the cunt had to say to us.

Drake put the shotgun down on the kitchen counter.

"You can come out now, Scarlett," he called down the hallway.

A few moments later, our girl walked into the room. My eyes immediately went to her jaw, where a bruise was forming. It took two steps before I was next to her and gently tipped her chin up towards me. Her hazel-green eyes were full of conflicting emotions.

"Did he hit you?" I murmured, trying to suppress the urge to stab Mason in the face.

"Yes," she whispered. "He would tell you I provoked him, but I'm not responsible for his inability to control himself. I took it because it shows he's as bad as Stuart."

I stroked her jaw.

"My brave little warrior."

Tears welled in her eyes. I wrapped my arms around her, holding her against my chest. Her fists bunched in my coat.

"Thank you. Thank you for coming for me."

“I told you, I’d tear apart the world to find you, my little Scar. You’re mine.”

“Yours. Always yours.”

I held her closer, giving her what she needed. She was so fucking brave. I had no idea what he’d put her through while she’d been here, but I was sure she’d done everything in her power to keep herself safe. Scarlett wouldn’t take anything lying down. Not now she was free of fucking Stuart and his fists.

I could hear Drake, Francis, and Prescott talking behind us, but I ignored them. Scarlett needed me. I would never let her down again. She didn’t blame me for her accident, but I was still responsible for what happened that night.

“I want to go home,” she whispered into my chest. “I want to go home so fucking much.”

I stroked her hair.

“We’ll take you as soon as we’re done here, okay? I promise.”

She nodded, clutching me tighter for a long moment. Then she pulled away and smiled. I stroked her arm. If she wanted us to take her home to Fortuity, we would, but we had to deal with Mason first.

Both of us turned to look at the others. They were watching us. Mason was glaring behind the tape over his mouth. Scarlett moved towards the boys. Then she was bundled up against Prescott’s chest and he was murmuring how much he loved her before kissing her like it was the last time he would. When he let her go, she went to Francis. There were similar sentiments shared between them.

She looked at Drake. His expression was dark, but his eyes softened. She stepped closer, running her hand up his chest before cupping the back of his neck.

“I’ve missed you.”

Drake dipped his head and pressed his lips to her forehead.

“Me too,” was all he said in response.

“Won’t you kiss me properly?”

It took a moment for him to relent, bowing his head and pressing a chaste kiss to her lips. She pouted when he pulled away, but he was already moving towards Mason.

“You have caused us no end of fucking trouble,” he ground out. “And you’re fucking lucky you’re Garrett’s son or we wouldn’t hesitate to end your sad, sorry

existence, because trust me, I'm having a very hard time finding reasons to keep you alive.”

Drake towered over Mason, staring down at him with hatred glowing in his indigo eyes. The mask had dropped. He wasn't playing games today. Out of all of us, Drake was the most sleep-deprived, having spent hours upon hours tracking down where Mason had taken Scarlett. His patience was at an all-time low.

“In case we hadn't already made it very clear to you, Scarlett belongs with us. She's ours. And you should have known you couldn't keep us from hunting you the fuck down when you took her.”

Mason's eyes were full of rage, and he struggled against his bindings as if he wanted to throw himself at Drake.

“You are pathetic, you know that? You've wanted her for years. I know unrequited love can fucking suck, but helping a man kidnap a sixteen-year-old girl, pretending to be her friend whilst biding your time until you can have her makes you a sorry excuse for a human being.”

Drake turned away from Mason and levelled his gaze on Scarlett.

“Did he do anything else to you other than that?”

He pointed at the bruise on her jaw.

“No.” She sent Mason a dirty look before turning her attention back to Drake. “What now? Are we going home?”

“We will... after we search the place and decide what to do about this fuck.”

“He wouldn't allow me into his office.”

“Then we'll start there. Francis, you come with me. Pres, watch West and make sure he doesn't do anything stupid.”

I scoffed and crossed my arms over my chest. If he thought I wasn't going to punish that little shit Mason while he was out of the room, he was clearly putting far too much trust in Prescott's ability to keep me under control.

Drake gave me a significant look before he and Francis left the room. If this was Mason's hideaway, no doubt he had shit here he didn't want anyone else seeing.

I turned to the man himself, giving him a smile.

“Why do I get the feeling you have no intention of listening to Drake?” Prescott said as he came to stand next to me.

“Because I’m not.”

“You can’t kill him.”

“I can punish him in other ways. After all, this fucker has been after Scar for years and quite frankly, he deserves a little torture.”

Prescott raised an eyebrow. Scarlett looked at both of us with a raised eyebrow.

“Come here,” I said to her as I walked around the other side of the dining table.

Scarlett approached me with caution in her eyes. She probably should be suspicious as fuck right now.

I took her by the arm, pulling her closer and stroking a hand down her cheek.

“Do you want to help me punish him, little Scar?”

“How?”

I leant closer and whispered in her ear. When I pulled back, her cheeks were pink.

“Are you serious?”

“Very. After all, you like being watched, don’t you?”

Her cheeks darkened to red. Her eyes darted away for a moment.

“I need... I need you to make me,” she whispered.

My lips curved up into a smile. She wanted to be my reluctant but willing little victim. Well, I could certainly play that game. Scarlett liked to be humiliated and degraded. What better way than to fuck her in front of the man who had pretended to be her friend for ten years.

“Do you want a safe word?”

She shook her head, looking up at me with wide eyes.

“I trust you.”

I slid her cardigan off her shoulders and threw it on one of the chairs. She was wearing a t-shirt and jeans. It pissed me off to see her in clothes he’d clearly bought for her, but at least he’d given her something decent. I would have smacked him around the head if he’d bought her skimpy shit to wear. She liked to be comfortable.

My hand went to her hair, fisting it behind her head and forcing it back so she met my eyes.

“Is my little slut desperate for dick? You’ve been without for far too long,

haven't you?"

Her lips parted, but no sound came out.

"Mmm, I know you are."

I let go of her hair, took her arm again and pressed her face-first onto the dining table. I held her down on it with her arm pinned behind her back.

"You got something to gag her with, Pres?"

Prescott stared at the two of us with heat in his eyes, then dug his hand in his pocket, pulling out the tape. I grinned and indicated her with my head. He moved closer, pulling off a piece of duct tape. He leant over and secured it across Scarlett's mouth. She whimpered into the makeshift gag.

"Hold her down for me. Wouldn't want my dirty little slut trying to escape whilst we're teaching Mason a fucking lesson."

Prescott took over, pinning her arm to her back and grabbed her other one, securing it in his hold too. Then he turned to Mason and gave him a wink. The little shit looked incensed, struggling against the ropes holding him to the chair. He had a grand old view of Scarlett's face.

"Make sure she doesn't look away from him," I said to Prescott. "I want him to see how much she loves my dick. I want him to watch her come all over it."

My hands went to Scarlett's jeans, unbuttoning them and pulling them down her legs, along with her knickers. I ran my hands over her bare behind, stroking her skin. Then I slapped my hand across it, making her jerk.

"This is what you want, isn't it, Mason? You want to fuck this pussy. Too fucking bad. This slut belongs to my dick. I'm the one who gets to abuse her, not you."

The way he struggled harder had me chuckling and smiling at him. Scarlett shifted, spreading her legs wider for me.

"Well, look at you, slut, offering your pussy up to me like a fucking sacrifice."

I ran my thumb along her wet slit, almost groaning at the feeling. Fuck, how I'd missed her sweet little body.

"See this?" I brought my thumb up, letting Mason see it glisten. "This is all for me."

I watched him making noise behind his gag and smiled wider. Then I slapped Scarlett's pussy, making her cry out behind the tape.

"You ready for dick, slut? Show me how much you want it and perhaps I'll

give it to you.”

Scarlett raised her hips off the table, trying to encourage me. I slapped her pussy again. Prescott was no longer looking at Mason. He was staring at my hands on Scarlett, spreading her so we could both see how dripping wet she was.

“Fuck,” he muttered.

“Do you think she deserves to get fucked?”

He looked up at me, his blue eyes shining with mischief and desire.

“Show him what he’s missing.”

SEVEN

WEST

Prescott was clearly as into punishing Mason as I was. The sick fuck had stolen our woman. We weren't going to lie down and let him fuck us over like this without exacting retribution. Drake had banned us from killing him, but he said nothing about making Mason suffer. Right now, the cunt was going to topple over the chair we'd secured him to with all his protesting behind the tape secured to his mouth and wriggling in his restraints.

"You want me to make her come over my dick, huh, Pres?"

Prescott's pupils were blown as he stared down at Scarlett's exposed holes.

"Make her come so hard, she cries."

I winked at my voyeuristic friend. It's not like Mason could see too much of what was going on since I'd made sure to place Scarlett head on to him, but it was enough to torture the fuck out of the little shit. I didn't want him seeing the view I had, anyway. He didn't deserve it. Hell, he barely deserved to see her come, but it would drive him fucking insane. That's exactly what I wanted. For him to fucking feel the pain.

"You hear that, my little Scar? Pres wants me to make you cry."

She moaned against the gag, shifting against the table. Prescott tightened his grip on her with one hand while he held her chin with the other. I'd told him to make sure she didn't look away from Mason.

My hands went to my jeans, unbuckling my belt and undoing the buttons. My dick was so hard, it fucking ached with the need to be inside my woman. My little Scar. The owner of my soul. There was nothing I wouldn't do for this woman. And being without her for almost a week was fucking crushing. It damn near ruined the four of us. We'd just got her back and this fuck deciding to steal

her again made us even more determined to end this war between us and Stuart fucking Carver.

I freed my dick and ran it up her slit, almost groaning at how wet she felt.

“Do you want my cock, slut? Did you miss it? Did you miss us?”

She nodded profusely despite Prescott’s hold on her face. I stroked her hip with my free hand, reassuring her I missed her too. Fuck. I didn’t know what I’d do without this woman. I’d been more stable since she’d been back. Less inclined to lose my shit. She was my balm. The calm in the storm that was the four of us. The guiding fucking light of our lives.

“Mmm, don’t worry, you’ll get thoroughly fucked by all of us when we get home, I promise.”

“After she’s rested,” Prescott murmured. “All of us need to.”

I gave him a nod. Scarlett could sleep in the car, but we all needed to rest. None of us had been sleeping very much over the past week with our desperation to find out where the fuck Mason had taken her.

“You ready to show Mason how much you love my dick?” I asked Scarlett, leaning over her and running my hand up her spine.

She moaned into the tape. I bit my lip before notching the head of my dick at her entrance. Then I was pushing in, unable to help the groan erupting from my lips.

Prescott turned his attention to Mason, giving him an evil smile.

“You should see how she stretches around his dick. Such a fucking sight.”

“Pres’ favourite game is watching,” I added.

The death glare we both got from Mason was worth every moment.

I slid deeper, impaling Scarlett completely. My hands went to her hips to give me leverage to fuck her. She cried out into the tape when I pulled back and slammed inside her. Her hands shifted against Prescott’s, but he had a firm hold of them.

“That’s it, little lamb, you’re doing so good. Take his dick nice and deep.”

She rubbed her face against his fingers. Prescott released her chin to cup it instead. He leant closer and nuzzled her hair.

“Good girl,” he whispered in her ear. “Such a good girl.”

Then he moved back, releasing her chin. Scarlett didn’t look away from Mason. She stayed where she was, allowing me to fuck her as deep and rough as

I wanted.

“Let go of her hands,” I said a moment later.

Prescott did as I said. Scarlett laid them on the table, taking everything I was giving her without complaint. His hands went to his dick instead, adjusting it. I smirked and gave him a wink. Watching always got him going.

“You going to make him come, little lamb? You want him to fill you up with his cum?”

She nodded. It made Mason spit out a bunch of unintelligible noises behind the tape. Prescott moved closer to him.

“You see that?” He pointed at us. “He had her first, you know. And I’m not talking about now. When you were busy leering over her, he was taking what’s rightfully his. Scarlett has always been ours since day fucking one. We were born as one. We’ll die as one.” He gave Mason an evil smile. “And you? You’re nothing but a fucking waste of space wanting what he can’t have. She’s never been yours. Never will be. Time to get that into your thick skull.”

Prescott turned back to us.

“She’s going to come all over his dick because she likes being told she’s a dirty little bitch who loves cock. She’s our corrupt queen. And she’s taken her rightful place by our sides. The Four Horsemen and their goddess, Nyx.”

I ran my hand up her back and gripped her hair, tugging her upright until her back was pressed to my chest. I wrapped my hand around her throat while still pumping my hips, letting her feel how much I needed her sweet little pussy wrapped around my dick.

“You hear that, little Scar? Our goddess. That’s what you are.”

She reached behind us, gripping my coat between her fingers. The low whine coming from behind the tape only made me shove her back down on the table, my body going with her. I leant over her, keeping her pinned to the wood while I hammered into her pussy.

“You like that, don’t you, slut? Being ours. Letting us use your little body the way we need.”

I ripped the tape from her mouth, making her cry out.

“I want to hear you. Tell him how much you love my dick, slut.”

My hand went back to her neck, holding it and squeezing.

“I love your dick. The things you do with it make me scream,” she choked

out. "I can't live without it... or you."

I looked over her shoulder at Mason. The fucking broken expression on his face was exactly what I wanted to see.

"Tell him how much you like to get fucked by more than one dick at once," I whispered in her ear. "Tell him the truth."

Scarlett's grip on my coat tightened, keeping me against her.

"I can't wait to get home so you can fuck me together. I want all of you inside me. I need it so bad."

"Such a filthy little slut. So needy for cock."

"Yes," she moaned, "I need it."

Prescott was rubbing himself through his clothes, watching us with no shame.

"You want to come, slut?"

"Please."

My fingers tightened around her throat.

"You going to come for Pres, hmm? Show him how much you like getting fucked?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Tell him."

She turned her attention to Prescott who moved away from Mason, coming closer to us again.

"I want you to watch me come over his cock."

Prescott bit his lip and smiled at her, his gaze absolutely wicked.

"Mmm, then you better be a good little lamb. Show him you deserve it."

He leant over the table and stroked her hair. It was as if Mason was no longer there. It was just the three of us. And so it fucking well should be. Prescott and Scarlett were far more important to me than that piece of shit we had tied up.

"I want to see you. Show me how hard you are."

His smirk as his hand went to his jeans was devious. He had as much shame as I did, which was zero.

"Do you want him in your mouth?" I murmured in her ear. "Want him to come down your throat?"

"Please."

"You've been such a good little slut. I think Pres should reward you with his cum."

She moaned, letting go of me and reaching for Prescott.

“Hold on, get up on the table, Scar, then you can suck his dick.”

I pulled away from her. She crawled up on the table and I got up on it behind her. Prescott had his dick out and knelt on the table too, shifting closer to Scarlett. I gripped her hip, pressing back inside her pussy. Scarlett reached out and stroked Prescott’s cock while he gathered her hair between his fingers.

“So hard for me,” she murmured, licking the head of his dick.

“Always, little lamb.”

She took him in her mouth, letting go of his dick so he could control the action. I met Prescott’s eyes over her body. He gave me a wink before shoving his dick so far down Scarlett’s throat, she let out a low whining sound around it and gagged.

“Such a dirty little slut you are, taking his dick so deep,” I taunted as I fucked her with brutal strokes.

She was trapped between us now, getting thoroughly railed from both ends. And she did nothing to stop it. No, our girl took every inch of our dicks.

“Look at you, crying so sweetly, lamb. Such a good girl,” Prescott said. “You deserve a reward.”

“Give it to her.”

“Only if you make her come.”

I grinned, reaching around and strumming her clit with my fingers.

“With fucking pleasure.”

Scarlett bucked between us, trying to impale herself further on my dick. I held onto her hip tighter to stop her from moving while I claimed her pussy with my cock and stroked her needy clit. She was moaning around Prescott’s dick, her hands scrabbling against the wood.

“Come for us, little lamb. Soak his dick,” Prescott ground out, fucking her throat harder with his hand still fisted in her hair. “Give it to us.”

It took another minute. Then she was crying all over his dick, her pussy clamping down around mine and her body trembling with her orgasm. She was wild with it, shifting and bucking in our hold. Prescott didn’t let up with his cock in her throat. He kept ramming it down while I continued to fuck her pussy with as much brutality.

“Fuck,” he groaned a moment later.

“Don’t swallow it all yet, slut,” I ordered as he came violently down her throat.

Prescott held her in place for a moment longer, before letting go of her hair, his dick popping out of her mouth. I gripped her hair instead, pulling her upright against my chest. I gripped her chin and turned her face towards Mason.

“Show him.”

She opened her mouth, cum dribbling out of it down her chin.

“Good slut. Now lick it up and swallow.”

Scarlett did as she was told while my hand went to her throat, holding it as an anchor while I continued to fuck her.

“Make him come, lamb, I want to see him flooding your pussy,” Prescott told her as he sat back and watched the show now he was spent.

Scarlett wrapped her hand around mine on her throat and leant into me. I held closer with my arm wrapped around her middle.

“You hear that, slut? Pres wants to watch me come inside you. Do you want that? Want my cum running down your fucking thighs?”

“Yes,” she moaned.

“Dirty, dirty little whore. My little bitch is in heat, isn’t she?”

She whimpered but nodded against my shoulder.

“Good thing I’m about to feed your pussy then, isn’t it?”

My hand squeezed around her throat as I felt it building. I fucked her harder, making her cry out from the intense pace. Then I was groaning in her ear as I erupted in her wet little pussy, coating her insides and making her squirm in my hold.

We stayed that way for a long moment after I was spent. Then I lowered Scarlett back to her hands and knees, leaning over her as I forced her to look at Mason again.

“There’s something you need to know, little Scar,” I whispered in her ear. “And you’re not going to like it... but it’s time. The truth needs to come out.”

Scarlett tensed in my hold as I continued to whisper to her, watching Mason’s grim expression to see what he thought of our little display. He had no idea what I was about to unleash on him. This was my final hurrah. My fucking ace. It would hurt Scarlett. I knew that, but my need to get revenge on this sick fuck was far more important.

She would forgive me... but she wouldn't be forgiving Mason for it.

Not by a long shot.

He was about to find out the reason I called her my little warrior. And why he should have never messed with my woman in the first place.

EIGHT

SCARLETT

I stared at Mason, my entire world falling to fucking pieces as West whispered the dreaded words I never wanted to hear in my ear.

“Mason killed Lylah. He killed your mother on Stuart’s orders. She was making too much noise over your disappearance. It was all over the news. She kept harassing the police to do more. She wouldn’t take it lying down, Scar. She was determined to get you back because she loved you so much. You were everything to her. And Stuart couldn’t let that stand when he realised you couldn’t remember what happened that night. When he kept you to punish us.”

A tear leaked out of my eye. This time it was one of grief and not pleasure.

“He had Mason kill her and stage it as a break-in gone wrong. He stabbed her to death, Scar. It was brutal and bloody. It’s an unsolved killing because that fuck was good at covering his tracks, but we knew. We fucking knew it had to be Stuart’s doing. When we found out Mason had done it on Stuart’s orders, that he was the one who killed her, we were fucking livid. But we couldn’t touch him because of his fucking daddy.”

Mason had killed my mother. He’d killed my fucking mother. Rage, hurt, and pain echoed around the void in my chest where she should be.

“I’m sorry, my little Scar. I’m sorry you have to find out this way, but I’m done hiding the truth from you. Done with secrets. You need to know why we hate him so much. Why we wish he was fucking dead.”

They’d asked me to kill him once. Or, at least, they made me think I was killing him. And now? Now I wanted to rip his fucking face off. I wanted to tear him to pieces. The red mist descended. I did nothing to stop it. Nothing at all.

“Let me up.”

West moved off me and the table without hesitation. He tucked himself away as I crawled off the table. I could feel his cum leaking out of me, but I literally did not give two shits about it. Pulling my clothes back on, I zipped up my jeans and stared at West. His expression almost decimated me. As if his words hadn't already done the trick. But I wasn't angry with him. No, I was fucking livid at Mason.

"Give me your knife."

"Little Scar."

"Thank you for telling me. Now give me the knife and don't get in my way."

West slid it from his pocket. I knew he would have it on him. He never went anywhere without it. I put my hand out. He placed it in my palm but didn't let it go.

"You're not angry with me, are you?"

I shook my head, then I reached out with my other hand and ran my fingers down his chest.

"No. I promise I'm not."

He released the knife. I stared down at it. Then I flipped it open and gripped it in my fist, my eyes turning towards Mason. He was looking between us with confusion. I had enjoyed Prescott and West fucking me in front of him. It gave me a high to see him so tortured over it after all the shit he'd put me through.

And now... now I was going to kill him because he'd killed my mother. I was going to avenge her death. It was the least I could fucking do. My mother would have never given up searching for me. Never. Mason had taken her away. That was unforgivable.

I walked around the table with the knife clutched between my fingers and approached Mason. I don't know what he could see in my expression, but it couldn't be anything good. Then I ripped the fucking tape off his mouth.

"Scar—"

"Oh no, I didn't take that off so you could fucking talk," I ground out, cutting him off.

"I'm—"

I slapped him across his face.

"You killed my mother. You killed her in cold fucking blood."

He tipped his face up towards me as the blood drained from it.

“I...”

“Now you can’t talk? Fuck you! Just fuck you.”

“I’m sorry.”

The fact he’d even tried to apologise to me was rage-inducing.

“You’re sorry? You’re fucking sorry? You murdered her for him. You took away my only fucking family after he stole me.”

The abject misery on his face didn’t fill me with sympathy or compassion. In fact, it made me want to kill him more. To make him feel every ounce of pain my mother must have felt. She’d looked for me. She’d wanted me back, and he made sure I could never be reunited with her. All for fucking Stuart Carver.

“Scarlett...”

“I hate you!” I screamed in his face. “I fucking hate you!”

My hand came up with the knife in it. It sailed through the air and hit my target. It hit him right in the fucking chest. For a moment, neither of us did anything. Then he looked down at the knife. I choked on my own breath before I ripped it out of his chest.

“I hope you burn.”

Everything went still for the briefest of moments, then I stabbed him again. And again. And again. It reminded me of killing the man in the warehouse, but this time, I was in control. I knew what I was doing.

I was aiming to kill.

“Guess what, fucker? They killed your friends for me. They fucking murdered them. And now you’re going to die. Die drowning in your own fucking blood.”

I heard footsteps followed by an exclamation behind me, but I ignored it. Mason’s expression was horrifying, but I didn’t care. My heart was frozen over. He had shown himself to be nothing and no one. A selfish piece of shit who never cared about me. He only cared about himself. And I was his fucking reaper.

He choked a minute later, blood gurgling from his mouth. I watched the life drain from his eyes. They were wide with shock like he never expected me to be the one to take his life. Well, it served him fucking right.

“Scarlett!”

Drake’s voice broke through my blood-fuelled haze. I stepped back, ripping the knife from Mason’s chest one last time. He was a dead, bloody mess. And it

was fucking glorious.

My chest heaved as my arm dropped to my side. I turned my head and saw the four of them staring at me.

Francis had a proud look in his eyes, but he was trying not to show it. Prescott's pupils were blown and his lips curled up into a smile, like the sight of me murdering Mason was hot as fuck. Drake looked like he wanted to blow a fucking fuse. But West? Well, he looked at me the way he had always done. Like I was the only thing in the world that mattered to him. And he loved me.

My feet advanced forward before my brain even registered I was on the move. I dropped the knife on the table then I was on West, my bloody hands in his hair tugging him down until my mouth crashed against his. I pressed myself against him, forcing him into accepting my affection. Into accepting my kiss.

West was frozen for a long moment, clearly unprepared for me to attack his face like this. Then his arms were around me and his tongue was in my mouth. He backed me up against the table, shoving me down on it and covering my body with his. He kissed me like he was drowning, and I responded in kind, moaning into his mouth. His fingers tangled in my hair, clutching me to him as if his whole life depended on it. I couldn't get enough of this feeling. Of the sensation of his tongue against mine, devouring my mouth with each swipe. It was messy. My hands were in his hair, covering him in Mason's blood, but neither of us cared. All I could think, see, and feel was him. All I could do was grind against his body and kiss him until I could hardly breathe.

West pulled back slightly, his amber eyes full of heat and his mouth smeared with blood.

"There's my little warrior," he murmured.

Then his mouth was back on mine, kissing me with such gentleness, I almost cried. It was the way he'd kissed me when we'd been sixteen. His grip on me was still rough, but his mouth was so soft and sweet.

My West. My West is back. This... I need this... I need you. Fuck, do I need you.

I wanted to tell him, but he was too busy making me feel like I was his only one. The only girl in this entire world that he needed and wanted. He put me back together, piece by piece, with his kisses. Repairing the part of my heart that had broken when faced with the knowledge Mason had murdered my mother. West made me feel whole again.

I love you, West Greer. I don't think my heart ever stopped, even when I couldn't remember you.

When he finally released me, he smiled, and I couldn't help grinning back.

"West..."

"If you two have quite finished, we need to talk about this," came Drake's voice from behind us.

West straightened and looked behind him at Drake.

"Oh, I'm sorry, did you want a turn?"

His eyes went pointedly to Drake's crotch as I pushed myself up on my elbows. Drake glared at him and turned away slightly, trying to hide the fact the sight of all the blood had aroused him. All of us could see and were very aware of his particular... kinks.

"You can kiss me too... if you want," I said, giving him a wink.

I was still caught up in the kiss with West and my stabby-fest. Adrenaline coursed through my veins, making me reckless. And I sure as fuck wanted to push Drake's buttons because of it.

For a second, I thought he might tell me to turn over so he could spank me in punishment for giving him attitude.

"Come here." His voice came out low, gravelly, and commanding all at the same time. "Now."

I scrambled off the table, West stepping back to give me room. The moment I got within two feet of Drake, he had me by the arm and dragged me closer. He leant down, his indigo eyes full of suppressed desire.

"You are such a little brat," he murmured.

"Yes, Daddy."

He stopped right before his mouth met mine. I'd said it quietly so no one else could hear me. It's not like I had a daddy kink but knowing it would piss Drake off was the only reason I said it.

"What the fuck did you just say to me?"

"You heard me."

"You'll be the death of me, little wisp."

He gripped my hair in his fist, then he kissed me in that savage way of his, completely heedless of the fact he was doing it in front of the others. The grip he had on my hair made my scalp burn, but I didn't care. He was punishing me

for my remark.

When he released me, he nuzzled my face.

“I’m going to thoroughly redden your pert little arse when we get home,” he murmured, “and I’m going to fuck it afterwards, you hear me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Brat.”

“You love it.”

He stroked my cheek.

“You’re lucky I do,” he whispered, finally admitting it for the first time.

I pressed my mouth to his before smearing the blood I’d left on him across his cheek. He let out a little growl in response, then pulled away and looked over at Mason.

“That is a mess we didn’t need, little wisp.”

“He killed my mother.”

Drake straightened and looked between West and Prescott.

“Which one of you told her?”

“Me,” West replied with a shrug.

He stood next to Prescott while Drake was mauling my mouth. I wanted to press myself against West and never leave his side. He’d finally allowed me to kiss him and it had been everything. And this stubborn man in front of me had given me a real kiss too, like I’d wanted from him earlier. I was on cloud nine, even if I’d just killed a man in cold blood.

Drake turned his attention back to me.

“We’ll talk about that later. Right now, we need to clean this shit up. It’s lucky he put in wooden floors. Francis, go get the car from where we left it. Prescott, you can take this one to clean herself up whilst West and I deal with Mason since we’ve already got his fucking blood on us.”

“Are you sure you don’t want me to help?”

He looked at me for a long moment.

“No, you can help Francis and Prescott with the stuff in Mason’s office.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“The stuff in his office?”

Drake stroked my cheek with his fingers.

“Yes. We’re taking it with us to look through at home. There’s too much

there for us to deal with right now and from what Francis and I have seen... well, let's just say it's rather useful."

I wasn't sure what Mason could have that would be useful, but I was going to take Drake's word for it.

"Strip out of that first. We'll need to make sure we destroy all the evidence."

Francis moved towards the front door while Prescott went over to the kitchen and started looking in the cupboards. I imagined it was for Mason's cleaning supplies.

I let out a sigh and started removing my clothes, leaving them in a pile on the floor. When I was bare, I wiped my feet down to make sure I wasn't trailing blood everywhere, then moved towards the hallway. Prescott had piled a bunch of things on the kitchen counter for Drake and West. He followed me to the bathroom and flipped on the shower for me.

"Are you okay, little lamb?" he asked, stroking my arm to get my attention.

I had to think about it for a moment. I'd killed another person. Last time, I'd fallen apart over it. Somehow, this time, it was different. There were no feelings of regret or remorse. I merely felt a sense of peace washing over me.

Wherever you are now, Mum, I hope you're happy. I avenged your death. And even if that puts a black mark on my soul, I don't care. It was worth it.

I looked up at Prescott and gave him a smile.

"I'm good... I'm glad he's dead. And I don't feel bad about it."

Then I stepped into the shower and let it wash away the evidence of the slaughter I'd left in my wake.

NINE

DRAKE

What a fucking shitshow. The past fucking week had been one, but what we'd just had to clean up was even more so. That wasn't even the end of it. Scarlett had set in motion a tidal wave of fuckery none of us could run from. She'd cast the first stone by killing Mason. And now the consequences would come galloping in like a fucking storm with hellfire in its wake.

Yet... I wasn't angry at her for it. In fact, I was proud of the way she'd handled herself. She hadn't hesitated this time, according to West. She'd asked for his knife to kill Mason with. When Francis and I had heard screaming, we'd run into the living area to find her stabbing the guy to death with calm fury written all over her face. Scarlett knew exactly what she was doing. She wanted him to die. Needed it. How could I ever begrudge her revenge on the man who'd helped steal her from her life? Who'd murdered her mother to cover up her kidnapping. Who had done nothing but lust after her since she was a teenager. There was no redeeming a man like Mason Jones.

We'd spent a couple of hours dealing with Mason's place, making sure we scrubbed it thoroughly of our presence and loading his papers into the Jeep. Now all I wanted to do was get home and sleep in my own fucking bed. However, we had a stupidly long journey home to contend with, not to mention there was a body in the back of the car.

West had called Penn when we were finishing up. He'd given us details for someone he knew who could help us dispose of Mason's body. I didn't question how or why he knew someone in Scotland. The guy was resourceful. He was London's best known and most sought after Fixer for a reason. No wonder he basically lived in Zayn Villetti's pocket, according to West.

It wasn't the first time I'd been thankful for his friendship with West. Penn might be batshit crazy, but he was useful as fuck. He'd helped us out on more than one occasion. We still owed him a favour, and no doubt he would come to collect when he was ready.

Francis was taking the first few hours behind the wheel. Prescott had fallen asleep with his face smashed against the window in the front seat a few minutes after we'd set off. He'd barely got any sleep since we'd left home, so it was unsurprising he was the first one to crash out. West was dozing in the back with me and Scarlett, who was sitting in the middle. She was curled into my side with her head resting on my shoulder. I'd covered the both of us with one of the blankets we'd brought with us so she didn't get cold.

I needed her close to me. Needed her body against mine. I was the last person to see her, and it killed me to know she'd been taken right after the moment we'd shared on the rooftop. After she'd given me exactly what I needed. To punish her, fuck her and hold her afterwards. She was my heaven, wrapped up in a beautiful human being who loved fiercely and gave everything to those she cared about. And having her gone for a week was a fucking wake up call.

“Drake?”

I looked at her. It was dark outside, but I could just about make out her wary expression. Her voice was hushed as if she didn't want to disturb the others.

“Yes?”

She curled an arm around me, stroking my side with her fingertips.

“How did you find me?”

My mind circled back to the past week. The hours we'd spent tracking down Mason's place. It wasn't an easy task, by any means. He'd covered his tracks well. The house wasn't even in his fucking name. It made finding it far more difficult than it should have been.

“We saw you being taken on the security footage and after trawling through it, we got a good look at who took you. He not only drugged you but one of our security guards. It took us some time to work out how he got into the building in the first place. After we went snooping around Tonya's old place, we found she'd leaked our building plans, along with our security details, to him. That's how he got to you.”

I decided to lay it all out for her. Scarlett should know the lengths we went to

in order to find her.

“You searched Tonya’s?”

“Mmm, we broke in. I wasn’t going to ask Fletch, even though he has the keys. I’m not fucking talking to him after he landed me in the shit with my mother.”

Scarlett’s stroking grew more insistent. It was making me uncomfortable, but not because I didn’t want her touching me. My problem had to do with the fact she’d looked like a damn queen when she’d butchered Mason. All that blood covering her clothes. The blood that had got on me when I kissed her. Not to mention the provoking words she’d come out with. All of it fuelled my desire to paint her lithe little body with welts and fuck her until she cried from my brutality.

Fuck, I need to rein this in.

“When are you going to tell her about me?”

“After we’ve handled Stuart.”

“Are you going to be honest about all of us being a thing? You know, we can’t exactly hide that from her, Rosie and Frankie’s parents.”

I hadn’t exactly thought about it, even if she was right.

“I don’t see how we can keep the truth from them.”

“I can’t even imagine what she’s going to say.”

I didn’t want to. In fact, it was a conversation I would quite happily avoid forever. Our families likely wouldn’t approve of our unorthodox relationship with Scarlett. And they would be unhappy about us hiding the truth about her return from them too.

“Are you going to let me get on with telling you about the past week?”

She nodded, her hand leaving my side and running down my stomach. I tensed under her exploration, not wanting her to find out what her proximity was doing to me right at this moment. Before she could get too far, I removed her hand from my stomach and placed it on my thigh instead. Scarlett didn’t protest, but I could feel her eyes boring into the side of my head.

“Once we worked out how Mason gained access to the building, we had to put in extra measures to prevent anything like this from happening again. We’re going to keep you safe this time, little wisp. We don’t care what it takes or the cost. We won’t let anyone take you again.”

“I know,” she whispered into my shoulder. “I trust you.”

Her hand curled around my thigh, her fingers stroking along it. I fought against the urge to press her hand against my cock. It was getting really fucking uncomfortable now.

“It wasn’t easy to find you. Mason has a property in the city, but the one he took you to isn’t in his name. We searched his London flat for clues about where he’d taken you. Then we tracked down his associates when we turned up nothing. West beat some sense into them, but even they had no fucking clue. Francis searched his flat again and had to break into the safe he had hidden under the floorboards. That’s where we found the deed. It was in his mother’s name. And his mother isn’t Garrett’s wife. Not his real mother, anyway. We found his birth certificate there too. Quite the fucking scandal Garrett had to cover up there.”

Even as I told her this, all I could focus on was where her hand was. I didn’t question why I found Scarlett so fucking distracting. She was my very own siren. A woman I couldn’t resist under any circumstances.

“He had an affair with a woman he worked with, and she ended up pregnant. Two months after she gave birth to Mason, she was found dead in the canal by a single gunshot wound to the back of the head. It was from a police issue weapon, so pretty fucking suspicious, but they never found her killer and Mason was raised by Garrett alone.”

“No wonder he turned into such a creep.”

I almost snorted. Mason was more than a creep, but that was neither here nor there.

“The moment we found out where you were, we came for you, little wisp. We drove all night to get to you. None of us has slept much in the past forty-eight hours.”

Her hand moved higher as if she wanted to soothe me with her touch.

“You must be exhausted. I’ll let you sleep.”

I caught her hand in mine, pulling it away so she wouldn’t notice how fucking hard I was for her. Scarlett shifted next to me, tugging her hand from mine. I thought she was going to move away from me, but no. The girl damn well decided she was going to touch me right where I was aching for her.

“Or not. Did I do that?”

“You know very well you did,” I muttered, trying not to groan when she started stroking her hand along my length.

You are going to kill me one day.

“Was it all the blood?”

I felt like telling her to quit it, but it felt too fucking good.

“You, the blood, watching you kill again. All of it, little wisp. You make me so fucking crazy.”

Our voices were low, so they didn’t carry to the front. West was still asleep. We weren’t exactly disturbing him, either.

“Then let me take care of it for you.”

Scarlett shifted and started unbuttoning my clothes without a second fucking thought. The moment she wrapped her small hand around my cock, I gritted my teeth. This wasn’t going to do. I didn’t want to come all over myself. Gripping the blanket, I tugged it up before planting my hand behind her head and shoving her underneath it.

“Wrap your lips around it,” I hissed before settling the blanket over her.

I almost fucking died when she complied. Her hot little mouth was heaven. She stroked what she couldn’t fit between her lips. I wasn’t going to make her gag on me. It might wake up Prescott and West. My eyes went to the front of the car and met Francis’ through the rearview mirror. He gave me a look that spoke volumes. He knew what was happening. I gave him a shrug, placing my hand over Scarlett’s head underneath the blanket to keep her working my cock with her mouth.

Francis shook his head and turned his attention back to the road. Probably a good thing he was the one driving. If it had been Prescott, he would no doubt be encouraging us right now. I didn’t have time for his voyeuristic antics. Not when it felt so fucking good to have her mouth wrapped around me.

“Little wisp, don’t stop,” I whispered.

She hummed, the sensation making my dick throb in her mouth. I had no problems letting her set the pace and be in control right now. All I wanted was to come down her fucking throat after being tormented by the sight of her bloody form earlier.

The moment she cupped my balls with her free hand, my head hit the headrest and I couldn’t help the low groan escaping my mouth. It was a mistake

because West opened his eyes and glared at me. Then he looked down at what Scarlett was doing. A smirk appeared on his face as he glanced into the front to find Prescott still fast asleep.

“And here I thought you would be giving Mr Voyeur a show,” he murmured, tugging the blanket he had on up higher around him.

“Fuck off,” I hissed. “Go back to sleep.”

“How can I when you’re getting your dick sucked next to me?”

“Easy, pretend you didn’t see it and close your eyes.”

Scarlett popped off my dick and sat up, pushing the blanket off her head.

“Would you shut up? I can’t make you come if you’re busy arguing with West.”

West snorted, giving me a wink.

“Yeah, Drake, listen to Scar and keep your mouth shut if you want to get off.”

I was about to open my mouth to retort when I was rudely interrupted.

“All of you shut up or you’ll wake Pres,” Francis hissed from the driver’s seat. “Did you forget he literally had no sleep at all on the journey up here?”

West turned away from us, rolling his eyes, and settled back down. Scarlett dived back beneath the blanket and wrapped her mouth around my dick. My hand went to her hair, pushing her down on it. She sucked me harder, making me grit my teeth so I wouldn’t make any further noise.

It didn’t take long before I came with a low grunt down her throat. While it felt fucking good, it wasn’t quite the most satisfying experience given we’d been interrupted by West. I reminded myself when we were home, I had planned to punish her. The knowledge of it would tide me over until then.

Scarlett pulled back, swallowing before she tucked me away. Then she settled herself on me, her arm around me as her head burrowed against my chest. I covered her with the blanket, not wanting to tell her off for the way she was draped over me. My hand went to her hair, stroking her as I leant back against the headrest.

I closed my eyes, feeling content with her there. The motion of the car, Scarlett’s soft breathing and her lithe body on mine lulled me to sleep. And I realised before I dropped off, it had been a very long time since my mind was empty enough to allow me to rest without any worries crowding my head.

TEN

FRANCIS

I was too fucking tired for words by the time we got back to Fortuity. The stress of the past week and the lack of sleep had left me needing to hibernate in bed. The relief we all felt having Scarlett back with us was palpable. There was no stone we'd left unturned in our search for her. We weren't going to allow her to be taken from us again. Not after the past ten years without her. Not when we were in love with the girl we'd grown up with. If anything, that made it even more imperative we got her back.

Drake pulled the Jeep up under Fortuity in the carpark. I looked over at the car next to us, finding Penn leaning against it with a smirk on his face. That tattooed bastard was useful, even if he was a headcase. We all got out and West went over to greet him. Prescott took Scarlett's hand and pulled her towards the lifts. Drake had told him to take her up to bed while we dealt with Penn.

"Am I not allowed to say hello to your little lady?" Penn asked West.

"Don't fucking flirt with her."

Penn gave West a wink before he took a few steps towards the lift where Scarlett was clutching Prescott's hand and looking dead on her feet.

"I hear you've had quite the adventure."

"You could say that," she replied.

"Did you meet my friend?"

She raised an eyebrow.

"The one who grunts more than actually talks?"

"Yeah, that's him."

We'd stopped on the way to deal with Mason, so we didn't have to drive all the way back here with a dead body in Prescott's Jeep. Well, for the most part,

anyway. Penn's "friend" took Mason's body out of the back of the Jeep and returned half an hour later with one of those freezer bags containing ice packs and a decapitated head. Drake had asked him for that and to dispose of the rest.

"We did, though he didn't say much. I liked his house. I wouldn't want to be tucked away surrounded by the woods. This is my home." She waved around at the place. "But if you wanted peace and quiet, it'd be perfect."

Penn gave her a nod.

"Haven't been there myself. He lived down here for a few years. That's how I met him. He's a useful sort."

"You seem to know a lot of those."

"Part of my job... say, did West talk to you about getting tattooed yet?"

Scarlett's eyebrows shot up. Her eyes went to West, who merely shrugged. Drake was busy getting the freezer bag out of the back, but I could see him listening to what was being said.

"No, he didn't."

The lift arrived, the doors sliding open.

"Well, just so you know, the offer is there if you ever need my services."

Penn gave her a wink as Prescott pulled her into the lift. She didn't respond, just gave him a little wave before the doors closed.

"If you're quite done flirting with our girlfriend," Drake said, giving Penn a hard stare.

Penn merely smiled at Drake and walked back over to us.

"If you think that was flirting, I clearly need to give you some lessons."

West barked with laughter. Drake scowled. I put my hand over my mouth. Drake and flirting did not go hand in hand.

"I'd love to see you try," West said when he settled down. "Drake's not a very good student."

Drake merely shoved the bag at Penn, who took it with a graceful smile.

"You can shut the fuck up, West. And you... look after this for us," Drake ground out, pointing at the bag. "We haven't decided what we're going to do with it yet, but we will be sure to let you know when we do."

Drake didn't wait for an answer. He stalked away to the lift, hitting the button to wait for it to come back down.

"Someone clearly got out on the wrong side of bed this morning," Penn said

with a grin before he opened the boot of his car and stuffed the bag containing Mason's head inside it.

"None of us has really slept," I said with a shrug. "Not to mention West interrupted Scar giving Drake head in the car. Think that soured his mood."

Penn snorted. Drake would probably kill me for telling him that, but I didn't care. All I wanted to do was take a shower and fall into bed.

"He did get off though, right? I'm sure she's not the type to leave a man hanging."

"Don't talk about her like that," West ground out, giving Penn a look. "But yes, he did." He walked towards where Drake was standing. "I'll call you."

I gave Penn a nod, watching him walk around and get in his car before joining the other two. The ride up to our penthouse was silent. Drake was clearly brooding. Neither me nor West wanted to piss him off further. I trudged up the stairs when we left the lift. The five of us had stopped for an early dinner on the way at a service station, so I was ready to sleep.

When I slipped into my bedroom and shut the door, my eyes went to the bed. I stilled when I saw a lump in it. My heart thumped in my chest. I hadn't expected her to be here. Our night together last week had been rudely fucking interrupted by Mason. Her coming to me had me wanting to get into bed, curl myself around her and never leave again, but I needed a wash first.

I padded into the bathroom, trying not to be too loud as I stripped out of my clothes and got in the shower. The hot water soothed me. I didn't linger after I'd washed myself, eager to be with my girl even if we were just going to sleep. Drying as fast as I could, I pulled on a pair of boxers, turned out the lights and slid into bed behind Scarlett.

I wrapped myself around her back, curling my arm around her and pinning her to my body. Nuzzling her hair with my face, I breathed her in. She didn't smell of her usual cinnamon, but that was okay. I was just happy to have her here.

"Frankie," she breathed out.

"I'm here."

She turned in my arms and buried her face in my chest, clutching me to her body.

"I missed you so much," she choked out a moment later. "I know you're

tired, but please kiss me. I need you.”

I took hold of her chin, tipped her face up and found her hazel-green eyes teary.

“Shh, shh, don’t cry. I’ll give you anything you need, Scar.”

Capturing her mouth with mine, I held her close and kissed her, trying to be gentle and sweet, knowing it was what she needed after everything she’d been through.

“I love you,” she murmured against my lips, “I love you so much.”

She kissed her way down my jaw and buried her face in my neck, breathing me in.

“You’re my favourite scent in the whole damn world, you know that.”

I chuckled. Knowing she loved it, I’d slapped on some of my cologne before getting into bed.

“I’ll let you in on a secret. I’ve been having it specially made for years. Your love of apples and cinnamon is something I’ll never forget. I wanted something that reminded me of you wherever I went. It kept me from falling apart and losing hope that we’d get you back one day.”

She tipped her head back, staring up at me with wide eyes.

“That’s... fuck, Frankie, why are you so sweet?”

I reached up and stroked her face.

“Because I love you.”

She leant back into me, brushing her lips against mine.

“Tell me again.”

I flipped her over onto her back, pressing my body against hers and running my tongue along her jaw.

“I love you, little whore.”

My fingers tugged off the little lacy knickers she’d worn to bed. Yes, I was fucking exhausted, but her body was too tempting and sinful for me not to be aroused. I couldn’t help myself when it came to Scarlett.

“I love you.” I pressed my lips to her pulse point. “I love you.” My boxers were discarded next to us within a matter of seconds. “I love you.” I stroked my fingers between her legs, finding her wet for me. “I love you forever.”

She let out a moan when I slid home, clutching my shoulders with her small hands. Her legs wrapped around me, encouraging me to give her what she

needed... me. I wasn't going to be rough with her today. I wanted to make love to her. To show her how much I missed her. How I needed her as much as I needed air to keep breathing.

Rocking into her, I stroked her hair back from her face before cupping her cheek. I stared into those eyes I loved so much, trying to communicate my feelings without words. She looked up at me with so much fucking open love and affection, it was almost too much to handle after being away from this beautiful woman for a week.

"Mason ruined our last night together," she whispered, stroking her hand down my back. "He can't ruin anything for us ever again."

"You made sure of that."

"I did... and before you ask, I don't regret it. He got what was coming to him."

I pressed my lips to hers.

"He deserved to die."

"I know I shouldn't, but I liked it. The heat of the moment, watching the life drain from his eyes. It made me feel like a god."

I took her hands and pinned them to the bed. Hearing her talk about killing made my dick throb. And while I wanted to be gentle, her words had me needing to give it to her harder.

"It's a heady feeling, being the one in control of someone's life like that."

She arched up into me, asking for more. I thrust deeper, knowing exactly what she needed.

"Intoxicating... like a high you know you shouldn't feel, but you do because he deserved it. He deserved the pain. I gave it to him. I hurt him. Made him feel my pain. And all that blood everywhere, fuck... Frankie, it made me feel like a queen being covered in it."

"You looked like a goddess, my fucking goddess."

I wasn't going to lie. Seeing her kill was hot. It's not like Scarlett and I hadn't talked about killing before. She knew my feelings on the matter. Knew how it fuelled me when I took someone's life. How it did something to all of us.

"Tell me... tell me how she died."

She was talking about Chelsea. It was on the news a few days ago about how Chelsea McDonald had killed herself. Except she hadn't really. It was me who'd

killed her.

I pressed my face into Scarlett's neck, keeping up my pace. She felt so hot and wet as I fucked her. Talking about this was turning both of us on further. Scarlett linked her fingers between mine, holding onto me right back as if she craved the deep connection we'd forged with each other.

"I wore gloves to her house so I wouldn't leave fingerprints. The moment she saw me, she knew why I was there. And, of course, she was a bitch to me about it, but I didn't care. She threatened my family."

Scarlett moaned as I shifted the angle, hitting the right spot for her. I noted what she liked whenever we fucked, so I could make her feel good.

"I made her write a suicide note whilst I tied the noose I'd fashioned to the bannisters on the landing next to the stairs. Then I placed a chair underneath it and made her stand on it. She put the noose over her head and tightened it like I requested... then she was still giving me shit, so I kicked the chair from under her. I guess I got a little impatient to get it over and done with."

Scarlett's nails dug into my back with my words, like hearing me say those things only made her want me more. Her chest heaved against mine, her body moving with me. I kissed her neck, licking her skin to taste her.

"I watched her die, Scar. I watched her, and I didn't care that I'd taken a life. I didn't give a shit. She knew the rules, and she broke them. I will kill anyone who fucks with my family. And I'll torture anyone who fucks with you before I end them."

"Why is that so hot?"

I grinned, pulling away to look at her.

"You're in the darkness with us now, little whore." My hands pressed hers down harder into the mattress. "Embrace it as I have. Be ours."

She smiled up at me.

"The goddess and her horsemen?"

I leant closer, running my nose up hers.

"That's right... Nyx belongs with Pestilence, War, Famine and Death."

"Always."

I kissed her. It was rough and raw. Her tongue clashed with mine, our bodies moving faster together like we were both pushing each other to the edge. I let go of one of her hands and pressed it between us to reach her clit. Scarlett cried

out at the extra sensation.

“Come for me, little whore,” I murmured against her mouth. “Show me you belong to me.”

She wrapped her now free hand around me, stroking it down my back. Her nails dug into my skin a minute later, making me grunt. I fucked her harder in response and she exploded for me. Her pussy clenched around my cock. I couldn't hold back my own climax with her bucking against me.

“Fuck,” I ground out, feeling it race up my spine before I erupted inside her.

I almost collapsed on top of her when I was spent. Then exhaustion really did set in. I don't know where the extra burst of energy came from, but we'd both needed this. To reconnect with each other after Mason had ripped her away.

Shifting off Scarlett, I made myself get up and pull her with me into the bathroom to clean up. We got tucked back up together afterwards, holding each other like our lives depended on it. I buried my face in her hair, never wanting this moment to end as I closed my eyes.

“Love you forever,” she whispered against my chest, pressing a kiss to my heart.

“Love you for eternity,” I murmured back as sleep claimed me and my beautiful girl, who ruled my soul.

ELEVEN

PRESCOTT

I awoke for the first time to the sound of my sheets rustling. Opening my eyes, I found Scarlett crawling into my bed. Her hair was sleep-rumpled, and she had a tired smile on her face. I lifted my arm up, allowing her to tuck herself up next to me, and pulled the sheets over us. A minute later, I drifted back off, content to have my girl next to me.

Waking for the second time, I discovered Scarlett sprawled across my body, her hair fanning over my chest. Her tiny fist was pressed against her mouth, making her look so fucking adorable. I didn't want to disturb her, even though I was curious why she'd left Francis' bed to come to mine this morning. She'd told me it was important they got to have their night together after Mason had interrupted it when he stole her. I respected her wishes, although I wanted her with me. When you were in a relationship with a woman who was also in one with your three best friends, selfishness wasn't an option.

Reaching up, I stroked Scarlett's hair with gentle fingers, not intending to wake her but needing to touch my girl all the same.

"I've missed you, little lamb," I whispered.

Her being gone had left us in a fucking state. It made it all the more clear she belonged with us. We didn't function right without Scarlett. The way we'd been for the past ten years no longer worked for us. Not now the five of us knew what it felt like to be together. Sure, we still had conflicts, and Scarlett hadn't exactly completely resolved her relationships with Drake and West, but between me and her, things were perfect. Same for Francis now he'd declared his love to her. He'd told me about it during some downtime we'd had in the search for Scarlett. I got why it was a big deal to him after everything he'd been through

with Chelsea.

Scarlett shifted on my chest, her hand uncurling from her mouth and flattening on my skin.

“My wolf,” she murmured.

I couldn’t fight the grin spreading across my face. She opened those hazel-green eyes of hers and gave me a soft smile when she saw I was awake too.

“Dare I ask if Francis knows you’re here?”

“He does... he had his fill of me last night.”

“I bet he did.”

Scarlett rolled her eyes. The next thing I knew, she’d moved to straddle my lap and lean over me, placing her hands on either side of my head.

“Jealous?”

“Not in the slightest.” I ran my thumb along her bottom lip. “I already got to fuck this pretty little mouth of yours.”

She nipped my thumb before sucking it into her mouth and swirling her tongue around it. I licked my lip. Of course, I’d woken up sporting an erection, what with Scarlett being on top of me. This wasn’t helping it go down.

“Don’t start something you can’t finish.”

My words only made her suck my thumb the way she’d suck my dick.

Fuck me.

“You’re a bad little lamb.”

She slid my thumb out of her mouth and gave me a salacious look.

“Maybe your lamb wants her wolf.”

I groaned, wanting so fucking badly to take her up on that offer, but we promised Drake we’d all go through the boxes from Mason’s house we’d brought with us today.

“My lamb is going to have to wait until later... and if you’d like, I’ll quite happily chase you around the penthouse.”

She grinned and leant closer, pressing her mouth to mine. Her tongue chased mine down. I allowed us a moment of passion, running my hand down her back, and making her wriggle on top of me.

“And what about the woods?” she asked as she pulled away and rolled off me.

“Mmm, I can arrange that soon.”

“I wasn’t asking for tonight.” She hopped off the bed and went over to my wardrobes. “We should go when it rains next.”

I sat up and watched her open the door. She pulled out a few things for both of us, placing them on my armchair.

“You want me to chase you in the rain?”

The wicked look in her eyes had me adjusting myself.

“I want you to make me extra dirty when you catch me and fuck me in the mud.”

I jumped out of bed and went over to her, capturing her up in my arms.

“I’m pretty sure you’ve been taking lessons from Francis.”

“Lessons in what?”

“How to be a secret deviant.”

She snorted and shoved my chest.

“He’s just smart.”

“Too fucking smart for his own good. I swear his imagination knows no bounds.”

Going up on her tiptoes, she pressed a kiss to my mouth.

“That’s one of the things I love about him.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“And what do you love about me?”

She licked her lip.

“You’re always putting me first, taking care of me, being sweet and kind and the way you love me is... I don’t have words, but it’s the best feeling in the world.”

My hand drifted from her back to her behind. I gave it a squeeze.

“And you’re dirty as fuck, so there’s that too,” she added.

“That’s more like it.”

“Aww, Pres, do you not like having nice qualities?”

“No, I like being bad.”

She laughed and kissed me again.

“You can be bad to me later.” She skipped out of my arms and gathered up my clothes. “For now, let me dress you.”

I didn’t object as she helped me into a casual pair of dark chinos and a black polo shirt. She stroked my chest when she was done, giving me the once over

before dressing herself in a little black jersey dress. I noted she hadn't put on any underwear underneath it. Her nipples stood out against the fabric. I stroked one when she passed by me, only earning me a scowl.

"You can play with them later," she stated before she flounced out of the room, leaving me trailing behind her.

When we got downstairs, Drake was already up and had laid out the boxes all over the dining table. In the kitchen, he'd left a selection of brunch items for us on the counter.

"Well, someone has been busy this morning," I commented as Scarlett, and I made our way over to the kitchen.

"No time for slacking off," Drake muttered, his head buried in some papers.

I didn't know if it was a dig or not, but I decided to ignore him. Scarlett set about making us some tea and a coffee for his majesty. She took it over to him, placing it down by his hand and leaning down to kiss his temple.

"Morning, grumpy."

"I'm adding that to your list of offences, Scarlett."

She grinned at me before pushing his arm off the table so she could straddle his lap. Drake stared at her with cold eyes. She merely stroked her fingers through his hair.

"Are you going to write it all down and present it to me, so I know why I'm being punished?"

"If that's what it takes to get you to behave."

"We both know you don't want me to behave, Drake. Let's not pretend otherwise."

I snorted, picking up two plates for me and Scarlett and bringing them over to the table. I made some room for them before grabbing our teas and sitting down.

"Go eat your breakfast."

She leant closer to him, brushing her lips over his.

"What if I want you to feed me?"

"You're trying my patience."

"Is it so bad I want to spend time with you?" she told him, her voice cracking on the words. "I need you, Drake. Don't you understand that?"

For a moment I thought he might push her off him and tell her to go sit with

me, but he reached up and stroked her hair back from her face.

“You need me.”

“Yes... a lot more than you realise. The only time you give me your undivided attention is when I push your buttons. Is it any wonder I’m always doing it?”

He leant his forehead against hers and sighed.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t think. I’m not used to being... needed.”

She wrapped her arms around him and buried her face in his neck.

“I’m not trying to ask you for things you can’t give me but spending time with me is non-negotiable. And a little affection wouldn’t hurt either.”

He curled his arms around her.

“Like this?” he asked, nuzzling her hair.

“Exactly like this. No more statue Drake. I don’t like him.”

“Statue Drake?”

She pulled away and looked at him.

“Yes, sometimes you’re like a stone and I’m not here for it. Warm, fuzzies Drake who kisses me without restraint is who I want.”

“I don’t do warm fuzzies, Scarlett.”

She bopped his nose with her finger. He scowled but didn’t make a move to stop her.

“You do with me. Now, about feeding me.”

“Don’t push your luck.”

She cupped his face with both hands and gave him a bright smile.

“It’s what I do.”

He didn’t get a chance to respond. She kissed him, making him accept her affection. And he did, tangling his hand in her hair and angling her head to deepen their kiss.

Watching Scarlett handle Drake was rather amusing. He clearly wasn’t sure what to do with her when she was like this. I had a feeling he also liked the way she pushed him. In fact, he needed it. She was the only one who could wrap him around her finger without him realising she was doing it.

I turned when I heard a noise from the stairs finding West and Francis walking downstairs together, talking in low voices. Scarlett slipped out of Drake’s lap and came over to me, taking a seat in mine instead.

“Are you expecting me to feed you?” I asked, turning to her as the other two went into the kitchen.

“No, but we can eat whilst we look through this shit.”

I wrapped my arm around her waist before sipping at my tea. Then I dragged over a stack of papers and started looking through them. West and Francis joined us a few minutes later. The five of us were silent as we ate and looked through everything we’d brought back from Mason’s.

“Holy fuck,” Francis breathed out, making me look up.

“What?”

He flipped around a photo he was holding to show me. It was taken in a hospital room and showed a patient lying in a bed with Garrett Jones standing over her. Next to him was Stuart. There was a window in the background, and it was dark outside. It took me a minute to register that the person in the bed was Scarlett.

“Is this what I think it is?”

“I’m pretty sure that gives us undeniable proof he was involved.”

“What I want to know is how far down the rabbit hole did he go with Stuart.”

I handed it to Scarlett, who looked incensed.

“What the fuck? Why did he take a picture of this?”

“Maybe Mason wanted some collateral.”

Scarlett gave it to Drake. He eyed it with no small amount of suspicion.

“We’ve never been able to hit Stuart head-on because of his relationship with Garrett,” he said after a moment. “This isn’t enough, though. We need more. If Mason had this, he could have a lot more shit on his father. Find it.”

“And then what?” West asked. “I mean, I wasn’t judging when you asked to keep Mason’s head. Hell, I’d want a trophy too, but what are we going to do with it?”

Francis snorted.

“I think we should have kept his balls if you wanted a trophy because you lot certainly emasculated him.”

West barked with laughter and gave Francis a wink. We’d told Drake and Francis about the whole fucking her before she’d killed him business.

“I merely showed him what he couldn’t have. Voyeur boy over there made it into a spit roast. I’m surprised Mason didn’t come in his fucking pants at the

sight of it. He was too busy cursing us behind his gag rather than enjoying the show.”

Scarlett blushed and buried her face in my neck. I stroked her hair. She enjoyed being watched by us, but I was pretty sure the Mason thing was a one-time deal to punish him for everything he'd done to her.

Drake gave us all a look before he stared down at the photograph again. Then he rubbed his chin and sat back, placing the photo on the table.

“What are we going to do with it?” He cracked his knuckles. “Tie a nice little bow around his face, package it up and have it hand-delivered to Stuart.”

“That’s going to force him into coming after us, and antagonise the fuck out of Garrett,” I said.

Drake smiled, his indigo eyes glinting.

“That’s the whole point. Stuart threatened Scarlett. We’re going to show him we’re not to be messed with. Are you in?”

The rest of us looked at each other as Scarlett turned her face from my neck to stare at Drake.

“As long as I get to torture the fuck when we finally nail him, I’m in,” West said with a shrug.

“I wouldn’t expect anything else.”

“I’m ready,” Francis said.

“Me too,” I put in.

All of us looked at Scarlett. She had to be on board with it too. We did it all together or not at all. Those were the rules. And she was one of us. They applied to her too.

She leant forward, placing her palm down on the table.

“Let’s show him who’s boss and kill that motherfucker.”

West gave Scarlett a smile.

“As my little Scar wishes. I’ll text Penn and get the ball rolling.”

“Good,” Drake said as he sat forward and picked up the pages he’d been looking through again. “It’s time we declared outright war on those fuckers once and for all.”

And fuck if it wasn’t satisfying to know we were all going to take that cunt down or die trying.

TWELVE

SCARLETT

I jumped down the last couple of steps, looking back to find Prescott on my tail. My feet carried me into the kitchen, squealing as he made to grab me, narrowly missing catching hold of my dress. I ran around the counter to avoid him.

“You’re making this far too easy, little lamb.”

I raised an eyebrow, watching him walk around it while I dashed away towards the dining table.

“We don’t have enough room in this place,” I countered.

“Excuses, excuses.”

I grinned and gave him a wink, moving around the table as he came at me. We were on either side, staring each other down a moment later.

The door to their gym opened and out walked a shirtless Francis, who shoved his dark hair back from his face. My eyes immediately went to his chest, watching sweat drip down to the grooves of his abs.

That should not be so hot, but it is. Holy fuck.

The fact I even got distracted by the sight of Francis shirtless was my downfall. Prescott took advantage of my momentary distraction, ran around the table, and caught me against his chest, nuzzling my ear and pressing his hard dick into my back.

“You made that far too easy, sweetness.”

“Blame him.” I waved at Francis. “Coming out here looking all hot and shit.”

Prescott looked over my shoulder at Francis, who had paused by the stairs to eye both of us with a wary expression on his face.

“Well, if I was into dick, I would be distracted too.”

“What are you two staring at?” Francis asked, raising his eyebrow.

“You,” I said like it was obvious.

“Me?”

“Mmm, yeah, our girl is staring at your abs,” Prescott replied, waving at him.

Francis looked down at himself, then back up at me. Then a smirk appeared on his face.

“You can come touch them if you want.”

I looked up at Prescott, who was grinning.

“Go on, show me how much you appreciate Francis’ hard work in the gym.”

He released me, letting me make my way over to Francis while he followed behind. The moment I got close to him, I ran my fingers along Francis’ stomach, getting them covered in his sweat. I didn’t care. He was far too attractive for his own good. And besides, we both got rather sweaty together in the bedroom.

“Don’t stop there,” Prescott murmured in my ear. “Perhaps you want to get on your knees.”

I lowered myself to them on his order, sliding my fingers into the waistband of Francis’ shorts and tugging at them. Prescott put his hands on my shoulders, pushing me closer to his friend. I looked up at Francis, who was breathing harder now. Those grey eyes were full of desire.

“Make him hard for me, little lamb.”

I ran my hand along the slight bulge in his shorts, making Francis let out a harsh breath. His hand went to my hair, fingers digging into the strands and stroking my scalp. I kept stroking, feeling him stiffen under my caress.

“Good girl,” Prescott murmured from behind me as I continued to stroke Francis.

I didn’t look at him. My body heated. I enjoyed being watched as much as he enjoyed watching me, but I wanted to know what he saw one day. Maybe I’d ask him to take me somewhere we could watch together. Prescott was definitely the type of person who would be aware of such places.

My fingers went to the waistband of Francis’ shorts again. I tugged them down, along with his boxers, freeing his cock. My tongue flicked out, running up his hard shaft.

“Fuck, Scar,” he ground out, his fingers tightening around my head.

“Push him down on the stairs so you can straddle his lap, little lamb. I want

to see him slide into your wet little pussy.”

Francis didn't object when I directed him closer to the stairs and made him sit down a few steps up. Nor did he when I crawled into his lap. My dress slid up my thighs. Prescott came closer and leant down behind me, tugging it up further so it sat around my waist. He stayed there, staring down between me and Francis, waiting for me to carry out the second part of his instructions.

My hand wrapped around Francis' dick, holding it so I could lower myself onto him. He let out a grunt. I moaned with the stretch.

“That's so fucking hot,” Prescott whispered. “Ride him for me. Make him feel good.”

I did as he asked, moving my hips and up and down. Francis' hands went to them, helping guide me. One of my hands went to Francis' shoulder to hold myself steady, while I moved the other behind me, finding my way to Prescott's dick and stroking it through his clothes. He growled in my ear.

“Naughty lamb.”

“Punish me then, wolf.”

He chuckled, and I felt him shift behind me.

“Oh, why would I do that when I can just get Drake to?”

My eyes went to the top of the stairs, finding Drake standing there watching us with a raised eyebrow.

“Is this what we're doing now? Openly fucking anywhere in the house when we feel like it?” he asked a moment later, digging his hand into his pocket and leaning against the bannisters.

“You complaining?” Prescott asked as I continued to fuck Francis without missing a beat.

“No, by all means... continue.”

“Well, there's one for the books. Drake not complaining about our sexual antics,” Francis said with a grin as he looked up at his best friend.

Drake watched for a moment, not saying a word in response to Francis. I continued to stroke Prescott's dick, making him let out a harsh pant in my ear.

“Take her dress off.”

Prescott looked up at Drake again. Then his hands were tugging at my dress, pulling it up my body. I put my arms up to allow him to take it off and toss it on the bannister. He cupped my breasts, rolling the nipples with his thumbs before

he licked my neck. I watched Drake's expression. His indigo eyes darkened with lust.

Francis' grip on my hips tightened, making me ride him harder. His eyes were fixed on Prescott's hands on my breasts, like the sight of it mesmerised him. Being wanted by these men was a high I never thought I'd experience. Being back with them after my ordeal with Mason had me wanting to savour every moment. I needed to feel them this way. It helped calm the raging storm in my mind. The thoughts and worries I had about our next course of action.

Sex was my way of escaping for a while. And connecting with the people I loved. Because I loved all of them. I might not have said it to Drake or West yet, but I felt it. My heart belonged to them in the same way it did to Prescott and Francis.

Drake walked down the stairs until he was level with us. Then he sat on the step next to Francis and stroked his fingers down my arm. My hands were back on Francis' shoulders to hold myself steady.

"My beautiful little wisp," he murmured, leaning closer and pressing a kiss to my shoulder. He kissed his way up my neck until he met my ear. "I've missed the way you light up a room with your intoxicating spirit."

I shivered at his words, turning my face into his. Drake didn't hesitate to kiss me. Hearing him admit those things to me freely was more than I could take. Perhaps he'd taken my words from this morning to heart. I hoped so. I wanted him to spend more time with me outside of sex. To make me a priority in his life. I deserved to be. And I wasn't going to take no for an answer. He was going to be a better boyfriend to me. I didn't care what Drake said. These men? They were my boyfriends. They were all mine.

My hand left Francis' shoulder and went to Drake's thigh, giving it a squeeze. My hand drifted up his leg, getting closer to his cock. Prescott must have noticed as he nuzzled my ear.

"I want to watch you suck him off, little lamb," he whispered.

I released Drake's mouth and looked back at Prescott.

"Who, Drake?"

"Yes."

"And are you going to join in the fun too?"

Prescott growled, rubbing himself against my back.

“Do you want all your little holes filled, lamb?”

I nodded. I didn't just want it. I needed it. Wanted to feel that connection between the four of us... and maybe even five if West came downstairs. He'd disappeared after dinner earlier, probably to go smoke a joint, but who knew. We hadn't talked after I'd kissed him. While he'd actively participated, I wasn't entirely sure how he felt about it, given he'd told me on numerous occasions he didn't kiss. Had he been waiting for me to do it? Did he need me to push him the way I had been doing to Drake?

You already know the answer to that.

Prescott chuckled and released me before standing up.

“Let's move this party to the sofa, hmm?”

I shifted off Francis as Drake stood up, helping me to my feet. The four of us made our way over to the sofa. Francis sat down and I straddled his lap again, sinking down on his hard cock. Apparently, Prescott had stashed lube down here because he pulled it out of a drawer in the coffee table and knelt behind me.

I got distracted from what he was doing by Drake leaning over the back of the sofa and capturing my chin between his fingers. He stared at me with so much affection, I just about died on the spot. I leant towards him, wanting to be closer.

“I thought you didn't do warm fuzzies,” I murmured.

“I don't.”

“Could have fooled me with your sweet words and the look in your eye.”

The way he broke out into a grin made my heart thump against my ribcage. He moved closer, brushing his nose against mine.

“I'm not sweet, Little Nyx.”

He gripped my chin tighter and kissed me. We both knew that was a lie. He could be sweet to me if he was so inclined. I adored the soft side of Drake. It told me my Drake from my youth was still in there. I had to draw him out completely and make sure he stayed that way. He could be cold-hearted to everyone else outside of these four walls, but with his family? Well, that was a different story.

I pulled away, grinning back at him before I looked down at Francis. He was watching us with a wicked glint in his eyes, so I leant down and kissed him too,

for good measure. His hand tangled in my hair, pulling me against his chest as his hips thrust up into me. I moaned around his tongue, feeling Prescott lube me up from behind with his body pressed to my back.

“Less kissing, more fucking,” he said in my ear.

I released Francis and gave my voyeuristic king a look over my shoulder.

“I’ll ban you from my lips if you’re not careful.”

He gave me a wounded look, so I kissed him. When I turned back, Drake had stood up and was busy undressing. I watched him. The way his muscles flexed with his movements. His long fingers unbuttoned his chinos. My body shuddered at the thought of him wrapping those big hands around me. To say I was a little obsessed with them would be an understatement.

Feeling a little daring, I reached out towards him when he was bare. He came closer and looked down at me. I took his hands, pulling him against the back of the sofa. His brow furrowed slightly as if he was wondering what on earth I wanted. I placed his hands on my shoulders, forcing him to lean down to reach me.

“I want you to hold me down.”

“What?”

“I... I like your hands. I mean, in general, I can’t stop looking at them but right now I’d like them on me.”

For a long moment, he didn’t react. Then his fingers curled around my shoulders. I let out a long breath, feeling the tension leave my body.

“And what is it about them you like so much?”

I let out a little moan as Prescott pressed a third finger inside me.

“They’re so... big. I feel small compared to you and the fact you can easily overpower me is a turn on, okay? I just find them attractive, and this is officially embarrassing.”

My cheeks were burning, but I maintained eye contact with him, not wanting him to think I was scared of telling him the truth of my feelings.

Drake raised one of his hands from my shoulder and cupped my face with it. The simple gesture made me tremble.

“Do you like it when I wrap them around you?”

I nodded, catching my bottom lip between my teeth.

“When I punish you with them?”

My head kept bobbing. Drake smiled in such a deviant way, I almost wanted to faint.

“Then I shall endeavour to make you happy by giving you what you need, little wisp.”

He released me and I was about to protest, but he walked around the sofa and sat down next to me. Then he was pulling me closer and running his hands all over my torso, squeezing them around my sides and my breasts. I choked on a moan. All three of them touching me had my body feeling over-sensitised and drove me closer to the edge, especially when Drake slapped me across my breast, making it sting.

“Fuck,” I hissed. “Do it again.”

He did. The pain made me crazy in the best way possible. My hand went to his cock, stroking it. I needed to feel him as he touched me. He grunted but didn't tell me to stop.

“I see you all started the fun without me,” came a voice from behind us.

I knew exactly who it was.

“Then you better make up for lost time,” I replied, not even looking over my shoulder.

And the moment I heard West's chuckle, I knew I was in for another mind-blowing experience with these four men.

THIRTEEN

SCARLETT

I felt him before I saw him as West approached our little gang of four. He sat down on the other side of me from Drake, his amber eyes glinting with mischief. He stroked my shoulder and gave me a smile.

“I’m sure these three can satisfy your urges, little Scar,” he murmured and didn’t move to join in.

My attention was stolen by Drake squeezing my breast and running his thumb over the nipple. And then I cried out because Prescott entered me from behind without warning. It didn’t hurt, as he’d prepared me, but I hadn’t been ready for it. My hand tightened around Drake’s cock, the other squeezing Francis’ shoulder.

“That’s it, little lamb,” Prescott said. “Such a good girl.”

I preened at his praise, rubbing myself against his chest as his arm came around me and he thrust deeper. Being filled by both him and Francis was my heaven. Having any of them this way was. It helped me from spiralling out of control. My thoughts were a demon I could only escape when I was with them this way. When they fucked me with brutality and the only thing I could see was them.

The very thought of this being taken away from me had me trying not to choke. Stuart had already stolen me from them once. Mason had tried to again. They couldn’t keep us away from each other forever. Fate wanted us together. It demanded the five of us remain by each other’s sides. And we couldn’t escape it. Nor did I want to.

“I’ve missed you all so much,” I blurted out, my voice sounding all small and helpless. “Please... don’t let anyone take me away from you again.”

All of them stopped moving. My words hung in the air, making us all tense. I didn't blame them for what happened to me ten years ago. I didn't think placing it on anyone would get us very far. It was what it was. We couldn't go back and change it. The future was important, not the past.

Francis was the first to move, sitting up slightly and pulling me into his arms. Then I had Prescott embrace me from behind. The next thing I knew, Drake and West joined in, all of us holding on to each other like we never wanted to let go.

"Never again, little Scar," West whispered against my hair. "And even if it does happen, we'll find you. We'll bring you home every single time."

A little sob erupted from my lips. I couldn't help it. The weight of being kidnapped by Mason, killing him, and the very real threat Stuart posed to us came crashing down on me. The past week had been awful without them. Now I was with them, I was safe, I couldn't hold back my emotions any longer.

"Shh, little lamb, we've got you," Prescott murmured.

"I don't know what I'd do without you," I told them. "I tried so hard to be brave when he took me, but I was so afraid."

One of them stroked my hair, soothing me with their gentle touch. Prescott shifted, pulling out of me, and moving my hips, so Francis slipped free too. Clearly, he knew I needed to get whatever was going on in my head out and sex was the last thing on my mind now.

"He was going to keep me in that place like his little pet. He planned it all. Bought the house, did it up and furnished it the way he knew I liked. But it wasn't nice. It was super fucking creepy. And... and the night before you came for me, he slept next to me. I thought he was going to force himself on me."

I choked back tears, not wanting to cry over it.

"He didn't, but I spent the whole night awake. I was fucking terrified he would. I knew you'd come for me. I really did, but it didn't stop me from worrying about what he'd do. A part of me knew I might have to save myself before you came for me... before... before he made me do something I didn't want to."

The whole week I'd been on high alert. Now I was home and rested, I felt safe again. I could fall apart and show them my vulnerabilities because they were mine and I was theirs. It didn't make me weak, just human. A woman who'd

been through an ordeal and her men who'd tear apart the world for her. Maybe I was fucked up for wanting the four of them after everything they'd done to me. After everything we'd been through. I didn't care. We were a family and we loved each other.

"The idea of anyone going to those lengths, plotting to keep me captive in a remote location, especially knowing what I'd already been through for the past ten years... it's fucking horrifying. I want to be free. The only time I feel that way is when I'm with all of you. I don't feel like I'm trapped here. I want to be with you. I need you so much, it hurts."

Their arms around me tightened, reminding me of the way Francis' ropes always calmed me. They must know I needed this. Francis always did. He gave me the safety I'd always craved when I'd been locked away.

"Thank you for coming for me. Thank you for all these years you kept fighting for me. I know it all got so fucked up, but it's okay... I forgive you. I don't care about the past. I need you. I just want us to be able to live normal lives without all of this shit hanging over our heads."

It was my only desire going forward. For us to be free. For this shit to end. I'd got rid of one threat. Now we had to get rid of the rest. We had to fight to survive and hope they didn't kill us before we got to them.

"We will," Drake murmured. "I promise, little wisp, we will."

None of us moved for a long time. We needed a moment of stillness together. Reassuring each other our family was together. We weren't going to let anyone pull us apart again. They didn't need to say a word for me to know they understood my feelings. It was in the way they held me close and didn't let go.

While I might have things I needed to resolve with all the boys, I didn't want to be away from them. We were stronger together.

"Do you want to continue, little lamb?" Prescott asked, rubbing my shoulder. "It's okay if you don't."

I hadn't meant to ruin the mood by getting all emotional.

"Maybe," I whispered, "I don't really know."

Prescott pulled away. The next thing I knew, he'd plucked me out of Francis' lap and settled me between Francis and Drake. He knelt between my thighs and rubbed them. Leaning down, he kissed his way up my leg.

"How about I reward you for being such a good girl, hmm? I want you to

make my face messy, little lamb.”

I shuddered when he spread my thighs further and lowered his mouth to my pussy. Those blue eyes of his glinted as he stared up at me. The other three watched Prescott slide his fingers into my wet hole while his tongue flicked out, running over my clit, and making my hips buck.

“Pres,” I breathed.

“Let us make you feel good, little whore,” Francis murmured as he leant over me, kissing his way down my collarbone.

I had Drake touching me on the other side, wrapping his lips around my nipple and biting down on it. One of my hands went to Prescott’s hair, stroking through the soft strands. My gaze went to West, who was watching me with a pensive expression as if my words from a few minutes ago were still playing on his mind. I reached out to him over Francis’ head. He took my hand and pressed a kiss to it before entwining our fingers together. Having that connection with him had me relaxing against the back of the sofa, allowing them to make me feel good like Francis had told me to.

I whimpered when Prescott grazed his teeth across my clit, his fingers pumping harder inside me. Both my nipples were now occupied by two mouths. The sensations drove me closer to the edge. My eyes closed and, in my mind, I hovered over the abyss. The tendrils pulled me down, sucking me into the void. It’s why I didn’t immediately register movement next to me. It was only when a hot mouth pressed against mine, I opened my eyes and found West leaning over Francis to get to me. His lips were soft. I yielded immediately, sinking into his kiss like our mouths belonged together.

In a lot of ways, they did. West had been mine since the moment we’d laid eyes on each other at five years old. It was an instant thing. We both knew but it had taken years for us to act on those feelings. They were innocent when we were young. They grew into more as time passed. He buried himself in my heart as I buried myself in his. There was no way to extract each other. And I didn’t want to. Despite everything that had happened, I wanted him right there, nestled inside me where he should be.

“West,” I moaned against his mouth, letting go of his hand so I could cup his face, pulling him closer.

His fingers dug into my hair, holding my head in place as his tongue slid into

my mouth. The extra sensation of him kissing me sent me over the edge. I whimpered into his mouth, bucking into Prescott's face with my climax. He kept fucking me with his fingers, drawing it out while the other two continued to suck my nipples until I was pushing Prescott away from my pussy.

All four of them released me, West leaning back to allow Francis to sit up properly. Prescott sat back on his heels, smiling up at me with my arousal glistening on his lips. I licked my own in response.

"Do you want to go to bed, little lamb?" he asked, stroking my leg with his fingers.

I nodded. I was drained now. All I wanted was to curl up under the sheets.

"And who would you like to take you?"

My eyes immediately went to West. I wasn't done kissing him. In fact, I wanted to be wrapped up in his arms with his mouth pressed to mine. Asking for that, however, had me swallowing hard, trying to find the words.

Prescott kissed my thigh and stood up, reaching to grab his clothes. Francis and Drake stood with him, moving away, and leaving me and West staring at each other. I didn't have to ask. They knew the moment I looked at West, I wanted him. As the others moved away to get dressed, West shifted closer and cupped my face with one hand.

"I want to stay with you," I murmured.

He nodded, then he got up and picked me up in his arms. Before he carried me to the stairs, he turned me to the others one at a time, letting them kiss me goodnight. We were silent as he took me to his room. He pulled back the covers with one hand and set me down on the bed, tucking the duvet around me a moment later. Then he walked away towards the window and stared out over the city.

"What were you doing up here before you came down?" I asked when he didn't say anything.

"Thinking."

"About what?"

"Everything that's happened in the past week." He let out a sigh but didn't turn around. "I know what you said when I asked, but I'm still wondering how you really feel about the way I told you of Lylah's death."

I stiffened. Thinking about the fact Mason had killed my mother to stop her

from making too much noise hurt me. I didn't blame West for it, however. It was all on Stuart and Mason. They were responsible for her death.

"I'm not upset with you over it. I mean, it wasn't exactly the best time to tell me, but I don't know if I would have... killed him if you hadn't."

West turned around. He hadn't turned the lights on, but I could see his features from the city lights spilling in through the windows.

"I wanted him dead. Drake made us swear we wouldn't hurt him, but he said nothing about you." He took a step towards the bed. "I need you to know I told you because I wanted you to kill him. I was counting on it."

"And you think that might upset me?"

He shrugged, digging his hands into his pockets.

"Last time I made you kill someone, you weren't very happy with me."

I slipped out of bed and walked over to his wardrobes, trying to get my thoughts straight. Opening one of the doors, I pulled out one of his t-shirts and slipped it over my head. I lowered my face and breathed in. It smelt faintly like their detergent and West. Closing the door, I rested my forehead against the wood.

"I'm grateful you told me the truth. I had trouble confronting it. The fact that my mother is dead. And that made it real. Knowing he killed her made it... real."

Tears welled in my eyes. This time, I didn't hold them back as one slid down my cheek.

"I miss her... so much."

My knees threatened to buckle, but I put my hands on the door to stop myself from falling to the floor. I'd tried to keep my grief inside me. Tried so hard not to allow it to burst through. I'd held onto my anger towards Mason so I didn't have to deal with it, but now... now I couldn't hold back any longer.

My mother was gone. Murdered. It happened when I had no idea who she was. That was the very worst part of all.

FOURTEEN

WEST

Watching her struggle with her composure made my chest hurt. I wasn't good at this shit. Being there for people. It had been a long time since I'd needed to. And Scarlett had been the only one I'd ever comforted.

I walked around the bed and reached out to her, placing my hands on her shoulders while she tried to hold in her emotions. All I wanted to do was take away her pain. To end her suffering. She deserved more than life had given her. I would do everything in my power to give this woman a better future.

"Little Scar."

"I've lost so much already. Almost half my life was stolen from me. I lost you... I lost us. Why did I have to lose her too?"

I pulled her away from the door, turning her around and tucking her against my chest. She clutched my t-shirt and let out a hiccup.

"I want you back," she choked out. "I can't have my mother back or my old life, but I want you, West. I just want you."

I didn't know what the fuck to say. Didn't she know I was right here? Didn't she know she had me? Every part of me?

No, because you haven't fucking told her.

It should be simple. Telling her I loved her. But the truth was... I still struggled with myself over it. Scarlett reminded me of the boy I'd been. She dragged him out into the open. The boy I thought had died the night she fell. The man I'd become had all but been labelled a sociopath. And yet, I was capable of feeling human emotions. I felt them for Scarlett. Her pain. I understood it. I felt it inside me, like a festering wound unable to heal. And it was killing me.

I didn't know how to define myself any longer. How to navigate these waters I'd found myself in. Maybe I wasn't supposed to do it alone. The world had given me Scarlett back. Given me the one person who had always filled me with the hope I wasn't completely fucked in the head. She told me she didn't see me differently because of my diagnosis. So why did I still see myself as unworthy of her love?

"Tell me how to give you that, little Scar," I whispered, pressing my face into the top of her head. "Tell me, so I can give you me."

Her body shuddered against mine. I could feel her tears soaking my t-shirt, but I didn't care. If she wanted to cry on me for hours, I'd let her. Fuck, I would do anything at this point. Anything to make her smile again. To see those hazel-green eyes full of joy, love, and affection. I'd forgotten how much I need that from her. How she was the only person in this world capable of keeping me on an even keel. Maybe it had everything to do with me loving her.

"Why wouldn't you kiss me before? Tell me the real reason."

I stroked her back. If we were ever going to get back to where we were before, I had to be honest with her.

"Do you remember the night you came to me after the twins tried to assault you?"

She nodded.

"You kissed me first, little Scar. I guess I needed you to be the one to do it again... then I'd know you'd forgiven me for everything. That you still felt the same way you did all those years ago. You still saw me as... yours."

She let out a choking sound before she looked up at me, forcing me to straighten.

"You needed me to be your little warrior?"

I gave her a smile.

"You were always the one who kept us together. You were good at this stuff. I'm not. I don't know how to be a good... boyfriend to you."

Being vulnerable wasn't easy for me, but I was done hiding away from her and my feelings.

She blinked back her tears, letting go of my t-shirt to wrap her arms around my neck instead.

"I don't think you ever stopped being my boyfriend. We technically never

broke up. And you were pretty good at it when we were younger, even if our time got cut horribly short.”

“Was I?”

My girl rose up on her tiptoes and nuzzled my jaw with her lips.

“Yeah, you took care of me, West... always.”

I allowed her to press a kiss to my lips.

“Look, I’m not asking for you to be anything other than who you are now. I happen to like you this way. I won’t lie. Sometimes you scare the shit out of me, but we both know that turns me on. That night you pushed me way past my limits because I asked you? I trusted you implicitly in those moments. You and me... we have something special. I don’t want to lose it or you.”

“I never wanted to lose you.”

She sighed, pressing her face into my neck.

“But you did... the night I fell.”

I nodded, clutching her tighter.

“I’m sorry you suffered all these years without me when I had no idea who you were. I’m here now... and I’m never leaving you again, West. Never. I promise. I’m yours.”

My heart slammed hard against my ribcage. I didn’t think I’d hear those words from her mouth, uttered so freely as if it didn’t cost her anything.

Leaning down, I clasped her thighs and picked her up, carrying her over to my bed. I set her down under the covers and tucked them around her. Scarlett reached for me when I straightened.

“I’m not going anywhere, little Scar. Let me just take this off, okay?”

She settled back against the sheets, watching me as I moved towards my wardrobes and undressed. I walked back over to her and got into bed. She immediately moved closer, tucking herself up in my arms. Scarlett turned her head up towards me and I leant down, capturing her mouth as if it was natural. As if I’d never gone without kissing her all these months since she’d been back.

The simple act was all I needed, no matter how much her body against mine aroused me. Scarlett needed to sleep, not be mauled by me. Funny to think weeks ago, I would have done whatever I wanted with her, but not now. Not when I knew she needed this. Needed me to kiss her and hold her against me while she fell asleep.

“This feels like when we were teenagers,” she whispered to me when she pulled away.

“Is that a good thing?”

Her hand slid from my back to my chest.

“It’s like coming home, being in the place I was always meant to, right here in your arms.”

Her eyes clouded over a moment later, making me stiffen.

“Am I still your curse?”

I shook my head.

“You were never a curse, little Scar... you were always my destiny, just as I’m yours.”

“You make it sound like we’re in a world where fated mates exist.”

I snorted, stroking my hand down her back.

“Maybe that’s what the five of us are, even if it’s ridiculous and farfetched.”

“Who knew you, of all people, could be sappy as fuck.”

Leaning closer again, I nuzzled her nose with mine.

“For you, Scar, I’d be anything and everything.”

She grinned, pressing her mouth to mine in a series of kisses, leaving the both of us breathless. Maybe I was being sappy or whatever, but a part of me had always known Scarlett and I were soulmates. I’d just been lucky enough to find her when we were young. Lucky enough to know who I would spend my whole life loving with every inch of my being.

We lay cuddled together in silence for a long while. It had been years since I had this sort of contentment in my life. There was no driving need for violence filling my insides when she was in my arms. Well, perhaps not the type of violence involving death and destruction... sex was an entirely different matter. Scarlett had given me an outlet I didn’t realise I needed until now. The way she craved degradation fed me. Instead of violence with my fists, it was with my words. It didn’t mean I wouldn’t relish killing that cunt Stuart, but I didn’t need to hurt, maim and torture quite so much when she was near me.

The balm to my soul. That’s what you are, little Scar.

I pressed a kiss to her forehead, nuzzling her hair and pulling her tighter against me. She reached up and stroked the scars she’d given me. They were healing nicely. Scarlett had taken care of them, just as she’d promised. Although,

while she'd been kidnapped, I'd had to do it myself, not that I minded. It was painful as fuck having to pick off my own scabs, but whatever. I could take it. The pain reminded me I was hers.

"I understand why you scarred me," she said after a moment. "Your little warrior needed a battle scar from her warring horseman."

Even though I'd always thought that fucking moniker was ridiculous, it was fitting for the five of us. The horsemen and their warrior woman. We would ride into battle upon four horses, white, red, black, and pale, with the goddess of the night in our wake. And we would destroy our enemies for good. Nothing would be left standing in our way now.

"Will you go to war with me if I asked it of you?"

"Always."

I pressed a kiss to her hair.

"I'll make the world safe for us," I whispered. "I won't let anyone hurt you. None of us will."

She snuggled even closer, pressing her lips to my chest.

"I want to burn his empire down and dance amongst the ashes."

"You will. I'll make sure of it."

Scarlett closed her eyes and wrapped her arm around me.

"Did she ever stop fighting for me?"

She was referring to Lylah. My heart twisted for her. My poor girl never got a chance to see her mother again or say goodbye. After everything she'd had to endure, that was a fucking travesty I couldn't forgive. I was glad Scarlett had avenged Lylah's death by killing Mason.

"No, never. She was advocating for you until the very end. She loved you with everything she had, little Scar. There's nothing in this world she wouldn't have done to get you back. Nothing at all. And we continued that fight for her. We brought you home."

She nodded, shifting in my embrace before settling down again. I stroked her arm as I watched her fall asleep. My perfect little woman in my arms. And I promised myself I would do my best to keep opening up to her. To keep being vulnerable. If there was anything in this world she deserved, it was that. She deserved to be treated like my partner. My equal in every sense of the word. If she could be open with me, I could do it for her.

I pressed one last kiss to her hair before settling down to sleep myself. And wondered as I drifted off if Stuart would enjoy the little package he would have delivered on his doorstep tomorrow. After all, it wasn't every day you were sent a severed head accompanied by pictures of his affair with your wife. If only I could be a fly on the wall when it happened, but I would settle for knowing it would fuck with him. And we'd continue fucking with Stuart until we could end the man. He deserved nothing less.

FIFTEEN

DRAKE

I stared down at the phone for a long moment after being informed we had a guest. Well, I wouldn't exactly describe Garrett Jones as a guest, but we would be treating him like one. After all, it wasn't every day you had a personal visit from the Met Police Commissioner. The fact he'd come alone spoke volumes. He would have sent officers if he was here to arrest us.

Standing from my desk, I straightened my suit jacket, dusting off a piece of lint on the sleeve. I sent a group text out to the boys and Scarlett. I took a breath then strode out of my office towards the lobby where our guest would be arriving shortly. Scarlett peeked her head out of her office. I paused when she stepped out.

"Do you need me?"

"Get the rest of them into the meeting room before I bring him in, then make yourself scarce. We don't need him to suspect you."

She nodded, moving away to Prescott's office as I continued down the hallway.

I knew exactly why Garrett was here. It might have taken him a few days to turn up at our offices, but we'd known he would come. There was no way he would let what we'd sent Stuart go unanswered. I smiled to myself as I waited by the desk in the lobby. Quite the present we had delivered on his doorstep by Penn's men. It wasn't as if they could trace it back to us, but they would know we'd done it all the same. No two fucking ways about it.

My features were schooled when the lift doors opened and out stepped Garrett Jones, his light brown hair slicked back, blue eyes dark with irritation. He wore a pinstripe suit with a trench coat over the top of it.

“Good afternoon, Commissioner,” I said, giving him a nod.

He came to a standstill near me. I didn’t offer my hand since I knew he wouldn’t take it.

“I’m not here for niceties nor do I offer them in return.”

“No, of course not. Please come this way.”

I put my hand out towards the hallway before leading him towards the meeting room. If he didn’t want niceties, I would endeavour not to give him any. He would probably hate us even more by the end of his time here, but who gave a fuck.

As I entered the meeting room, I found the other three sat at the table. Francis had a pile of documents in front of him. I waved at a chair as I crossed the room to sit next to Prescott, but the Commissioner remained standing. He looked over at the four of us with narrowed eyes.

“I expect you are aware of why I’m here.”

“Why don’t you enlighten us... Commissioner?”

He’d asked to see the four of us directly. It meant he had no idea of Scarlett’s involvement. I was counting on that.

“Let’s not play games,” he ground out, leaning on the table with one hand flat on the wood. “I should have you all arrested.”

“On what grounds?”

“You dare ask me that? I shouldn’t be surprised.” He straightened and glared. “You were never ones for telling the truth, even when you were boys.”

West clenched his fist on the table. Francis nudged him. I needed West to keep his fucking temper in check. We couldn’t have Garrett suspecting a damn thing. Nor would violence solve this problem. If he remained calm, we could get through this unscathed.

“If you tell us why you’re here, perhaps we can help you.”

I knew my nonplussed attitude was pissing him right the fuck off. If we riled the man up, that was fine with me. We had the upper hand.

“I know it was you who sent Stuart my... my... my son.”

“Your son?”

“Don’t play dumb. This is not a game. You sent his decapitated head to Mr Carver along with pictures of his wife’s affair.”

I raised my eyebrows.

“Did we?”

He threw his hands up.

“Look, you can sit here and deny your involvement all you want. We know what you’ve done whether or not there is proof.”

I sat back and tapped my fingers on the table.

“Is that why you came alone? You don’t have evidence we were involved in any of the things you and Stuart have accused us of. We’re innocent until proven guilty, Commissioner. You, of all people, should know that. So tell me, are you here to arrest us for a crime you have evidence for or did you just want a little chinwag?”

He slammed his hand down on the table, making Prescott jump.

“You killed my son. I can’t prove it, but I know you did.”

There we had it. The real reason he’d come in person. He wanted to look us in the eye and see if we’d admit or deny it. The thing was, we didn’t kill Mason, we’d just covered it up for our girl. Just like we’d made sure Penn covered up the man we’d made her kill. There was no fucking way we would ever allow our girl to be arrested for any of this shit. We’d always been thorough when it came to killing and knew exactly how to get away with it.

“I’d bet you’d love to pin it on us,” Francis said, giving Garrett a cold, hard stare. “Just like you tried to pin Stuart’s kids disappearing on four sixteen-year-olds who witnessed their best friend almost die.”

Garrett didn’t look cowed at all by Francis’ statement, but his expression turned grim.

“What happened to that girl was a tragedy. It doesn’t change the fact you had it out for the twins and are the only ones with motive.”

“That girl, huh?” Prescott interjected. “She has a name. I’m pretty sure you’re fully aware of it.”

I gave him a look, but Prescott ignored me, continuing to stare at Garrett with disgust written all over his features.

“Scarlett.”

Prescott gave him a sweet smile and his gaze fell on Francis, who picked up a photo from the pile of documents in front of him and slid it across the table towards Garrett. It took a minute for him to pull it closer and stare down at it. His eyes narrowed. It was the photo of him standing over her bedside with

Stuart.

“You remember when that was taken, don’t you?” Francis asked with a hint of reproach in his voice.

Garrett said nothing.

“Well, let me enlighten you.” Francis slid another photo across the table, showing Garrett and Stuart in low conversation near Scarlett’s bed. “You being there shouldn’t raise any eyebrows, but him? Well, he should never have been anywhere near her.”

Garrett looked up at us then, after eyeing the second photograph.

“This proves nothing.”

“Are you going to deny you knew he took her?”

We’d always planned to turn this around on him, but they were meant to let me lead the conversation. Clearly, Francis and Prescott weren’t in the mood for placating the Police Commissioner. No, they wanted to go on the offensive.

“Because if you are, we have plenty more proving you not only knew he took Scarlett, but you also aided him in stealing her from the hospital and made sure no one ever found out where she went.”

Francis slid more of the pages he held across the table. Garrett made no move to take them. Mason had quite the damning evidence against Stuart and his father. We weren’t going to show our full hand, but we had enough here to get him to back off. At least, that was the aim, anyway.

“What do you want?”

I smiled and leant forward.

“We all know Stuart will never stop coming after us. He wants us dead and no doubt if he does succeed, you’ll make sure he’s never prosecuted for it.”

Garrett didn’t acknowledge my statement, but it was the truth. He wouldn’t allow his best friend to go to prison after all the shit he’d done. He was just as embroiled in the sordid affair as Stuart. They were as bad as each other. Too many fucking skeletons in their cupboards.

“You have as much to lose as he does if any of this becomes public knowledge.” I waved at the pages in front of us. “We’ll keep this from coming out provided you turn a blind eye to what happens next.”

He looked down at the pages. Then he pulled out a chair and took a seat, steeping his fingers together.

“This is blackmail.”

I shrugged.

“You didn’t come here today as the Commissioner. If you had, it would have raised a lot of eyebrows. This is personal for you, just as it is for us.”

He pulled the rest of the documents towards him and rifled through them. The more he read, the more incensed he looked. We had pages upon pages proving he’d helped Stuart kidnap Scarlett. How he’d covered up everything Stuart had done. How he’d made sure the site where Scarlett’s accident happened was kept cordoned off until the developers went bankrupt. We knew who owned the land and the surrounding buildings now, after doing a little research. No doubt that was a deal Garrett made in exchange for turning a blind eye to money laundering.

I almost shook my head. I hadn’t cared about that fucking site until recently. To be honest, I wanted to forget it ever existed, considering it was an ugly reminder of the worst night of my life. Discovering it was owned by none other than Zayn Villetti put a whole new spin on things.

Everyone liked to think the mafia wasn’t a big thing in this country, but they kept a low profile. Knowing the Met Police Commissioner was likely in bed with the kingpin himself, Gennaro Villetti... well... it was obvious how they flew under the radar now.

Garrett leant back a moment later, staring down at the table for a long moment before he met my eyes.

“You’re asking me to turn a blind eye to what, exactly?”

“What we do about Stuart.”

He tapped his fingers against the arm of the chair.

“I don’t owe you any loyalty.”

“No, but you do want to keep your job, don’t you?”

If he had been any other man, we would have butchered him to get him out of our way. We didn’t kill members of the police force. That was just asking for trouble. It took enough coordination to kill a normal citizen and not get caught. It would be infinitely more difficult to kill an officer of the law and get away with it.

“We’re fair men, Commissioner. We understand betraying your lifelong friend is no easy matter, but you would be stripped of your position and go to prison

for all of this. Do you really want to destroy the reputation of the force?”

He didn't answer for a moment, but I knew I had him there. Besides, if he refused, we would go public with not only this but everything else. We would ruin his reputation for good. We could do that to Stuart too, but we wanted him dead. He deserved it after the way he'd treated Scarlett.

Garrett stood up and straightened his sleeves. His eyes went to me again.

“You have my word I will not interfere in your plans for Stuart.” He paused and fidgeted for a moment. “What did you do with the rest of my son?”

“Who said we did anything with him.”

“We both know I cannot tie any of you back to it.”

I leant forward.

“Your son took her with the intention of keeping her locked away for the rest of her life. Not to mention he murdered her mother on behalf of Stuart, something else you covered up. And yet *we* still did nothing to him.”

I wasn't going to admit it was Scarlett who'd murdered his son in an act of revenge, but if Garrett read between the lines, he would see the truth.

His eyes narrowed.

“I see.”

Garrett took a moment to look at all of us before he nodded.

“Keep to your word and I keep to mine, not that I trust any of you, but this doesn't come out in the open.” He pointed to the papers. “Are we clear?”

“Very.”

“Good.”

Then he strode from the room, leaving the four of us staring after him. West got up and walked to the door. He stayed there for a long moment as if he was making sure Garrett didn't go looking for Scarlett. Then he turned to us.

“Well, that was easier than expected.”

“I don't trust him,” Prescott said, leaning back and scowling.

“We shouldn't,” I replied. “But that's one hurdle we've overcome for now. Next... we go after Stuart head-on.”

“We should sit down with Scarlett later to discuss what we're going to do,” Francis said.

I nodded and stood. I'd speak to her now and make sure she was okay. No doubt I didn't trust Garrett Jones as far as I could throw him, but we'd given

him and Stuart more reason to fear us. Perhaps our greatest enemy would finally understand we were not to be messed with. Nor were we ever going to back down.

SIXTEEN

SCARLETT

It had been several days since the Police Commissioner had visited Fortuity. We'd not heard a peep from either him or Stuart, something that had put all of us on edge. The boys were in the midst of coming up with a plan for what they were going to do going forward about Stuart with my help. We knew we wanted to go after him directly. We all wanted him dead. The only problem was the how of it. We didn't want to get caught. Killing a man with a profile as high as Stuart Carver required careful planning and precision. Drake didn't want to go off half-cocked. I was inclined to agree with him. If we were going to rid the world of Stuart Carver, it had to be done as cleanly as possible.

Today, as it was the weekend, I'd persuaded the boys to let me go see my mother's grave. I'd asked them about where she was buried a few days ago. Drake had insisted on taking me since he didn't trust I would be safe on my own. After being kidnapped by Mason, I agreed with him and didn't complain about it. I was sure Prescott wanted to accompany me, but if anyone was going to go with me, the stoic one was my choice, anyway. Drake would keep silent while I said goodbye to my mother. He wouldn't interfere or offer me platitudes and comfort. I didn't want those. All I wanted was a space to tell her everything I never got to when she was alive.

The cemetery was on the outskirts of London. For a city of millions, it was a quiet, peaceful place with trees planted amongst the graves. Drake parked the car in the car park next to the crematorium in the middle of the cemetery and took my hand.

He'd become more affectionate towards me after I'd told him I needed him, not hesitating to give me casual touches and kisses. Every morning when I

brought his coffee into his office, he'd make me come around his desk so he could kiss me before he got on with his day. I didn't know where this side of him had come from, but I wasn't about to start complaining. He'd made the effort to give me what I'd asked for. And every time he smiled at me, it made my heart go all funny in my chest.

"Why do you look happy?" he asked after we'd been walking for a couple of minutes along the road running through the cemetery.

I glanced up at him. His dark hair was a little messy like he hadn't bothered brushing it this morning. I admired his casual attire of black jeans, a dark jumper and a black coat, along with a pair of trainers. It was the first time I'd seen him be so careless with his appearance. It was really fucking hot. While I probably should not be thinking about how much I wanted to jump his bones when I was visiting my mother's grave, I needed a distraction. The thought of saying goodbye was making me anxious.

"I'm with you."

"Being with me makes you... happy?"

"Um, I hate to break it to you, Drake, but you make me happy even when you're being all domineering and shit. I'd be kind of worried if you didn't, considering you're my boyfriend."

I smiled more when I noticed a slight blush appear on his cheeks as he looked away.

"So you're definitely set on calling me that then."

"Do you have a problem with being my boyfriend? Or is it because I have four and you don't feel special enough?"

He gave me a reproachful look.

"No, I don't have a problem with it, nor you being with the others. You know that."

"Do I though?"

He pulled me to a halt and took my chin between the fingers of his free hand, making me meet his eyes.

"Are you mine, little wisp?"

"Yes."

"And am I yours?"

"Yes."

“Then don’t ask stupid questions.”

He let me go and took off again, his long legs eating up the road and making it difficult for me to keep up with him.

“How is that a stupid question?”

“I have never given you any indication I have an issue with you having a relationship with West, Prescott, and Francis. I don’t know why you would ever think that about me.”

I tried not to laugh even as I had to jog to keep up with him.

“I don’t.”

He stopped abruptly, making me almost crash into him.

“Then what are you playing at, Scarlett?”

“It’s fun to see you get worked up.”

He huffed and gave me a disapproving stare.

“Are you capable of going one day without being a brat? Not that I’ll complain about fucking the attitude out of you later, but is this really the time? We’re about to get to Lylah’s grave.”

I bit my lip and looked away.

“Maybe I was deflecting.”

The next thing I knew, I was gathered up against Drake’s chest and he was pressing a kiss to the top of my head.

“I know this must be difficult for you, little wisp, but you asked to come here today. I’m just trying to give you the space you need to say goodbye, okay?”

“Are you really going to fuck the attitude out of me?”

“Scarlett...”

“I’m just asking.”

“Yes.”

“Okay. I’d like that.”

I heard him chuckling while he held me tighter.

“You are a reckless little troublemaker.”

“That’s what you lo... like about me.”

What the fuck? Were you just about to tell him he loved you?

I almost winced. Drake hadn’t expressed his feelings towards me, at least not like that. I knew he wanted me, but as for love? Fuck knows. My heart was his. He might be grumpy, overbearing and drive me crazy at times, but the glimpses

of the younger version of Drake I had made it impossible for me not to fall in love with him. He was trying his hardest when it came to me. I appreciated it so fucking much.

“I like a lot of things about you. I always have.”

“Even though I’m a brat?”

“You’re *my* brat, little wisp. Mine. No one else’s, just mine.”

Jesus, I swear you’re trying to kill me. How am I supposed to not melt in a pile of goo at your feet right now?

We stayed locked together for a long moment before Drake pulled away and looked down at me.

“You ready now?”

I nodded. He took my hand and led me down a small path into the trees. I swallowed hard as we approached a little wooden plaque. Drake’s hand tightened in mine as we stared down at it.

“She wanted a woodland burial,” he said when I didn’t say a word. “We all came to the funeral. It was... I don’t really know how to describe a funeral, to be honest.”

I had to smile at his words.

“It’s okay. You don’t need to.”

I looked up at him. His indigo eyes were full of sorrow as if he was remembering the day it happened.

“Would you mind if I have a few minutes alone?”

He shook his head, letting go of my hand to cup my face in both of his. Leaning down, he pressed a kiss to my forehead.

“Take all the time you need, little wisp. I’ll just be over there keeping watch.”

I tipped my head up to catch his mouth before he could let go. My hand slid around his neck, keeping him there. I kissed him until my heart was beating so hard in my chest, I thought I might pass out.

“Thank you for bringing me,” I whispered when I pulled away and let him go.

“You’re welcome.”

His cheeks were flushed, but he gave me a soft smile and backed away. I watched him walk a little way off to give me some space. While I wanted to do this alone, I didn’t want him to be so far away I couldn’t see him. A part of me didn’t feel safe without one of them near me after being stolen from them twice

in my life already. That was the best part about having four boyfriends. One of them could always be near me, no matter what. It gave me a sense of peace to know the four parts that made up my heart were close by.

I squatted down and placed my hand on the grassy area by the wooden plaque.

“Hi, Mum... it feels kind of weird talking to you because you’re not really here, but I’m going to do it, anyway.”

I sat down on the grass as I didn’t want my legs to give out. Leaning my head on my knees, I stared out over the woodland burial area.

“I miss you, Mum. It’s like there’s a hole in my heart where you should be. I hate that you died before we ever had a chance to be reunited. It feels so unfair your life got cut short because of all the shit that went down.”

I sighed and let out a breath.

“At least I remember you now, hey? Would have sucked if I’d gone the rest of my life without knowing who you are... not that my life hasn’t sucked already. I mean, I’m okay now, I guess... no, I am okay. I have the boys.” Reaching out, I stroked the grass again. “They found me and brought me home.”

I smiled to myself.

“You know, you always told me one day I was going to have to choose between the four of them. Maybe if I’d never been kidnapped, West and I could call ourselves childhood sweethearts. You knew it was him, didn’t you? I made it kind of obvious. Don’t get me wrong, I loved the others too, but he... he was the one.”

My gaze went to my fingers, wondering if West and I would have grown up, got married and had two point five kids like you’re supposed to. Then I remembered we’d never ascribed to society’s values or rules.

“It seems kind of fucked up to say I’m not entirely sorry I was stolen from them, but I don’t think things would have happened this way otherwise. I mean, I don’t think I would have ever been okay with being with all of them. Fuck, it feels so weird to admit that out loud. Who’d have thought I’d have four boyfriends.”

I let out a little chuckle. Most people would probably think this was crazy. A rather unorthodox relationship. And it was... but it didn’t matter. I loved them.

They wanted to be with me. What difference did it make to the rest of the world? We were happy. It was all that mattered.

“We’ve always said we were born to be with each other. I just didn’t think it meant like this. But I wouldn’t have it any other way, Mum. They’re my family. They understand me and my needs. That’s what’s important. Being with the people who give you everything you’ve ever needed. And if it’s from all four of them, then it’s not wrong. A love like ours is never wrong. It just came in a different package.”

It struck me then how true that statement was. People would have you believe anything that deviates from so-called traditional values is abnormal and should be stamped out. But life wasn’t about absolutes and strict adherence to a moral code. It was so many shades of grey and everything in between. Real happiness only comes from being your true self. Mine happened to be a woman who’d fought through hell and was now able to stand by the sides of the men known as the Four Horsemen. The ones who’d see her through to the end.

“I’d like to think you would be okay with this, Mum. That you were happy I’d found them again. You can rest easy knowing we’ll spend the rest of our lives bringing each other joy, contentment and... love. It’s all anyone can ask for. A family that sticks together no matter what. That’s what the boys and me are.”

I raised my hand to my mouth, pressing my lips to my fingertips before placing them back on the ground.

“Thank you for never giving up, even when your life was stolen from you. Goodbye, Mum.”

I stayed there for a long moment before I looked back at Drake. He was leaning against a tree, fiddling with his phone, but I could tell he was still alert and checking our surroundings. He shoved off the tree when he noticed I was looking at him and walked over to me, his brow furrowed.

“You okay, little wisp?”

I nodded and put my hand up to him. He helped me to my feet and stroked my hair as if to reassure himself I was good. I tucked myself into his side, wrapping an arm around his waist and pressing my face into his coat. There was no need for tears or angry words about the injustice of her death. I’d already avenged it by killing Mason. Now, I merely felt a sense of relief that I’d been able to talk to her. To tell her how I felt about the boys. And to know, despite

everything, I was okay.

The wind blew, ruffling my hair, but I stayed close to Drake, appreciating his warmth despite his icy exterior.

“Scarlett.”

“Mmm?”

“We need to talk about something.”

I looked up at him. Drake’s eyes were full of hesitation. It made the skin at the back of my neck prickle.

“What is it?”

“I should have told you this when you spoke to us about it the day Stuart called.”

His expression clouded over further. My skin grew cold.

Has he been keeping more things from me? What the fuck? I thought we were done with secrets.

SEVENTEEN

DRAKE

Now was likely the wrong time to talk to her about this, but it couldn't wait any longer. I didn't want to keep shit from her. Not when it was important we were open about things. After all her teasing regarding my feelings about her being with the others, I was reminded a relationship would only work if we had honesty.

"Told me what, Drake?"

Scarlett was tucked up against my side, but I had a feeling she'd be pretty fucking mad at me the moment I told her.

"When you told us you can't have children... we already knew about it."

Her eyes narrowed and her mouth thinned. Then she extracted herself from my grasp and took a few steps back, putting space between us.

"You knew."

"Yes."

Her tiny hands clenched into fists at her sides, like she was trying to keep her anger in check.

"I don't want to jump to conclusions, so you better tell me exactly how you found out."

I dug my hands in my coat pockets. This had been playing on my mind since the day we'd found out about Stuart's abuse. Since she'd openly admitted to us she was unable to have kids.

"Drake, spit it the fuck out."

It was now or never. I had to rip the bandage off.

"We bribed the doctor Stuart got for you to give us access to your medical files. We saw everything... all of your injuries, how the scarring from the way

they pinned your pelvis together all but destroyed your ovaries, how extensive your rehabilitation was, everything, Scarlett. There's nothing we don't know about your medical history. I know that's really fucked up. I know it's an invasion of privacy and I'm sorry."

Scarlett's fists didn't unclench. She stared at me, her expression dark and full of anger.

"Sorry. You're sorry. Jesus Christ, Drake! What the fuck next, huh? When are these secrets going to end? Are you going to tell me this has all been a fucking ruse and when this is over, you're going to leave me in the dust because I can't give you children? Or that you never really wanted me in the first place?"

"What? No!" I took a step towards her, putting my hands out. "Hey, no, don't do that. Don't start accusing me of wanting to leave you. I'm trying to be honest with you here."

She backed away, but I caught her by the arm. How could she think that of us? We cared about Scarlett above all else. Hell, I'd fallen so hard for her, it was un-fucking-real. I didn't think I was capable of such emotions after everything fell apart, but my long-buried feelings for her resurfaced when she'd arrived back in our lives. When she'd ripped open the ice casing around my heart and made herself at home in it.

"Let go of me!"

"No. You listen here, I made you a fucking promise I'd never leave you no matter what happens. I don't give a shit about children, Scarlett. I never have. I don't care about destinies or fate. I literally couldn't care less what anyone else thinks about our relationship. The only thing in this entire world I care about is you. Only you. Forever. You hear me? For-fucking-ever."

For a second, Scarlett didn't react to my words. Then she put a hand to her mouth as if she was trying to hold back her emotions. Her eyes were wide and her chest heaved. I decided to press on. To admit things to her I would have never done so before, but she needed to get stupid shit like we'd leave her out of her head. She was it for the four of us.

"I've spent almost my whole damn life wishing you were mine. It might not have looked that way to you, but it's the truth. Why do you think I turned down all the girls at school? Why do you think I wasn't interested? The only person I've ever looked at and thought 'she's it for me' is you."

Unable to help myself, I cupped her cheek, drawing her closer to me.

“I’ve been trying so hard to give you what you need. To give you parts of me no one else has had before. You’re the only person I trust with them. I am yours. I will be yours for as long as you want me. For as long as you need me in your life, little wisp.”

I should tell her I loved her. I should fucking say it, but the words wouldn’t come. It didn’t matter. I hoped I was getting my point across. She didn’t need to worry or be afraid we’d walk away. We’d fought to get her back for ten years. I couldn’t allow another ten years to pass without her in our lives. Without her by our sides.

I need you. I really fucking need you. Damn it, Scarlett. I’m in love with you.

“You... you... you *liked* me, liked me?”

“Yes.”

“Holy shit.”

“I never thought you ever saw me that way... saw any of us like that. West didn’t even tell us about you and him until recently. I had no idea.”

She blinked.

“I told Frankie. He knew I loved West.”

I half-smiled.

“I know that now.”

She put her hand to mine on her cheek and pulled it away. Her eyes went to it as she fit her small fingers between my much larger ones. It reminded me of how she’d said she liked the way my hands fit around her. I had to stop myself from smiling at that little detail.

“I’m sorry I kept all this shit from you, but I meant what I said. You are what I need. Nothing more. Nothing less. Just you.”

My little wisp of a woman stared up at me with conflicting emotions racing across her face.

“Can I ask one thing about you knowing my medical history?”

“You can ask me anything.”

Not like I was planning on keeping anything else from her.

“Is that why all of you decided it was okay to just...” she faltered and looked away.

“What was okay?”

“To not use protection and not even talk to me about it.”

I tried not to smile.

“Yes. You never brought it up either.”

She met my eyes again and gave me a disapproving look.

“Oh yeah, because that was the first thing on my mind when I woke up tied to a bed naked. I wonder if they’re going to use condoms.”

I tucked my free hand around the back of her head.

“Do you want us to use them?”

“No!”

I leant closer.

“So... you like it when we—”

She slapped a hand over my mouth.

“Do not say it.”

I removed her hand and captured her mouth with mine. She didn’t protest. Her body melted into mine as I wrapped an arm around her back. Her fingers clasped the front of my coat. The little moan sounding in the back of her throat made me want to shove her up against a tree and put my hand down her jeans. I wanted to make her come on my fingers while she rubbed herself all over me. However, I didn’t think it was a very appropriate thing to do in a cemetery where anyone could come upon us.

“Drake,” she moaned against my mouth.

The temptation was almost too much. I had to pull away and catch my damn breath.

“Take me home,” she whispered, her little fists still clenched around my coat.

“Have you forgiven me for keeping another secret?”

She nodded, releasing my coat and stroking her hands down my chest.

“Then let’s—”

I heard rustling from behind me. My body went on high alert. I whipped around, shoving Scarlett behind me. And for good fucking reason. Three men appeared out of the trees. They did not look like they were here to exchange pleasantries with us, judging by the way one of them cracked his knuckles. One stepped forward, twirling a knife around his fingers.

“What do you want?” I ground out.

Scarlett peered out from behind me. I gave her a warning look before eyeing

the men again.

“We want the girl.”

“Why?”

The one with the knife was taller than the other two. He cocked his head to the side. It was shaved, and he had what looked like a tattoo of a bulldog on one side of it. I almost shook my head at his appearance but decided it wasn't worth it.

“None of your business, mate. Just hand her over and we'll be on our way.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“If you want her, you'll have to go through me.”

He scoffed and gave me the once over. I might not look like I could take them, but they had no fucking clue who they were dealing with.

“Three against one, mate. Are you sure you like those odds?”

I felt Scarlett press herself against my back, reassuring me she was right there.

I don't care what it takes. I will protect you, little wisp. These fuckers aren't having you. Over my dead body.

“You clearly don't know who I am.”

“Doesn't matter who you are. We only came for her.”

I gave them a smile.

“Oh, I see. He didn't tell you who you'd be trying to take her from now, did he?”

The man with the knife looked a little uneasy at my statement while the other two bristled at his sides.

I knew very well who sent these fuckers. It had to be Stuart. If he came himself, he wouldn't leave alive. Our message had been very clear when we sent them Mason's head. You fuck with us. We will fuck with you right back. Not to mention he must know by now we'd blackmailed Garrett into backing off.

“You think you know who sent us?”

“I don't think, I know. Stuart is getting sloppy.”

The way the leader's eyes widened made it clear I'd hit the mark. Then he shook himself off and glared.

“Whatever. Just give her here.”

“How much is he paying you to take her, huh? Because I'm telling you now, if you don't turn around and walk away, you'll be the ones paying.”

One of his men tutted and nudged his friend.

“This bloke thinks he’s tough. Stuck up rich pricks have no fucking idea.”

“Next time, I suggest you do your research before you take jobs from men like Stuart Carver. You would have known my reputation precedes me if you did.”

“What fucking reputation?” the leader spat.

I turned to Scarlett behind me.

“Get behind that tree,” I murmured.

“Drake, are you sure we shouldn’t just run?”

“Do what I said, little wisp. Let me deal with this.”

I felt her let go of my coat, but she didn’t move away. Turning back to the men, I offered them another smile as I straightened, widening my stance. They looked at me like I was crazy. Well, maybe I was. The thing about love was you did everything in your power to protect the one you felt it for. Scarlett was my love. Anyone who threatened her threatened me. I wasn’t lying when I told her I’d be her executioner. These men were going to die for trying to take her from me. No one would ever steal my woman away again. Never a-fucking-gain.

We’d made a promise to Scarlett. I intended on sticking to my word no matter what.

“I’ve been very remiss in introductions.”

I stepped closer to them.

“Drake Ackley.”

I pressed a hand to my chest before dropping it back to my side.

“You may have heard of my friends and me. People like to call us the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. And I’ll bet you want to know which one of them I am. Well... you’re about to find out.”

EIGHTEEN

SCARLETT

The moment the words about him being one of the horsemen left Drake's lips, he walked towards the three men who were after me. The man with the knife struck first, trying to throw a punch at Drake, who sidestepped it with ease. I put my hand over my mouth, backing away slightly. He'd told me to get behind the tree near us, but I wasn't going to hide and cower away from what was happening. Not to mention the fact Drake was crazy for taking on three guys at once.

What the hell is he thinking?

He had to be out of his damn mind, but something told me Drake wouldn't let them take me, no matter what. I couldn't deny it was hot even if I should be scared out of my mind by the danger right now.

The second guy, the one with a black tracksuit, threw himself fists first at Drake. He caught the guy's hand mid-strike and threw his fist off. The third one, a short man with blonde hair, tried to jump on Drake's back. Before he had a chance, Drake elbowed him in the stomach, then spun around and put his fist in the guy's face. The blonde man's head snapped back and he let out a grunt.

Drake didn't have time to stop, as the bald guy with a tattoo on the side of his head swiped at him with the knife. Drake stepped back, the man narrowly missing his coat with the blade. The way Drake moved with such grace had me riveted to the scene playing out. It was as if he was anticipating all their moves and dancing out of the way before they could get a grip on him.

"Get him, Jim," knife man barked at the tracksuit guy.

The blonde man was holding his nose with one hand as blood spurted from it. I saw Drake's nostrils flare before tracksuit came at him, swinging his fist and

clipping my man around the ear.

“Oh, you should not have done that,” he ground out.

Drake grabbed him by the shoulders and head-butted him in the face before throwing him into knife man. The two of them toppled over together and fell in a heap on the floor. Drake cracked his neck, seemingly unfazed by the hit landed on him. While the two men on the floor tried to extract themselves from each other, Drake’s attention went to the blonde. He smiled, his expression turning rather sinister.

The man took a step back as if realising a predator had him in his sights. I swallowed as Drake pounced, taking the man by the neck and backing him into a tree. It was at that point I realised he wasn’t going to allow these men to walk away with their lives. His hand tightened around the guy’s neck. The blonde man tried to push Drake off him, but my statue of a man stood strong. His other hand came up and joined its twin. The blonde wheezed, trying to pull Drake’s hands off his neck.

My attention went to the others who had both got up now. The one with the knife was walking towards Drake while tracksuit man was still looking a little dazed.

“Drake!”

His head whipped around and he let go of the blonde man, turning just as the tattooed guy raised his knife. I don’t know how the fuck he did it, but somehow, Drake was on him, gripping the guy’s wrist and snapping it backwards. The man with the knife yelled, dropping his blade on the ground.

“You think this is a game, hmm?” Drake said with deadly calm. He hadn’t even broken out into a sweat or anything. “Let me make something very clear. I don’t show mercy.”

He punched the guy in the face before throwing him to the ground. Tracksuit had shaken himself off by then and tried to come at Drake again. Drake merely grabbed hold of his arm, spun him around and wrapped his arm around the guy’s throat. He struggled against him, but Drake was looking around on the floor for something. A moment later, he threw tracksuit into the blonde man who was nursing his broken nose. He dived for the knife the tattooed guy dropped. He rose to his full height and turned to the man on the ground with a grin.

I couldn't look away as he tried to scramble backwards, but Drake caught up to him, grabbing him by the front of his clothes.

"Death comes to all," he said, his voice so calm, it was terrifying.

Then Drake slit the man's throat. Blood seeped from the wound, covering his hand in red liquid. He dropped the guy's shirt, straightening and turning towards the other two. Drake slid the back of his hand across his face, smearing blood over it. It almost felt like a purposeful act. As if he wanted the others to see.

Holy fuck!

Before they had a chance to run, Drake practically pounced on the one in the tracksuit. The knife slid into his body with so much ease, it looked effortless on Drake's part. He shoved the guy away before grabbing hold of the blonde-haired man and slitting his damn throat too. But Drake didn't stop there. He came for tracksuit again as the man held his stomach, blood seeping into the white of his top. The blade slashed across his throat before Drake threw him to the ground.

Drake stood there, breathing a little heavier than normal, as he stared down at the three men bleeding out. He had blood on his face and both his hands. And to me, he'd never looked more like a god. Like the man who controlled who lived and who died.

"You're Death."

Drake's head turned ever so slightly towards me. His lips curved up at the sides, his indigo eyes flashing with what could only be described as murder-filled delight.

"You missed out a word there, little wisp."

"What word?"

"My."

I swallowed as he stalked towards me, blade still clasped in his palm. He stopped inches from me, staring down at my small form like I was the most precious thing in the world to him.

"My Death."

He leant closer.

"That's right, Scarlett. I'm your reaper."

Then I was caught up against his chest and he was kissing me so hard, I forgot to breathe. If there was one thing in this world Drake was an expert in, it

definitely had to be kissing. The man could probably kill a girl just by kissing her. And the irony of it was not lost on me.

He's literally Death.

But he wasn't the fourth and final horseman for just anyone. He was it for me. My horseman. My Death.

I clutched his coat, aware he was getting blood on me but not caring in the slightest. I wanted him so badly, my legs were shaking.

"Take me home, please. I need you."

He kissed his way down my jaw, making me tremble all the more.

"I will, but we have a little issue to deal with first."

"What?"

He pulled away, straightening to his full height. I almost protested at the lack of contact until I saw the grim look on his face.

"We need to get rid of the bodies."

The bodies. Right. He just killed three people. Why am I forgetting that? Oh yeah, he just kissed the living shit out of me and now my brain is all fucked.

"We?"

"Mmm, you stay here. I'll get the car."

"You've got blood all over your face and your hands. What if someone sees you?"

He pointed at my bag.

"Wet wipes."

I was having a very hard time processing all of this. I'd watched him kill three men, and he'd been barely out of breath doing it. This man was absolutely lethal. Especially for my heart. It was pounding so hard, I thought it might explode on me.

"Scarlett."

I shook myself before pulling open my bag and extracting my makeup wipes. Drake took them and cleaned himself up while I stood watching him. He'd told me we would need to deal with the bodies. We. Together. Me and him.

"Wait, hold on... you just killed three people. How on earth are we meant to get rid of them on our own?"

"Just do as I say and we'll manage."

He took my face in his hand and cleaned off the blood he'd got on there.

“Now, hold these whilst I get the car. Do not go anywhere unless someone other than me comes along, okay? Then you run.”

“But, Drake—”

“We do not have time to discuss this. Wait here.”

He handed me the knife and the wipes. I took them and watched him stride away towards the road. I needed to get my shit together. Drake needed my help. I wasn't going to let him down. Taking a deep breath, I looked over at the men, wondering how Drake intended to get rid of them.

You can do this. You can help him. Drake doesn't need you freaking out or losing your mind, okay? He'll look after you when we've sorted this out.

I took that and ran with it. Setting down the wipes and the blade together, I walked over to the men and checked them to make sure they were dead. Then I used their clothes to mop up the excess blood before dragging them closer to the road. They were fucking heavy, but I managed. Now I could see how much blood had got on the ground.

“Fuck.”

Drake deciding to cut their throats wasn't the smartest idea, but it was neither here nor there. We were going to have to deal with it, regardless. Not like we could leave a ton of evidence or it might arouse suspicion.

“I see you've been busy.”

I jumped at the sound of his voice, spinning around and finding Drake standing over the bodies.

“You told me we had to deal with it. I was trying to be practical.”

He had a bunch of cleaning materials with him, which made me raise my eyebrows.

“Take this and mop up as much of the blood as you can.”

He handed me a bunch of absorbent cleaning cloths. I'd killed two men, so I wasn't particularly squeamish about blood, not to mention I'd cut myself for Drake. I did as he asked while he picked up the smallest man, the blonde one, and carried him away.

I worked as quickly as possible while the blood was still wet. It wasn't perfect, but Drake had something to wash it down with. Then I helped him with the other two men, getting them situated in the back of the car. He'd put the blonde man in the boot. We stuffed one in the footwell and laid the other across the

backseat. Drake had put down plastic sheeting and covered them in a blanket. I wondered why he had all this shit in the car with him, but then again, West told me they'd killed quite a few people in the past ten years. I got the impression they all knew the best ways to deal with dead bodies.

Drake made me wait by the car while he dealt with everything else. I kept looking around to make sure no one else was coming along. My nerves were firing on all cylinders. I rubbed my clothes with my fingers, trying not to freak out. This whole thing was fucking crazy.

By the time Drake got back, I could see two people walking along the road towards us. I jumped into the car, did my seatbelt up and tapped on the dashboard, hoping he wouldn't take too fucking long and those people caught up to us. He got in a minute later, eyeing me with a frown before he turned on the car and set off.

"Are you okay?" he asked after a minute.

"You just killed three people and made me help you clean up what is essentially a crime scene and you're asking me if I'm okay? No, Drake, I'm not okay."

He reached over and stroked my hair back from my face, tucking it behind my ear as he pulled up at the entrance to the cemetery.

"Which part are you not okay with?"

"The part where we could have and still could get caught."

"I won't let that happen, little wisp. You're safe with me."

I looked at him. The softness of his expression made my stomach twist in itself in knots. Then he leant over and kissed my forehead. I didn't say a word when he pulled away and set off again. He'd reassured me the back windows were tinted when we were putting the bodies in the car, but I was still a bundle of nerves.

"Where are we taking them?" I asked after a few minutes.

"Landfill."

"We can't just dump three bodies there, they'll get found."

"You don't need to worry. I called Penn when I was getting the car and he knows a guy."

Why I was even surprised by this knowledge was beyond me at this point. Penn was some kind of madman genius who seemed to know everyone. Maybe

I should tell West I wanted a tattoo. Then I could sit and question Penn about himself the whole time. For some reason, he fascinated me. Not because I was attracted to him, but he was on a similar level of fucked up to West. Guess I was drawn to the misfits and those who didn't play by society's rules.

I sat back and watched the houses go by while Drake drove and wondered when my life had got so crazy that killing people and disposing of bodies was becoming something of a normal, everyday occurrence. I guess when you have four psycho boyfriends who have adopted the moniker of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, it was par for the fucking course.

I glanced over at Drake again. He hadn't been lying about being my executioner. He'd protected me and kept me from being taken. And if I was being completely honest, rather than making me scared of him, it had only made me fall deeper in love with the man I'd come to know as Death.

NINETEEN

DRAKE

When I'd agreed to take Scarlett to her mother's grave, I did not imagine it would turn into a bloody mess. We'd finally made it home after dealing with the three men I'd ended up killing. We'd stopped at a drive-thru on the way back. We'd both been starving after cutting up the bodies, bagging them and having Penn's man take them deep within the landfill site. Money had quickly exchanged hands, and we'd been on our way. Scarlett hadn't exactly been happy to be involved in the process, but she didn't complain too much.

Scarlett had a tight hold of my hand as the lift doors opened. I tugged her towards the stairs when I realised none of the boys were downstairs. I'd texted them earlier to let them know what had happened. I'd had one back from West who was pouting about not being involved, but I'd ignored him. Not like I planned on getting into a fight with three men today or anything.

"Where are we going?" Scarlett asked when we were walking up the stairs.

"To get cleaned up."

"In...?"

"My room."

I found myself pulled to a halt as Scarlett stopped dead in the middle of the hallway.

"You're letting me in your bedroom?"

"Why wouldn't I?"

She stared up at me with wide eyes.

"Let me see, you've kept me out of there for months and now, without any warning, you're taking me in there."

I tugged her along, shaking my head at her statement. She wasn't exactly

wrong, but I didn't think letting her into my room was a big deal. Apparently, to her, it was.

"Well, you should consider it a privilege in that case."

"Drake!"

I opened the door to my room and pulled her inside, shutting it behind us.

"I want you in here, little wisp. Now, come along."

She didn't immediately start walking when I did, her eyes darting about the place. I let out a sigh.

"You can look around later. First, you're getting in the shower."

She followed me, her eyes still wandering around the room. It was of a similar layout to the others, with a big window along one side. My bed was on one end. A big set of wardrobes with black doors sat on the wall opposite the windows. I'd had the walls painted a deep navy blue. Everything was ordered, neat and in its place.

"Promise?"

"Yes, Scarlett. I promise you can snoop around to your heart's content if that's really what you want."

I pulled her into my bathroom. It had a slate floor and black tiles on the walls. I had a separate bath to the shower and a large counter for the sink with a big mirror above it.

"Strip and put your clothes in a pile there."

I pointed at a space underneath my heated towel rack. I would dispose of all our clothes later. Scarlett took a long minute to look around the bathroom, leaving me impatient for her to get on with it.

"Scarlett, clothes off and in the shower. Now."

She put her hands up.

"Okay, okay, Jesus. Calm down, bossy boots."

I watched her take her clothes off, unable to help myself from admiring her curves. She glanced at me as she stepped into my shower and flipped it on.

"Are you coming?"

I tugged my clothes off and dumped them in the pile with hers. She watched me walk towards her, her eyes wide when I grabbed her around the waist and hauled her against me under the spray. My fingers ran down her wet skin, savouring the softness of her body.

“I’m going to smell of you now,” she murmured, staring up at me with a smirk on her lips.

“What do I smell like?”

“Sin.”

I chuckled and leant down, capturing her mouth and cupping her face with my hand. When I pulled away, I grabbed the shower gel and squirted some on my hands. While I was just about ready to fuck the living daylight out of Scarlett, I had other ideas for how and where I wanted to do it.

“I think you must like the smell of sin,” I told her as I washed her body. “You seem to like me.”

“I more than just like you,” she mumbled as I turned her around and washed her back.

I didn’t want to read into that, even though my heart fired off at her words. Picking up the shampoo to distract myself, I started washing her hair. I’d managed to get blood in it earlier and wanted to make sure she was clean of all traces of those men.

“I’m going to have to get a set of toiletries for your room too now, like I have done with the others.”

“Who says you’ll spending a lot of time in here?”

She let out a little huff and crossed her arms over her chest.

“If you don’t want an equal share of my time, that’s your loss. I’m sure Pres, West and Frankie will be happy to take your nights off your hands.”

I tugged her back against my chest and ran my hands down her front, stroking them across her breasts. She shivered but continued pouting.

“Such a brat,” I whispered in her ear as I cupped her pussy and slid my fingers along her lips. “I’ll get Francis to tie you to my bed so you can’t leave if you start with that line of thinking.”

“Then don’t be out here trying to withhold bedroom privileges from me. I already have to put up with not having my own one.”

I had ideas of how to create a space for her in our penthouse, but it was something I was going to discuss with the others, so now wasn’t the time.

As much as I wanted to continue playing with her, we needed to finish washing. I let go of her to condition her hair after rinsing the shampoo out. She let me without complaint and gave me a shy smile when I allowed her to wash

me in return.

I pulled her out of the shower, flipping it off before wrapping a large towel around her small body and drying her thoroughly. I set Scarlett on the counter while I dried myself. She used a smaller towel to dry her hair enough so it was no longer dripping.

Picking her up off the counter, I took her into my room and strode across to my bed. I set Scarlett down in the middle of it and crawled over her. My fingers traced a line down her chest, watching her skin prickle from the contact. She stayed perfectly still, allowing me to explore her stunning body, scars and all. I stroked her 'war' brand. It had healed up, leaving pink lines across her skin that would eventually turn white. West now had a matching one she'd given him on his chest. It was a little like the binding of two souls, which I had to admit felt apt for her and West. They were both as unhinged as each other at times.

"You're beautiful," I murmured, settling my fingers across the biggest scar on her abdomen. "I've always thought so, but now... now you're more so. All of your imperfections are perfect to me."

"Drake..."

"Shh." I put my finger to her lips. "Don't say anything."

I sat up and reached over to my bedside table. Scarlett was suitably distracted from looking around my room right now, but she could later after I'd had my way with her. I dug out a small knife. She watched me use it to make a small nick on my wrist. Blood pooled around the cut. I coated my finger in it before leaning over her. Her eyes followed the path of my finger across her chest, painting a word on it in blood.

Scarlett swallowed when I was done. Her eyes went to mine after she read it, even though it was upside down for her.

"You branding me too?"

"In my own way."

Smearred across her chest in my blood was the word 'mine'. She was mine. All fucking mine. Scarlett belonged to me.

"I'm already yours, Drake." She reached up and stroked her fingers across my face. "I've been yours for a while, in case you hadn't noticed."

"Is that so?"

She nodded.

“I helped you get rid of three bodies. I think that proves my loyalty.”

I grinned and leant closer.

“It does.”

“There’s something else that belongs to you as well.”

I raised a brow.

“And what would that be?”

She licked her bottom lip, then her eyes clouded over. Her hand dropped from my face and she looked away.

“Scarlett?”

“How do you really feel about me? I mean, you said you’ve always wanted me, but what does that mean?”

Catching her by the chin, I turned her face back towards me to make her meet my eyes. I didn’t like seeing fear in those beautiful hazel-greens.

“It means...” I leant closer, brushing my mouth over hers. “It means, little wisp, that you are the owner of what you’d probably describe as my cold, black heart.”

Her bottom lip trembled against mine.

“You love me?” she whispered, her voice shaking on the words.

“I love you.”

“Fuck.”

I kissed her, stealing away any other words she was thinking about saying. She wrapped her arms around me, pulling me flush against her. I tried not to groan as my cock slid against her wet little pussy.

“Such a dirty little mouth you have,” I murmured against her lips.

“All the better to wind you up with.”

“Brat.”

“I’m your brat, sir.”

I pulled away from her and grabbed her by the waist, flipping her up onto her hands and knees. Running my fingers down her back, I pressed kisses to her spine.

“You have a lot of punishments pending, little wisp. I intend to collect.”

She shivered but didn’t tell me no or to stop. I got up off the bed and walked over to my display on the wall across from my bed. It was black metal crisscrossing bars with hangers at different intervals. On those hangers were my

various whips and crops.

I selected a small crop, testing it against my hand before moving back towards the bed. Scarlett looked back at me, then down at the implement in my hand.

“Drake...”

“What’s your safe word with the others?”

“Red.”

“Then you say that and I will stop, okay?”

She nodded but didn’t look entirely convinced. I knelt on the bed and stroked her hip.

“What’s wrong?”

She turned over and crawled into my lap. I set the crop on the bed and cupped both her cheeks as she held onto my shoulders. She searched my face for a moment.

“Nothing. I want you to punish me, but first...”

“First?”

“Kiss me and say it again.”

I almost denied her. The truth was, I couldn’t help myself when it came to my little wisp. Not any longer. I wanted her smiles and her laughter more than anything else. Leaning closer, I ran my nose along hers.

“I love you.”

“Again.”

I pressed a kiss to her mouth.

“I love you, Scarlett.”

“I love you too.”

I swallowed at her statement. My heart hurt in a good way. In the best fucking way. My mouth was on hers, demanding entry until she relented and kissed me back with as much passion as I gave her. She gripped my hair in her fists, rubbing herself against me. I found myself so desperate for more contact. More of her. I let go of her cheek and dug a hand between us. Scarlett shifted, then she was sinking down on me and moaning in my mouth. My hand curled around her hip and directed her movements, forcing her to slow down as she took me.

My other hand slid from her cheek to hold her jaw and tip her face up, stretching her neck out. She looked at me with wide, lust-filled eyes. I framed

my mouth over hers, not quite touching her lips.

“I’m going to cover you in marks, little wisp. I want you to be a good girl and take them.”

“Yes, sir.”

I ran my thumb along her bottom lip before slipping it between them.

“Your wet little pussy has made a mess of my dick. You’re going to clean it up before presenting me your pert little behind. Do you understand?”

I slid my thumb from her mouth.

“Yes, sir.”

Scarlett might be my little brat, but right now, she would be my good girl. I knew what she wanted most in the world was to hear me give her praise. And if she took her punishments like I’d told her to, she would.

TWENTY

DRAKE

When I let go of her, she slid off me, leaving a trail of kisses down my chest as she bent over me. Her tongue curled around my cock, licking up her arousal. I couldn't stop staring at her. The way her mouth parted and her tongue darted out. And when she covered my dick with it, that was fucking everything.

She sat up and turned around, getting up on her hands and knees in front of me after she'd cleaned me. I slid off the bed, picking up the crop before I ran it over her behind, watching her shiver from its touch.

“Safe word, Scarlett.”

“Red.”

“Good girl.”

The little sigh she let out had me smiling, not that she could see.

“Keep your eyes on the headboard.”

She centred her gaze on it, adjusting her hands and knees so she was more comfortable. I gave her a light tap with the crop, signalling I was going to start. I watched her suck in a breath. Then I laid into her, sending the crop sailing through the air. The smack as it struck her skin was so fucking satisfying. She exhaled on the first strike, her fingers curling into the covers. They were the only outward signs of the pain it had caused her. But I knew my little wisp liked it. She thrived on it.

The crop smacked against her skin, again and again, painting her behind with red marks. I was gentle at first, but the strikes got harder, leaving darker marks each time until they turned into little welts. Her breathing was heavy, and she kept making these little whimpering noises, but not once did she tell me she didn't want it. She didn't tell me it was too much or to stop. She knew she

could, but my girl was so fucking brave and strong.

When her behind was suitably red and raw, I moved to her thighs. Then she cried out, lurching forward after I pulled the crop back. I ignored her new sounds of pain while I continued to punish her skin.

“Fuck,” she yelled a minute later, her elbows buckling.

“Too much for you, little wisp?” I asked, pausing for a moment while she caught her breath.

She shook her head before resting it on her hands.

“No. No, it’s not.”

I ran the crop over her raw skin, making her hiss.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m not going to lie. It fucking hurts, Drake, but I want it. I want you to make me scream from the pain.”

I removed the crop and leant down, pressing a kiss to her abused skin.

“I’ll make it better afterwards. Good girls get to come.”

She trembled as I pressed more kisses to her red, welted behind. And to reward her for being such a good girl for me, I slid my tongue along her rather wet little pussy, curling my tongue around her clit a few times.

“Oh god,” she whined.

“God isn’t here,” I murmured. “Just Death and he isn’t remotely merciful.”

That only made her moan more as I continued to lick her clit. She pressed back into my mouth like it was instinctual to seek me out. I curled my free hand around her hip, holding her in place.

“You’re... you’re going to make me come if you don’t stop now.”

I pulled back, watching her raise her head from her hands and take a long breath.

“Is pain your drug of choice, little wisp?”

“Yes, sir.”

I straightened, gripping the crop in my fist and getting ready to start again. My fingers released her hip. I stood back, giving myself room. The first strike across her thigh made her cry out as if she wasn’t ready, but she gripped the covers and kept her eyes on the headboard.

Such an obedient little brat.

The crescendo of her cries grew louder as I continued to assault her red skin

with the crop. She'd told me to make her scream. I hit her harder, making welts appear on her thighs. I didn't want to break her skin, but I was getting close to doing so.

"Fuck," she screeched, lurching forward again as I hit a particularly sore spot for her. "No more, please... please, no more."

I ran the crop over the seam of her pussy, coating it in her arousal. It glistened when I pulled it away. I moved closer and shoved it in her face.

"This says otherwise, little wisp. You want me to hurt you."

"I hate that you're right."

I dropped the crop and knelt on the bed instead, leaning over her and kissing her shoulder.

"I think my good girl has been tortured enough, don't you?"

"If you say so, sir."

I clasped her chin between my fingers and turned her face, finding it tear-streaked along with her teeth digging into her bottom lip.

"I'll make it hurt in other ways," I whispered in her ear before I dragged my teeth over the lobe. "Just think of how much it will burn every time my skin meets yours whilst I fuck you."

Her whole body shook. I couldn't hide my smile as I released her and straightened again. Reaching over to my drawer, I pulled it open and extracted lube. I'd told Scarlett one of her punishments would include me making her little behind raw before I fucked her tight little arse. It was time to deliver on it.

I gripped her arse, making her cry out with the pain as I exposed her little hole to my view. Flipping the cap with my thumb, I dribbled it down over her. I set the lube down and rubbed it in, making her jerk under my touch. While this might be a punishment for her, I wasn't going to skimp out on preparing her to take me. Scarlett had got used to being fucked six ways from Sunday, so she didn't need as long, but I never liked to risk things. I worked her up until she could take three fingers with ease. She was whimpering and bucking in my grasp, her red flesh so fucking enticing. I'd take care of it when we were done, making sure I looked after her.

I let go of her to coat my cock before gripping her hip and notching it to her tight little entrance. She let out a breath as I pressed forward, and bore down, making it easier for me to slide into her. I grunted at the sensation of her

gripping me. Her head dropped down onto her hands and I could have fucking sworn I heard her mutter, “Shit, Death,” under her breath.

I leant over her, pushing deeper with my movement.

“Are you trying to tell me something, Scarlett?”

“What?”

I nuzzled her hair.

“Is there something else you’d rather call me other than sir?”

“No.”

“As long as you’re sure.”

She looked back at me, her face flushed red.

“I want you to be sir and maybe sometimes Death. Okay... so more than sometimes. Is that okay?”

My cock throbbed inside her, making me jerk forward and impale her completely. She let out a long breath before she groaned.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” she said a moment later, giving me a wicked grin.

I pulled back and thrust inside her again.

“It’s a please do,” I murmured, wrapping an arm around her and pulling her flush against me as I sat up, forcing her to straddle my lap.

From this angle, all of me was touching where I’d spanked her. She hissed at the contact.

“Jesus, you feel so fucking big like this.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

She snorted and wrapped her hands around my back, holding onto me as I gave her shallow thrusts, rubbing her raw skin against mine.

“Don’t let it go to your head.”

“Too late.”

I bit down on her earlobe, listening to her harsh pants and feeling her body relax into mine. Looping my arm around her, I held her stomach to give me more leverage to fuck her with. The way she moaned with each thrust was fucking music to my ears.

“Do you love me, little wisp?”

“Yes,” she whimpered, her nails digging into my skin.

“Say it.”

I needed to hear it again to be sure she meant it.

“I love you, Drake.”

I groaned in her ear, my other hand diving between her legs to stroke her clit. She rocked back against me.

“And I will stab anyone who tries to flirt with you.”

I choked out a breath.

“What?”

“You’re mine. I won’t tolerate anyone encroaching on my territory.”

Of all the times for her to start acting possessive of me, this wasn’t the one I expected. And I had to admit, it only made me fall harder for her.

“I think you’ve been spending too much time with West if choosing violence is your first port of call.”

“The reaper needs a dark queen to ride by his side. I suggest you don’t complain about it and accept you’re mine. I will hurt anyone who says otherwise.”

I gripped her tighter and rubbed her clit harder.

“He also needs a queen to fuck and punish to his heart’s content. She needs to be his brat and his good girl. Do you know where he can find such a goddess?”

She practically purred against me.

“Right here. You already have her. She’s yours. And she loves you to the stars and back.”

“I love her too, very much.” I pressed a kiss to the shell of her ear. “Come for me, little wisp.”

Shifting her in my lap, I adjusted the angle to hit deeper and circled her clit the way I knew she liked. She cried out when I gave it to her harder. The pain of my skin against hers sent her over the edge. I felt it hit her as she clenched hard around my cock. Her body tensed and released, her nails digging harder into my skin.

“Fuck, Drake, come for me too... please, fuck, please.”

I pressed her forward on the bed, covering her body with my own before giving it to her harder than before. She cried through it, her body writhing beneath me until I grunted with my own eruption. I collapsed on top of her when I was spent, pinning her to the bed with my much larger body.

It took a few minutes for me to regain my equilibrium and move off her. She

lay there quietly as if she needed more time to come down from her high. I slipped off the bed and went into the bathroom, cleaning myself up before gathering up supplies to take care of her.

I sat next to her when I came out and stroked her back.

“Do you want to lie in my lap whilst I take care of you?”

She nodded but didn't make a move. So I took it upon myself to shift her into my lap. I checked over her welts to make sure I hadn't broken the skin anywhere. Then I rubbed soothing ointment into her red skin. She sighed as I did it. When I was finished, I cleaned the blood off her chest and the cum from between her legs. Then I laid her back down on the bed while I got a t-shirt for her out of my cupboards. I pulled it over her head and tucked her under the covers, pressing a kiss to her forehead.

After that, I tugged on some clothes and went downstairs, pouring two glasses of water and putting a bag of dried fruit snacks she liked between my teeth. As I got back to my room, I found her clutching my pillow, her face buried in like she was breathing in the scent of me. I couldn't help but grin at how fucking cute that was as I set down the glasses and the snacks.

“Little wisp.”

She popped her head up, flushing red with embarrassment. I got under the covers and made her sit up so she could eat and drink. She let me feed her and make sure she was full before I allowed her to curl up by my side with my arm wrapped around her back. Pressing a kiss to her forehead, I watched her fall asleep. It wasn't very late. I was intending to get up after she was settled, but I found I couldn't leave her. Instead, I lay there stroking her face and wondering how I'd got so fucking lucky. I had the woman of my dreams in my bed and she loved me. It was a mind fuck, but a good one.

Her soft breathing soothed to my anxiety-ridden mind. I pressed my face into her hair and closed my eyes, savouring her warmth against me. Savouring every part of Scarlett. And somehow, without meaning to, I fell asleep hours before midnight for the first time in years. All because I had the love of my life next to me.

TWENTY ONE

WEST

My body jerked awake to the rush of cold air before a warm body curled itself around my back. A small hand appeared and wrapped around my stomach when I cracked an eye open. A hand I knew intimately. I closed my eye and settled into her embrace. There was no threat. It was just the owner of my heart crawling into bed with me as the morning sun dappled across my sheets. Lips pressed to my spine before a tongue traced the line of it. Then she settled, nuzzling her face against my skin. She knew I was awake but didn't make an attempt at conversation or say good morning. It was almost like she merely wanted to be in my space. And I was content to let her.

If it had been before she came back into my life, I would have jumped up the moment I awoke, ready to spill blood. None of the others came into my room without permission for that very reason. With Scarlett, my body instinctively knew it was her. She was my lifeline. My whole soul. At least, what counted for my soul since I was lacking in humanity at times. She made me feel. And what a fucking revelation not to wake up wishing for violence.

I turned in her embrace until her messy hair came into view. She blinked as she looked up at me. I didn't give her a chance to speak, diving down to catch her lips in mine. Who cared why she was here. My heart just cared that she was. Here in my arms, her mouth where it belonged and nothing to stop me from feeling her small frame against mine.

I ran my hand down her back to the curve of her arse, finding her without underwear beneath the t-shirt she wore. However, the moment my hand settled over her bare skin, she let out a small cry of pain in my mouth. I immediately let go of her, sat up, ripped down the covers and pressed her onto her front. My

eyes were searching and what I found had me almost smiling.

“I see someone was a bad girl last night,” I murmured as I took in the welts across the backs of her thighs and behind. Drake clearly hadn’t held back.

“I had punishments pending from days ago,” she responded, her voice muffled by the pillow her face was pressed into. “And it was worth the pain.”

I ran my finger over one of the welts on her thigh. She tensed at the contact.

“My dirty girl likes a little pain with her pleasure.”

“I was a very naughty little slut last night,” she whispered, turning her head to the side.

I leant down, pressing a kiss to the angriest looking welt on her behind.

“Mmm, did my naughty girl come from all the pain he caused?”

“Yes.”

“Good little slut.”

The way her body trembled at my words made my dick hard. The sight of her was making me a little crazy. A little like I wanted to sit her in my lap and make her ride me while I pressed down on the welts Drake had left on her skin.

“And does he know you left his bed?”

“He’s asleep.”

I looked over at my clock on the bedside table. It read past ten in the morning.

“Drake’s asleep at this hour?”

She shifted, turning on her side to meet my eyes.

“I was surprised too. He looked so peaceful. I didn’t want to wake him, but I was starving. I went downstairs, had breakfast and he was still dead to the world when I came back.”

“So you sought me out?”

She nodded, giving me a shy smile. I sat back, gripped her by the arm, and tugged her into my lap. She wrapped her arms around my neck.

“You’re his remedy.”

“Remedy?”

“For his inability to sleep. You should get back to him before he wakes up.”

The pout she gave me had me wrapping my hands around her behind and squeezing her abused flesh. She yelped, jerking against my body and making my dick throb. I didn’t want her going back to Drake’s room. I wanted her to sit on

my cock and ride me until she came so hard, she cried. Perhaps I'd send her back to him with my cum leaking from her pussy. I'd quite like to know what he would say about it.

"Are you sure you want that?" she asked as I wrapped my hand around her throat and stroked her soft skin.

"No, I want you to slide that sweet little pussy down on my cock whilst I choke you until you come."

Her eyes widened slightly at my rather blunt statement of my desires. Not sure why she was surprised.

"I suggest you do as I say, little Scar. I'm not a patient man."

And didn't she know it. The way she scrambled to pull off my shorts and rip the t-shirt from her body had me chuckling. Before she had a chance to mount me, I grabbed a hold of her body and buried my face in her tits, kissing and licking her skin until I bit down on her nipple so hard she cried out in shock.

"West, fuck!"

I gripped her throat again, squeezing the sides to restrict her airway. Then I smacked her arse, making her cry out again.

"Give me what I asked for."

She fumbled between us, her fingers gripping my cock. When she slid it between her lips, I could feel her wetness coating the crown.

Always so ready for me, little Scar.

She moaned when she sunk down on me, not stopping to let herself adjust until she'd taken the whole thing. Then she leant towards me, brushing her mouth over mine.

"Do you remember what we talked about when you let me scar you?"

"Mmm, I do."

"I know what promise you don't want me to break."

"Oh yeah?"

Her hand curled around my jaw as she pressed a kiss to the corner of my mouth.

"Forever. I promised to give you forever."

My hand around her throat tightened. The way her eyes twinkled as she leant back slightly to look at me had my fucking heart in knots.

"Are you going to keep that promise?"

She rocked her hips into me, clenching around my cock in the most delicious way. Her hand curled around the back of my neck before she leant her forehead against mine.

“All of my forevers are yours.”

I couldn't answer, so I kissed her instead. My tongue tangled with hers, creating a fucking mess between us, but it was what we needed. We'd found our way back to each other.

My forever is your forever. There is no me without you, little Scar.

She filled all my empty spaces with her light. She saved me from the dark by making a home for herself in it next to me. This woman was my goddess of the night. And I loved her with every inch of my being.

When she pulled away, her hazel-green eyes twinkled, and she pressed kisses down my jaw and neck.

“Who do you belong to?” I asked, tugging her back by her neck to look into her eyes.

By fuck, the way she smiled at me set my body on fire.

“War.”

“My little warrior goddess.”

I squeezed her throat again, making her buck into me.

“Touch your little needy clit for me. Show me you're mine by giving me your climax.”

Her hand snaked between us, finding her clit and stroking it. She rocked her hips against me in time with her stroking. Her eyes were fixed on mine as I kept a hold of her throat, the other hand wrapping around her behind to rub over her welts.

There was no more need for words. We surpassed those. The only communication between us was through our emotions reflected in each other's eyes. My Scarlett was back. She felt the same connection we'd always had with each other. It had changed, morphed into something stronger, deeper. My soulmate had found her way home to me. And I was ready to give up everything for her. Give up my fucking life if that's what it took to keep her safe. To keep her by my side. I'd give my woman the world even if I had to burn it down to ashes and dust.

“Forever,” she mouthed to me right before she came.

“Forever,” I echoed, watching her fall over the edge.

There was nothing but me and her in the moments she clenched around me, her body going slack against my grip. I released my tight hold on her throat to give her air but kept stroking her skin with my thumb. Everything could be burning around us and I wouldn't give a shit. The only person I had any care or appreciation for was her.

She pitched forward, leaning her forehead on my shoulder when she was spent, her breathing harsh and laboured. Carefully, I pressed her down onto the bed, rolling on top of her as I gripped her thigh for leverage. She closed her eyes as I thrust inside her, letting out a little sigh of happiness. Her hands gripped my back, keeping me there with her. My pace increased with my own need to find a release. And right before I did, her eyes flew open, catching me unawares.

I fell so hard, I thought I might fucking die with the pleasure. It raced up my spine with an intensity I had rarely experienced. Scarlett brought out these feelings inside me. It was all her. No one else ever had the ability to make me vulnerable. Make the dam burst around me and the floodgates rip open so wide, I didn't think they would ever sit right inside me again.

I'd known this would happen if I fucked her when I could see her face. I'd barely managed to keep my head straight when we'd fucked Scarlett together the last time, but now we were alone, I was drowning in her. In those beautiful eyes holding the keys to my entire soul. She broke me and put me back together every time, just as I did her.

I buried my face in her neck to hide my emotional state from her scrutiny. In response, she pressed a kiss to my hair and stroked my back with her fingertips, as if reassuring me it was okay. She had me. She wouldn't let me go or fall apart.

“My beautiful little Scar,” I whispered in her ear, “you make me happy. I hope you know that.”

She let out a breath, her hands flattening and tightening around me.

“Don't make me cry. And you make me happy too.”

“I like making you cry.”

She snorted. I lifted off her but not before pressing a kiss to her forehead.

“I want you to go see his highness before he wakes up and surprise him with your cum-filled pussy.”

The blush spreading across her cheeks had me grinning as I sat up on my

knees between her legs.

“You are incorrigible.”

“You wouldn’t have me any other way.”

“Fine, I’ll tell him it’s your gift to him.”

I laughed, rubbing my hand over her bare thigh.

“I’m sure he’ll appreciate it.”

She shook her head and sat up, pressing a kiss to my mouth.

“We all need to talk.”

Nothing good ever came with that statement. I stroked her cheek, not wanting her to think I was too concerned.

“About what?”

“Something Drake told me yesterday.”

Before I could question her further, she picked up her discarded t-shirt, tugged it over her head, and slipped off my bed.

“Scar...”

She looked back over her shoulder.

“I’m not mad. I just don’t like the secrets.”

Then she flounced out of my room, leaving me wondering what secrets she was referring to. And asking myself what the fuck Drake had told her. It’s not like I thought we should have any further secrets between us, but it could be anything.

I got off the bed and went into my bathroom to shower, then I’d go seek out Francis and Prescott to warn them of the impending conversation. They were likely going to freak out over it too, but it was neither here nor there. We were a family. And we’d deal with things like a family. Because that’s what you did for the people you loved. You heard them out and fixed shit between you. We would keep doing that with each other, no matter what.

TWENTY TWO

SCARLETT

Drake was not entirely impressed with his gift from West. In fact, he told me the next time I helped West prank him, he would put me over his knee and spank me in front of the others. I'd told him that wouldn't be much of a punishment. He responded by pinning me to his bed, telling me how much he loved me and kissing me until I was breathless. To say I wasn't completely won over by his playfulness would be an understatement. The Drake of my past had returned and I couldn't be happier.

After he'd taken care of my welts, cleaned me up and let me go to grab some clothes from Francis' room, I'd found him and the others downstairs with breakfast laid out. I sat down, took a sip of my tea and noticed West, Prescott and Francis were looking at me with expectant expressions on their faces.

“What?”

“You wanted to talk,” West said.

I put my mug down and dug my spoon into my cereal, stuffing it into my mouth and chewing. Setting my spoon down, I levelled my gaze on my four men.

“Drake told me you knew about my medical history. Now, I'm not mad about it, but I do think we need to stop keeping secrets from each other. Not to mention we need an actual conversation about our relationship and what it means for the future.”

Prescott reached out across the table and took my hand, stroking his thumb along mine. I didn't strictly need his reassuring touch, but it grounded me all the same. The five of us needed to be realistic and clear about what we wanted from each other. I wasn't scared of what they would say. Being on the same page was

important to me after everything we'd been through.

"No more secrets," he said with a nod.

I took a deep breath and let go of Prescott's hand.

"I want to see my medical records."

No one said anything as Drake got out of his chair and went over to the coffee table to pick up his tablet. He brought it back over, flipping through it for several minutes before he set it in front of me and took a seat again. I had expected him to say no or question why I needed this. He hadn't. Instead, he gave me what I asked for without hesitation. And hell did it make me want to go sit in his lap to kiss him until he was breathless to show my appreciation. Instead, I met his eyes and gave him a nod.

My attention went to the tablet. I picked up my mug, sipping at my tea as my fingers hovered over the screen. I steadied myself internally and began looking through everything. They'd never let me see any of my x-rays from the accident nor show me the extent of the damage. This made it all clear. The fact I'd even survived was a miracle.

It confirmed what they'd told me. After the surgeries, the scarring had left me with severely damaged fallopian tubes and my ovaries barely functioned. The only reason they'd left them in place was not wanting to put me into early menopause. It was hit or miss whether I'd even get a period. I didn't want any more surgery if I could help it. They couldn't fix what had been broken. And it was just my reality.

Seeing it laid out brought it home. The accident had taken a lot from me. And yet, strangely, I was no longer sad or mourning the loss of it. Before, I had no hope. I had nothing but a big fat void inside myself. Four voids. Four missing pieces. Now, the void was no longer there. It had been filled and with it brought a sense of peace and acceptance. I wasn't lesser or damaged. I was me. Scarlett. A woman who had survived many ordeals. It made me strong, not weak. It made me powerful.

I stared at the tablet for a long moment before turning off the screen and going back to my breakfast.

"I'm okay with the fact I can't have kids," I said, making them all look at me with startled expressions. They hadn't been expecting me to announce it. And I hadn't either, but the thing was, I was okay. Now all was said and done, it didn't

feel like I was drowning in misery any longer. I was whole.

“I mean, I don’t think I was before, but I felt like I was missing something... when in reality, what I was missing was all of you. I feel like myself again because I have my family back. That’s what I need. My family. Biological urges are all very well, but it’s what I want that matters. And I want you four. That’s it. Nothing more, nothing less... just you.”

I looked down at my hands resting on the table.

“What I need to know is if you all feel the same. I mean, I know you do, but we’ve never said it to each other when we’re all together. I need to know you’re okay with it only being us for the rest of our lives.”

The first person to take my hand was West, who was sitting next to me. He rubbed his thumb down the back of my hand and gave me a look that spoke volumes.

“I’ve never wanted anything else other than the five of us.”

And if that didn’t say something about West’s feelings towards us, I didn’t know what would. We’d been dancing around the fact we loved each other and strangely, I was okay with it. He wasn’t ready to tell me. Sometimes words weren’t necessary when you could look into a person’s eyes and see the truth. West didn’t hide his feelings from me. He just struggled to openly admit them.

I squeezed his hand to reassure him. He gave me a nod, then turned towards Drake, who was sitting at the head of the table as usual. He laid his palm out flat on the wooden surface. I could see the cogs turning in Drake’s head, but he didn’t hesitate to put his hand on West’s, as if this was his connection to me too.

“I didn’t go through ten years of fighting to get you back to make our family whole for nothing,” he said with a low voice, emotion radiating off all the words. “I just want us.”

Apparently, my prodding and insisting Drake open up to me had shifted something inside him. Or maybe it was because we’d shared our feelings finally. Either way, my heart was full seeing him be so willing to declare how he felt and what he wanted.

Drake turned to Francis, putting his hand out to him. As expected, there was no hesitation on Francis’ part to hold Drake’s hand. He looked over at me, his silvery-grey eyes glinting. I ran my tongue over my bottom lip. Something about the way Francis looked at me had my body heating like he was stripping me bare

in his mind and imagining all the dirty things he wanted to do to me. While it might not be entirely appropriate given the conversation we were having, I didn't care. It was layered with love too. The love he felt for me. The unfathomable depths of it weren't overwhelming. I felt the same way. I did about all of them.

"You complete us, Scar. I don't have need or want for anything else other than this."

Francis gave me a wink before putting his hand out to Prescott, who took it, then leant across the table to take mine again. Prescott stared at me with those beautiful blues of his. The smile he gave me had my heart racing.

"You four and Mum are the only people who have never willingly walked out of my life without a backwards glance. My loyalty is here and there's nothing else I could ask for or need other than this."

He squeezed my hand tight in his. It made me want him so badly, I was up and out of my chair, letting go of his hand and West's. I was around the table and gripping his face the next moment.

"I love you," I whispered before I kissed him.

It wasn't chaste or restrained. I poured out my love and appreciation into it, showing him my feelings. How I would never abandon him, even when things were tough. Never give up on the two of us, no matter what happened in the future. He deserved my devotion. He loved me in a way I couldn't describe. Gave me things I never knew I needed or desired. He was my king.

"I love you too," he told me when I released him.

I walked around him to Francis and sat in his lap, wrapping my arms around his neck and nuzzling my nose against his.

"You made me blush with the way you were looking at me," I whispered.

He ran his hand down my chest, making me wriggle in his grasp before curling his fingers around my waist.

"Can't blame me, can you?"

I chuckled before kissing him. Admittedly, I adored the way he made me feel beautiful and wanted without words. My safety and my home were with him.

"No," I replied when I pulled away. "But that wicked mind of yours is clearly running riot. No doubt you won't tell me what you're planning."

He grinned and bit his lip.

“Never.”

I pressed a kiss to his cheek.

“I love you for it.”

“I love you more.”

I stroked his face before extracting myself from his lap and going to Drake. He curled a hand around my waist, pulling me against his side as I leant down towards him. Drake tipped his face up to catch my mouth in a searing kiss that had my toes curling.

“My little wisp,” he murmured against my lips.

“My reaper,” I whispered back.

He smiled, stroked my side, and then released me. We’d already made love declarations earlier, so I wasn’t put out by the fact he didn’t say anything further. I skipped around the table to West instead, who looked up at me with his beautiful amber eyes shining with happiness.

I reached down, tucking my fingers under the collar of his shirt and brushing them over the scars I’d given him. He took my other hand and pressed it to his mouth, giving my palm a series of kisses. I craved the reassurance of his embrace.

West didn’t object when I sat in his lap. No, he wrapped his arms around me and let me rest myself against his chest.

“Can I stay here whilst I finish eating?” I asked.

“As my little Scar wishes.”

It didn’t matter if I’d had soul-destroying sex with him earlier. The way I wanted to be close to West couldn’t be quantified. Being near him made me feel... alive. There was a certain rush to having a man like him be utterly obsessed with you. I feared and desired him at the same time. A heady rush of mixed emotions that set me on fire.

For now, I was content to be held by him. And to remember the way he looked at me as he came apart earlier. How he couldn’t hide the depths of his devotion to me. His love. It was like being suffocated but in a good way. In the very best way. I liked it when West choked me during sex and this feeling was no different. I wanted to be drowned in his abyss of violence and destruction, pulled so deep inside I could never find my way out.

As I leant over to drag my bowl and mug towards me, I heard Drake clearing

his throat. I turned to him when I'd got settled, raising my eyebrow.

"I spoke to the others about this before you came down... after what happened yesterday, I think we all agree we don't want you leaving Fortuity without one of us with you. In fact, I'd prefer it if you stayed here out of harm's way entirely."

It took me a second to gather my thoughts and feelings on that little matter.

"You want to lock me up here?"

Drake frowned.

"No, I would never lock you up, Scarlett. I want you to have your freedom. I'm worried about what Stuart will do next. You know you're not safe alone, right?"

I hated it, but he was right. While I could get away if it was one man, I didn't think Stuart would send just one. It would be multiple. Especially when he realised sending three men after me hadn't worked. Drake had killed them all himself without breaking a sweat.

"I don't like it, but fine, I'll stay here. Will that make you happy?"

"It doesn't make me happy at all, but I need you safe where he can't get to you."

I went back to my food, disliking the prospect of not being able to leave Fortuity, but knowing it was in my best interests. It's not even like I felt safe going anywhere without one of them, anyway. They were my protectors. My guardians. My Horsemen. While I could handle myself just fine, I didn't trust Stuart at all.

"You know, we might as well have Penn on retainer at this point," West said. "We use the fucker's services enough."

"Will he give us mates rates since you two are so friendly?" Prescott asked.

West snorted.

"We're already getting them."

"Maybe we should invite him around for dinner to show our appreciation," I said.

"I'm not having him at our dinner table. He will simply flirt with you all evening," Drake said, giving me a stern look.

I batted my eyelashes at him.

"Don't worry, I would never stray even if he's rather handsome and the

tattoos do it for me.”

Prescott, Francis and West started laughing while Drake glared at me. I was already sat on the only tattooed man I wanted between my legs.

“Brat.”

“If you’re that worried, I promise I’ll tell Penn he’s not allowed to flirt with me at the table.”

Drake turned back to his food, but not before giving me a suspicious look, as if he was wondering what exactly my game was.

“I’ll consider it,” he said after a few minutes.

I couldn’t really ask for more from him. Drake might be prickly and stubborn, but he bent to my will more often than not. I didn’t like to tell him he’d become soft when it came to me, no matter how many times he punished me. The care he gave me afterwards spoke volumes. The man loved me and he would do everything in his power to keep me safe. And it’s why I’d decided not to object to his request to stay in the building for my own safety. It would only be until we’d dealt with Stuart. I could deal with that... couldn’t I?

TWENTY THREE

FRANCIS

My head was buried in my computer, running numbers for a meeting I had tomorrow with Viktor Bykov's accountant. We'd almost secured his daughter's account, but there were a few unresolved issues between us and the owners of the Syndicate. I hoped to have them sorted soon.

I was so busy, I didn't notice my office door open, nor the two people who walked inside until they were right up at my desk. My head whipped up, my eyes falling on my parents.

"Hello, Francis," Mum said with a smile. Her grey eyes that matched mine were full of joy.

It had been months since I'd seen them. I hadn't been expecting them to just walk in here.

"Oh shit, I completely forgot about lunch," I blurted out, smacking my hand against my head.

My dad chuckled and shook his head.

"Always busy, I see."

"I'm sorry."

I got up from my desk and came around to embrace both of them. I'd mostly taken after my father. We were matched in height and stature, with dark brown hair. Mum was willowy with blonde hair and I'd got her eyes. Eliza and Jasper Beaufort were the most normal parents a person could have. Mum had been a stay at home mother until I flew the nest, and Dad worked for a gas company. She worked a part-time job in an office now. They were proud of me for what we'd built with Fortuity. I'd paid off their mortgage when we made our fortune, but they'd refused to take anything further from me. Instead, I spoiled them on

their birthdays and for Christmases. It was my way of giving back. And probably why I liked to give Scarlett everything I could. I wanted her to know how much I loved and needed her.

“Don’t be,” Mum said. “We wanted to surprise you, so we asked them not to call up. And we know you boys are always working.”

I shrugged as I let her go.

“How are they, anyway?”

“They’re fine,” I said as I walked back around my desk to save what I was working on.

“May tells me Drake has a girlfriend.”

I paused what I was doing to look up at her.

“Um, yeah, he does...”

Drake had told me about his conversation with his mother. No surprise she’d blabbed to mine, considering the two of them were best friends. I was going to get the third degree over it, no doubt. Not something I particularly wanted to deal with considering they were both wondering when I would settle down too.

“Frankie, do you need me to arrange that meeting with Mr Knox? He said he’d be bringing Mr Nelson this time... oh, I didn’t realise you had... oh...”

My eyes went to Scarlett, who was standing in the doorway with a tablet in her hands, staring at the three of us with wide eyes. I left my desk when I saw the fear in them. This was completely my fault for forgetting my parents were coming to lunch. Now I was going to have to explain why Scarlett was here.

Fuck.

Yet, the person I was most worried about was my girl herself. I ignored my parent’s shocked expressions and went straight over to her. My first instinct was to cup her cheek and stroke it to soothe her.

“I didn’t know your parents were here,” she whispered.

“It’s okay. We’ll deal with it together, okay?”

She nodded, leaning into my touch as if it was grounding her. Scarlett might be strong as fuck but seeing people from her past couldn’t be easy. Especially when they happened to be my parents.

I dropped my hand from her face and turned to my parents, taking a breath before I dived in.

“Mum, Dad... you remember Scarlett, right?”

“Well, of course we do, Francis,” Mum said, looking between us and trying to guess at our relationship and what was going on.

“But the last we knew, she was missing,” Dad put in.

Scarlett tucked the tablet up against her chest and sought out my fingers, gripping them tightly between hers.

“I can explain... sort of.”

I felt Scarlett take a breath next to me before giving both my parents a smile.

“It’s so nice to see you. I’m afraid I only just remembered the past, so you have to excuse my shock at seeing you again.”

“The feeling is mutual,” Dad said, but he smiled back at her.

Scarlett let go of my hand and went over to them, shaking my dad’s hand, and Mum gave her a hug.

“We never expected... well, that’s neither here nor there. It’s good to see you again, Scarlett,” Mum told her as they drew apart.

I fidgeted, then Scarlett looked back at me with eyes full of fucking love and I knew what I had to do.

“Should we eat upstairs? Scarlett can join us then.”

I wasn’t going to take them out to a restaurant and air my private life where anyone could hear.

“Yes, that might be for the best,” Mum replied, giving me a nod.

Scarlett popped her tablet down on my desk and followed me and my parents out into the lobby towards the lifts. None of us spoke as we rode up to the penthouse. My parents rarely came here. I usually went to them, but maybe we should change that now Scarlett was back. Maybe I should be more involved in their lives and them with mine. I was their only son, after all.

Scarlett followed me into the kitchen after we got my parents settled on the sofas. The two of us started preparing something simple together. She leant over to me as I was stirring a pot.

“What are we going to tell them?”

It wasn’t something we’d spoken about, how we were going to address this with our parents. How we would explain what happened to Scarlett and the fact we were all in a relationship with her. Guess I was going to have to come up with something to appease them.

“A stripped back version of the truth, leaving out anything to do with Stuart.

They can't know what we've done... they wouldn't understand."

She wrapped an arm around me, pressing her face into my shoulder.

"No. I'll just go with your lead, probably safer that way."

I pressed a kiss to her forehead, forgetting entirely it was in full view of my parents. Restraining myself when it came to Scarlett wasn't exactly my forte. Being with her felt so natural. Touching her was something I couldn't go without when she was in my space. When her attention was on me and me alone. There was nothing in this world like being loved the way Scarlett Nyx loved me.

"Go set the table... and maybe text the others as a heads up. They probably won't come up here, but they'll need to know."

She nodded, stroking my back before she moved away to get the plates and cutlery. I watched her for a moment before going back to preparing lunch.

Twenty minutes later, we were all seated and tucking in. Mum and Dad kept giving Scarlett glances like they couldn't believe she was there. They asked me about how business was going and we talked about mundane things until I couldn't hold it in any longer. So I told them Scarlett had come to work for us. How she hadn't remembered who we were at first and slowly, things changed when she did. And how she lived with us here now.

They didn't ask Scarlett where she'd been or about the kidnapping. I think they were afraid of upsetting her by bringing it up. They just remarked on how pleased they were that we'd all found each other again.

I left Scarlett talking to Dad while I cleaned up the dishes. Mum came into the kitchen and leant up against the counter, eyeing me with concern. I sighed as I straightened after closing the dishwasher.

"Are you and Scarlett in a relationship?"

I nodded, unsure of what else to say about it. We hadn't hidden it. Scarlett had constantly touched me throughout lunch and I, her. It was like we couldn't stop. For her, I knew it was a reassurance thing. I was her safe place. There was no fucking way I would stop her from taking what she needed from me.

Mum looked over at Scarlett and Dad, who were laughing at something she'd said. The way my girl's eyes lit up had my heart racing. Seeing her happy was all I needed. All I ever fucking wanted.

"You love her."

My eyes went back to Mum, who was looking at me now.

“Yeah, I do, Mum.”

“Will you explain why May told me Drake’s girlfriend is also called Scarlett?”

I rubbed the back of my neck before looking away. It was better to just come out with it.

“Scar is his girlfriend too... and West’s... and Prescott’s.” I looked at her again. “We’re all with her.”

For a minute, Mum didn’t say a word, clearly processing what I’d told her. She didn’t look shocked or put out. It wasn’t an easy thing to admit to your parent, that you were in what was essentially a polyamorous relationship with Scarlett at the centre of it.

“I always wondered if the four of you loved her as more than just a friend. I guess I didn’t expect... well, I never expected her to come back after all these years, let alone for the five of you to find each other. But you were always very attached, so I suppose I can’t be too surprised this has happened.”

I moved closer to her and took her hand.

“It’s not like we meant to, but it’s Scar... she’s...”

“She’s your one. I can see that, Francis. Did you think I wouldn’t understand?”

“I don’t really know, Mum. With her being back and it being so complicated, I wasn’t sure what to tell you, so we decided we shouldn’t until we were sure of everything.”

She squeezed my hand.

“Are you sure now?”

“The only thing I’m sure of is the five of us being a family and her. I’m sure of her. Scar gets me. We take care of each other like it should be, you know... a partnership. And so what if she shares those things with Drake, Pres and West too? Doesn’t make her love me any less. She doesn’t make me feel second best... ever.”

Mum dropped my hand, only to stroke my hair back from my face. She smiled when she noticed it wasn’t gelled. I didn’t wear it any longer. Not when it made Scarlett happy to run her fingers through my hair. I couldn’t deny it made me feel good too.

“You were never second best, Francis.”

“I know but having her makes me see that clearly.”

“If being with her this way makes the four of you happy, then it’s all that matters. I won’t pretend to understand it, but all I want is your happiness in whatever form it comes.”

I almost shook my head. That was the thing about my parents. My mum was so easygoing and accepting. Probably why she and Drake’s mum were friends. Eliza was the calm in the storm that was May Ackley.

“There’s something I do have to ask you to do though.”

Her eyes narrowed.

“What?”

“You can’t tell May she’s back.”

Mum’s eyes widened.

“You are not seriously asking me to lie to her?”

“It’s not lying, it’s withholding the truth. I think Drake deserves a chance to tell her himself. It’s his life, Mum.”

“He never tells her anything.”

I snorted.

“Are you surprised? I know she’s your best friend, but May is kind of scary when she gets going.”

Mum rolled her eyes but smiled.

“I suppose you’re right. And Drake does need to tell her himself. I hope he does soon.”

“When he finds out you know, I don’t think he’ll have much of a choice. Neither Pres with Rosie. She’s going to be...”

“Angry you kept Scarlett from her.”

“Yeah.”

Mum nodded and dragged her fingers across the kitchen counter.

“I hate to ask this, Francis, but where has she been?”

I shifted on my feet. The question I didn’t want to answer. Mostly because I couldn’t. There wasn’t an easy or simple explanation for her disappearance. Not without revealing things better in the past. They didn’t need to know their son was a killer, nor the type of shit I enjoyed.

“I can’t tell you, Mum. It’s not my place to talk about it.”

“Do the police know she’s no longer missing?”

I shook my head.

“Francis...”

“We will tell them when Scar is ready to. She’s still working through things, you know. She’s spent ten years without her memories. It’s difficult for her.”

Mum looked over at Scarlett and Dad.

“I can imagine it is. Well, you have my word this will stay between me and your father.”

“Thank you.”

She pulled me in for a hug. I looked over her shoulder at Scarlett, who was smiling at me. Seeing her happy made my heart lurch. She was so fucking beautiful. Nothing in the world mattered more to me than her.

Mum pulled away from me and saw me staring at Scarlett.

“Go.”

I couldn’t help but be pulled by the thread binding me to Scarlett. When I arrived next to her, she stood up and put her arms around me. I stroked her cheek and smiled. Then I pressed her face into my chest and breathed her in. Her cinnamon scent surrounded me, soothing every part of me from the inside out.

“She’s happy you’re home with us,” I whispered.

“Doesn’t think I’m crazy for wanting all of you?”

I laughed.

“No, I think you’ll have more trouble convincing May and Rosie than Mum.”

Scarlett shuddered before clutching me tighter.

“I’m not looking forward to that part.”

They would have to accept it eventually because no matter what, we were sticking together. We’d promised each other as much. No one in this world could tear us apart except for Stuart Carver. And we had a plan to make sure he never did.

TWENTY FOUR

PRESCOTT

“Seriously, I’m going to die of boredom at this rate,” Scarlett huffed, pouting at me with those deliciously sensuous lips of hers.

“You’ve been inside for just over a week, hardly a death sentence.”

I knew she hated being locked up. It wasn’t fair on her. Not after everything she’d been through. I just didn’t think she’d be on my case over it so soon. Her ordeal with Mason had affected her more than she liked to let on. The free spirit inside her who liked to be chased was chained up, begging to get out. I could see it in her eyes.

She crawled towards me across the bed and sat in my lap, plucking my phone from my fingers and tossing it on the bed. Someone wanted my full attention on her.

“Please, Pres. I’m trying to be good and do what Drake asked, but I need to get out of this building. Even if it’s just for a couple of hours.”

I cupped the back of her neck, running my thumb along her skin. My poor lamb was suffering. I despised seeing it. It tore at my heartstrings every single time.

“Well, it’s very lucky for you I’ve got a surprise outing planned then, isn’t it?”

The way her hazel-green eyes lit up had me grinning.

“You do?”

“Yes, so you better go put a dress on.”

Fuck, her joy was utterly infectious. She was practically bouncing in my lap, vibrating with excitement. She leant forward and plastered my face with kisses.

“You are literally the best boyfriend ever, but don’t tell the others.”

I laughed, knowing she’d been asking West and Francis too, but neither of

them had budged. She knew better than to ask Drake, even if she had him wrapped around her finger. The way he conceded to her desires was a fucking miracle to watch. Then again, Drake always had a soft spot for her, even when we were kids.

“Wait.” She deflated all of a sudden. “Does Drake know?”

I removed her from my lap and got off the bed. There was no fucking way I was taking her out of the building without informing Drake of my plans. He would string me up by my balls if I did that.

“Yes. Now, get dressed, West has dinner on and we don’t want to be late.”

Like a little kid in a sweet shop, she scrambled off the bed and went over to my wardrobes, pulling them open. I watched her select a dark, forest green dress and change into it. Then she was looking over her shoes. She selected a pair of smart, dark trainers. She didn’t like to wear heels outside of the office and even then, she’d started wearing ballet flats most of the time. Past Scarlett had emerged in small but significant ways, changing things she did and liked. I was all for it. Seeing her come into her own was a joy in itself.

She braided her hair while I changed into something smart but casual. A dark shirt, chinos and dark trainers to match hers. She grinned when I took her hand and pulled her downstairs with me. She was animated throughout dinner, making Drake suspicious, but I told him not to worry. I’d take care of our girl. Besides, the place we were going to was safe. Probably one of the safest places I could take her with all the security protocols in place.

Scarlett was quiet on the drive. She watched the city go by, dragging her fingers over the window every so often. I pulled up in a car park nearby, paid and took her hand, leading her along an upmarket street. She had a curious expression on her face when we arrived outside a nondescript building. I pulled her inside, only to be greeted by a huge graffiti-style sign proclaiming the name of the club. Desecration. You had to know someone to gain access to this place. And lucky for me, I knew a certain Fixer who lived in the owner’s pocket.

“What is this place?” Scarlett hissed as we walked by a bouncer over to the reception desk.

“A sex club,” I murmured before greeting the girl behind the desk.

She was a pretty redhead with a bright smile, but that was all I noticed. When Scarlett was in the room, she was the one who radiated beauty and sin. My eyes

were for her and her alone.

Scarlett fidgeted next to me as I checked in. I was concerned she didn't want to be here. Her eyes were curious as the girl waved us into the club after checking our coats and told me someone would be along soon to take us to our private room.

I tugged Scarlett into the main club. There was a bar, so I drew her over to it. It was a decadent space full of red velvet and black. In the centre of the room stood several stripper poles with huge velvet-covered padded seats along the walls. For a weekday night, the place was pretty full. There were people seated, clearly waiting for something to happen.

"Do you want a drink?" I asked Scarlett, who was gazing around the room in awe.

"Water is fine."

I didn't get a chance to speak to the bartender. A girl with green eyes, bronze skin, and dark hair approached us.

"Mr Ellis?" she asked with a shy smile.

"Yes."

"If you and your date would like to come this way, your room is ready."

I pulled on Scarlett's hand as the girl started towards what looked like a set of double doors on the other side of the club.

"I'm Remi. If you need anything, you just have to ask."

I nodded, my attention going to Scarlett, who was staring at a man lounging near the corner of the room surrounded by women. He had dark hair and dark eyes with tattoos down his neck and on his right hand, which lay on his thigh. I got the distinct impression he was someone by the way people were glancing at him.

"Who is that?" Scarlett asked, nodding her head towards him.

I noticed Remi looking at the man before she pushed the doors open.

"Mr Villetti. He owns the club."

Zayn Villetti. The mafia prince. No fucking wonder. He looked the part. A king presiding over his kingdom.

"Didn't expect him to be here," I said as Remi led us down a corridor with numbered doors.

"It's a special club night. He always attends those." She paused at a door. The

number plate said ten. “Here we are.”

She opened the door and ushered us inside. It was a small room but contained everything you would need to watch. A sofa. A bench right in front of the two-way mirror. A mini-fridge stocked with water bottles and alcohol. And a set of drawers Remi mentioned contained a variety of toys, lube, and condoms.

I thanked her after she indicated the button on the side of the window to start the show and the second button if we needed something brought to the room. She left, telling us to enjoy ourselves. Scarlett turned to me when the door closed.

“What is this?”

“We’re going to watch.”

It took her a second to understand my meaning.

“How did you know I wanted... oh, Pres.”

She jumped into my arms and kissed me.

“You are the perfect man. My king.”

I chuckled as I set her down on the sofa. Grabbing a couple of water bottles from the fridge, I put them down on the side table and pressed the button to start the show. Scarlett squirmed next to me as I took a seat.

A moment later, the lights in the other room came on, giving us the full view of a bed set right in front of the mirror. Remi told us no one could see into our room. I’d made very specific requests. They’d been more than willing to accommodate.

Scarlett’s fingers slid into mine as three people entered the room. Two men and one woman. The way her pupils dilated told me she was excited by the prospect. I wanted to show her what I saw when she was sandwiched between the others. Wanted my girl to experience the things I did. The high I got from watching. Who knew if she would enjoy it, but I could only hope.

The two men bracketed the woman between them, one kissing her while the other pressed them to her neck. She writhed between them, enjoying the attention.

“Fuck,” Scarlett hissed.

She let go of my hand and put it on my thigh instead, giving it a squeeze. I leant closer, still watching the people in the other room.

“Does my little lamb approve?”

“Yes, a hundred times yes.” She glanced at me. “Am I allowed to touch you?”

“Of course, but you have to pay attention to the show. I want you to see what I see.”

She nodded, turning her eyes back to the other room. They were on the bed now, undressing the light brown-haired woman slowly, removing each piece of clothing with care. I may have asked for someone who looked similar to my girl.

“Imagine it’s you being undressed like that by Francis and West.”

Scarlett’s mouth parted on a breath, but she didn’t make a sound. She’d been sandwiched between those two a few times during our group sex. I knew she liked them fucking her together. She loved all of us doing it.

One of the men took his clothes off, and the girl mounted him, rubbing her pussy over his cock.

“Oh... fuck,” Scarlett whimpered when the woman took him inch by inch, giving us a perfect view.

Her hand on my thigh drew higher until she was brushing her fingers over my cock.

“Come here,” I practically growled, hauling her into my lap with her back plastered to my front. I held her chin in place when she tried to look at me. “Watch. Don’t take your eyes off them. See how they fuck her the way West and Francis fuck you.”

The other man was at the girl’s back, his fingers delving into her tight little hole. An open bottle of lube sat beside him.

“Pres,” she moaned as I stroked my fingers up her bare thighs, watching the threesome in front of us over her shoulder.

We could hear the low grunting and moaning sounds of the room echoing around ours through the speakers at the corners of the mirror.

“Is this making my lamb wet?”

“Yes,” she hissed when my fingers met the soaked fabric of her underwear.

“Mmm, so I see.”

Her arousal was mine and mine alone. I would never want anyone but me and the boys to see her this way. Worked up and needy for us.

“Does my little lamb need her wolf?”

She ground back against me, forcing a grunt from my chest with her movements.

“Please.”

The second man had his cock out now, his hand rubbing lube over it. When he notched it to the girl and pressed forward, my fingers curled beneath Scarlett’s knickers and plunged into her wet pussy. She whimpered and gripped the sofa arm with one hand, her nails digging in while I pumped my fingers into her.

We watched the second man push deeper, impaling the girl on his dick. The way she moaned from the stretch made my dick throb. It reminded me of the sounds Scarlett made when we fucked her together.

“Do you see that, lamb? That’s how you look when you’re taking two of them. When you’re stuffed full of cock.”

“Oh god, Pres. Please, please fuck me.”

Scarlett was rocking on my fingers now, her eyes fixed on the scene in front of us.

“Mmm, does my dirty lamb need filling like she is?”

“Please.”

As if I would deny myself the opportunity to fuck her little pussy. I’d never taken a girl to watch with me before. Never wanted to until Scarlett. Besides, I got my kicks from watching the others fuck, so never needed to go anywhere else. They were happy to let me watch, so what was the point?

Now we had Scarlett. My kinky little lamb was just as deviant as the four of us. Our perfect goddess of the night. She wanted to try everything. This was for me and her. Something we could share together. There was no fucking way I could involve the others in this. Scarlett was possessive. She wouldn’t want to see them fuck another girl. But this? We could watch people we didn’t know fuck in private for a price. One I was more than willing to pay for the safety and security of a club catering to your basest desires. I would do anything to make Scarlett happy.

Drake said yes because he knew Zayn’s club was one of the most secure places in the city. The mafia prince was known for running a tight ship. Privacy and security were his top priorities.

I removed my fingers from Scarlett’s pussy, pressing her forward enough to undo my trousers and get my cock out. I pulled her knickers down her thighs to give me access but didn’t bother tugging them off her body. My chin settled on

her shoulder a minute later.

“If you want my dick, lamb, take it. Show me how much you need me.”

She shifted back as I held it for her. And slid down on it just as the door in the other room opened, revealing a third man. I smiled at the shocked gasp emitting from Scarlett’s mouth. He was completely bare, with dark hair and dark eyes. The way he smirked as he approached the threesome on the bed made Scarlett squirm on my dick as she sunk further down.

“Room for one more?” the man asked as he climbed on the bed.

“Holy fuck,” Scarlett moaned as he took the girl by the hair, pulling her closer and shoving his dick in her mouth.

I couldn’t help but be pleased with Scarlett’s reaction.

My girl loves this as much as I do. What more could a man ask for?

TWENTY FIVE

SCARLETT

When I begged Prescott to take me out of the penthouse, I did not imagine I would end up in a sex club sat on his dick while we watched four people fuck. I got it now. Completely understood his fascination. It was the most erotic thing I'd ever seen in my life. Watching three men go at this woman like she was their plaything. They gave it to her with wild abandon, heedless of the fact they were being watched.

“That’s what Francis, West and Drake look like when they fuck you, little lamb,” Prescott whispered in my ear. “When they make you take them all at the same time.”

He gripped my hips and made me rock against him, fucking me while we watched them. And what a sight it was. The dark-haired man had the girl’s hair in his fist, pumping his cock down her throat and making her gag on it. I could hear the sounds of it through the speakers. The chestnut-haired one, who was fucking her pussy, was running his hands up her body, pinching her nipples while she rocked on his cock. The man with the auburn hair gave it to her from behind while he held onto her shoulders as leverage. I was riveted. There was a rawness to the way they fucked each other, to the passion between them.

I knew this was a show, and they’d been paid to act this out for us, but it didn’t stop it from feeling real. It was so fucking hot, I thought I might combust. My body was on fire with the scene in front of us. Prescott had understood what I needed. He’d surprised me with this. He wanted to show me what he saw. What he desired. Watching people fuck in the rawest and most animalistic way. No wonder this turned him on so much.

“Pres, please, I need more. Touch me.”

I don't think I could have got through watching this scene without him there, his cock buried deep inside me. He pushed me forward slightly so he could unzip the back of my dress. I let it fall off my body, pooling at my waist. His fingers pulled down my bralette and cupped my breasts. I moaned when he pinched my nipples and pressed kisses to the side of my neck.

"Do you like it, my lamb? My gift to you."

I moved my hips faster, needing more friction between us.

"Yes, fuck, it's the hottest thing I've ever seen in my life."

The dark-haired man pulled his cock from her mouth and rubbed her saliva around her lips. His dick was covered in it. Then he leant down, taking her chin between his fingers and spat directly in her mouth. I shuddered, feeling Prescott dig his teeth into my bare shoulder.

"Dirty girl," the dark-haired man said. "Such a dirty little whore."

"Yes," the girl moaned. "I'm your dirty whore."

She wrapped her hand around his cock, stroking her saliva into it. The auburn-haired man bit down on her shoulder the way Prescott was doing to mine. She yelped, pushing herself back into his embrace. I didn't know what to do with myself other than to watch them and let Prescott touch me. Let him drive me higher.

"Look at our slut, she's so desperate," the chestnut-haired man taunted. "You need dick, don't you, slut?"

Prescott had to have told them to say those things. And he must have asked them to get someone with the same hair colour as me. I could picture myself there getting fucked by Drake, West and Francis while he watched us.

"This is what you like... watching them give it to me," I said, arching my back as he pinched my nipple again.

"You take them so well, little lamb. Spread wide open by their cocks. It's the best sight in the whole fucking world. I could watch you every day and it would never be enough. You are the most beautiful creature I've ever beheld. The way you come apart for us is stunning. I don't think you realise how much we desire you. How much we need your body wrapped around ours. You are our queen. The one we need to debase over and over again until you're a panting mess."

I moaned, wanting more. Needing him to fuck me harder. This position was great for watching, but not to be fucked in the way I needed.

The fact three of my men had such dirty mouths turned me on so damn much. Drake had been a little more vocal the last time we'd had sex. Admittedly, I enjoyed the times he said nothing. It made me want to wind him up, so he'd crack.

"I need you to fuck me harder," I panted out, not caring how desperate I sounded.

I heard Prescott chuckle before I found myself pulled off him. He pushed me up to my feet. It was disorientating, but Prescott was behind me, pressing me forward until my knees hit the bench in front of the window. Then he made me kneel on it.

"Put your hands against the glass."

I obeyed, knowing they couldn't see me. They knew we were watching, but it made it hotter to know they weren't able to see Prescott fucking me as they fucked each other. My dress was still pooled at my waist and my knickers halfway down my thighs. He didn't bother removing them. He merely stood behind me and bent me forward slightly to give him a good angle. The moment he thrust inside me, I moaned and my breath misted the glass.

"Look at them, little lamb. Can you see their dicks pumping in and out of her?"

He was close to my face, running his teeth along the shell of my ear.

The dark-haired man's cock was now back in her mouth. She was being ravaged by the three men. They weren't giving her body any mercy as they fucked her in unison.

"Yes," I hissed when he gripped my hip and pounded into me the way I needed.

"They're going to make her come all over them. Make her come the way they make you."

"Pres," I whined as his fingers rubbed over my clit.

"Mmm, that's right, lamb. You're going to come with her."

Prescott shifted his angle, making me cry out from the way he was thrusting into me. My breath kept fogging the glass, but I could still see what was happening in front of me. Prescott pressed his free hand on one of mine, holding me there.

The three men were fucking the girl ever harder. She was gagging all over the

dark-haired man's cock, her saliva dribbling down her chin.

"Fuck," he grunted as he erupted down her throat, spilling his cum.

The chestnut-haired one was rubbing her clit and making her squirm on him and the auburn-haired man's dicks. The dark-haired one pulled his cock from her mouth, rubbing his cum all over her lips and chin. She didn't swallow, just kept her mouth open and turned to us, showing me and Prescott what he'd given her.

"Jesus," Prescott hissed in my ear.

The girl swallowed and smiled before turning her attention back to the two men still fucking her. The dark-haired man sat down and watched them. I couldn't help but wonder if he enjoyed watching as much as me and Prescott did.

"Does our dirty whore want their cum filling her holes?" the dark-haired man said with a smirk.

"Yes," she moaned, "please."

"Then be a good little girl and come for them."

Prescott circled my clit harder, rubbing me in the way he knew would make me explode all over him.

"Hold on for me, lamb," he whispered. "Hold on until she comes."

I squirmed on his cock, trying to stop from coming. All the orgasm denial Francis had done with me made it easier to keep myself from falling too quickly. I panted against the glass, wanting to see it. Needing to watch the moment she fell apart.

"Oh, fuck, I'm... I'm going to come," she cried out.

"Not yet, lamb, just wait," Prescott told me.

I moaned at the same time she did. Her body bucked with her climax. The men were grunting and cursing as she rode the wave.

"Let go. Come for me, little lamb. Come all over my dick."

I bit my lip as the two men started erupting inside the woman. Then I was lost to my own orgasm wreaking havoc through my body. I let out a low whining sound, my breath covering the glass as I panted out my release. Prescott grunted behind me, continuing to rub my clit until it was so over sensitised, I cried with it.

"I can't," I gasped. "Please."

He seemed to understand as he stopped, pressing his hand against my other one instead. Then he was fucking me into the window, squishing me against it. I was in no state to complain, not that I would have. Feeling his body pounding into mine with his desperation was intoxicating.

“Fuck, little lamb,” he groaned when he came, spilling inside me with hot pulses of cum.

I pressed my cheek to the glass, not even caring about the people on the other side. All I cared about was Prescott and me locked together after our mutual releases.

“I love you,” he whispered, pressing a kiss to my neck.

“Love you too.”

He pulled me away from the glass and walked us back to the sofa, settling me down in his lap. He hugged me close, pressing kisses to my face.

“Do you understand now?” he asked after a minute when we’d caught our breath.

“Yeah, I do... that was quite something.”

“I can’t say it’s as good as when I watch you, but it was pretty fucking amazing.”

I grinned.

“Nothing beats me?”

“No one in this world is more beautiful and as responsive as you, sweetness. You’re everything.”

I turned to him and pressed a kiss to his cheek.

“My sweet king.”

“I’m not sweet.”

“You are to me.”

He rolled his eyes and shook his head, but I knew he was secretly pleased by my praise. My king liked to be admired, even if he refused to admit it.

When we’d both recovered, we cleaned up and got our clothes in order. We drank the bottles of water Prescott had got out of the fridge, then made our way out of the room. The four people had left after they’d finished, presumably to clean themselves up, and the other room was dark.

Prescott led me back into the club. Neither of us felt inclined to linger to watch the show going on. There were a couple of women on the poles, but I

was more interested in staring up at my man who'd just entirely rocked my world by bringing me here and giving me an experience to remember.

We collected our coats from the reception area and pulled them on before stepping outside into what could only be described as a downpour. Prescott tried to hurry me along to the car, but I looked up at the sky as the rain pounded down on my face.

"Sweetness, come on, it's pissing it down."

I turned my head and smiled at him but didn't say a word.

"We're going to get soaked if you don't come along."

I allowed myself to be pulled towards the car park, but not before the idea of what I wanted Prescott to do to me in the rain consumed me. We ran through the rain, me laughing as Prescott cursed. When we got under the cover of the car park, he shook his head, his hair all wet. I tugged at his hand to get his attention.

"I want you to chase me."

His mouth twitched, his blue eyes darkening at the prospect before he frowned.

"Right now?"

I pressed myself closer.

"Yes, right now."

Perhaps it was the freedom I'd felt in the moments we'd shared together in the club, watching other people fuck. Or perhaps I was just high off the whole experience. Either way, I needed this. I was desperate to have him chase me down, press me into the mud, and fuck me. I wanted him to be my wolf. The one who would catch his lamb in the middle of the night in the pouring rain.

"Drake is going to kill me."

I went up on my tiptoes and pressed a kiss to his lips.

"So what? You won't let anything happen to me."

Prescott wrapped his arms around me.

"No, I won't. You're safe with me."

"Then please take me somewhere you can chase me."

He sighed and pressed a kiss to my forehead.

"I can't deny you when you ask me for something."

"You know you want to."

He let me go and took my hand, pulling me over to the car.

“I will never turn down chasing you, sweetness. Never.”

Those blue eyes of his glinted as he opened the car door for me.

“Now get in. I have just the place in mind.”

I jumped in the car, vibrating with excitement and adrenaline. Tonight, pretty much all my fantasies with Prescott were coming true. I was one lucky girl to have this man who owned my heart and my soul. The one who was so willing to do anything to make me happy.

My Pestilence, you're king in my heart.

TWENTY SIX

PRESCOTT

Scarlett was going to get me into so much shit with Drake, but I no longer cared. No fucking way I was going to let that fuck, Stuart Carver, ruin our lives. We deserved to live the way we wanted, regardless of what he was up to. Besides, we were going to destroy him. Murder the man in cold blood, so we would be safe. I wanted him dead for everything he'd done to Scarlett. The way he'd fucking abused her sickened me to my core. I couldn't wait until he got what was coming to him. Until we gutted him and anyone else who'd aided him when it came to abusing my woman.

I found on-street parking as the park was closed to cars at night and pulled up. We both slid our coats off as there was no point wearing them when we were about to get very dirty together. Scarlett got out with me, looking like the cat who got the cream. I took her hand, and we walked towards the park together in the downpour.

By the time we reached the woods I was aiming for in Richmond Park, both of us were soaking wet. I'd kept an eye out the whole way in case anyone was following us, but there was nothing suspicious I could see. Didn't hurt to be careful, especially when Stuart had sent three men after her when Drake had taken her to visit Lylah's grave.

We'd meticulously planned the visit to Desecration. I'd taken one of our lesser-used cars that weren't in any of our names. This impromptu chase was unplanned, but I was incapable of denying Scarlett the things she wanted, not when I wanted them too.

I turned to her as we stood together just under the cover of the trees and cupped her face with one hand.

“Stay in the woods, okay? We don’t want to get caught here.”

“I will. I promise.”

I stroked her face and pressed a kiss to her forehead.

“Run.”

My hand dropped. She gave me a smile, then she turned and ran into the trees. They were closer together than the woods we’d run through before. I gave her a minute before I gave chase. Given the danger of us being out here, I wasn’t going to draw it out. I was going to catch my lamb, shove her down in the mud, and give it to her without restraint. It had been raining hard for quite some time, so the ground was soggy, even in the densely packed trees.

I could see her up ahead, scrambling through the trees and trying not to trip over the undergrowth. It made me smile. Scarlett didn’t like to make things easy on herself.

There was no calling out to each other this time. We didn’t require taunts. She needed to run. I needed to chase. The rain was heavy. The trees creaked with the wind and I could hear thunder rolling in the distance. It made it a little eerie. The atmosphere was dense and unyielding, making me really feel like a wolf hunting down his prey. And what delightful prey she was. Her wet dress clung to her body. It was lucky it wasn’t long or it would be harder for her to run.

I wasn’t going at full pelt, wanting her to feel the mix of fear and adrenaline that came with the hunt. The closer I got, the more I could hear her heavy breathing and her feet pounding against the wet undergrowth. She could hear me too. Scarlett kept looking back to see if I was there. And when she spied me, she tried to run faster but was hampered by the weather and the trees surrounding us. The moan of fear she let out had my heart pounding harder against my chest. I wanted to grab her. I needed to feel her against me again.

The show at Desecration had been pretty fucking incredible. The experience I shared with her was unlike anything else. But this? Chasing her? It was my favourite. The primal, animalistic need inside me wasn’t often sated. Scarlett was the perfect prey. She was all of my fantasies rolled into one. The way she accepted and embraced the things I desired was unparalleled. She was everything.

I reached out, my fingers brushing her braid and narrowly missing her dress. She ran harder as if she realised she was about to get pounced on, making a

sharp turn left to throw me off. I let out a growl as the thunder rumbled.

My hand went out again, catching hold of her braid this time and yanking her backwards into me. She slammed into my chest, sending me a few steps back to keep balanced. I spun her around, catching sight of her scared expression before I was shoving her down in the undergrowth and covering her body with my own. She panted against me. I could feel her heart hammering against her ribcage. I pinned one of her hands in the mud before catching her mouth in a bruising kiss. The moment our lips met, it was a wild frenzy of pulling at each other, wanting to be closer, needing more, desperate for everything.

I shoved up her wet dress as her free hand fumbled with my clothes. She whined in frustration when she couldn't unbutton my chinos. The wet fabric was making everything so much harder. I let go of her hand to help her, tearing at my clothes to free my aching dick. Once tonight wasn't enough. It would never be enough with Scarlett. Never.

"Pres," she gasped as I pulled aside her knickers and shoved my fingers inside her.

I covered her mouth with mine, kissing her as I pumped my fingers into her wet pussy and got my cock out. She wriggled in the muddy ground, getting herself all messy. My knees were already squelching in the mud as I moved closer to her. I didn't care one fucking bit about the mud and the rain. All I wanted was her. My beautiful little lamb who was already clawing at me, needing me to fuck and claim her all over again.

I ripped my fingers from her pussy and replaced them with my cock, thrusting deep. She cried into my mouth at my roughness. Her legs wrapped around me, encouraging me to give it to her harder. I bit her bottom lip, making her pant and shove her hands under my shirt to scratch her nails down my back. I groaned, pressing kisses down her jaw and neck. My lips brushed over the scars West had given her. The neckline of her dress was low enough so everyone could see it. Scarlett was proud of wearing his mark now. She wanted to show everyone she belonged to War just as she belonged to Pestilence, Famine and Death.

"Bite me," she panted. "Make me yours."

I nuzzled the top of her breast before digging my teeth into her skin. Her nails dragged down my back, marking me in return. I growled against her skin,

biting harder to bruise her. To show her she belonged to me.

My knees started sliding in the mud, so I slammed a hand down to steady myself, fucking her harder. I couldn't help myself, acting on sheer fucking instinct and need. There was nothing but me, her, the trees, the mud and the rain hammering down on my back through the canopy. Scarlett was right. We needed this experience together. We needed it to set us free. She might run from me, but she always allowed herself to get caught. She wanted it. My girl would never abandon me.

"Mine," I growled, letting go of her skin so I could crash my mouth to hers again. "All fucking *mine*."

She couldn't respond with my tongue in her mouth, tasting and devouring her whole. Scarlett did something to me. She made me wilder. She set me free from my burdens and shame. I might hold her heart, protect her and be the one she came to for comfort, but she did the same for me. This woman had the power to heal me from the inside out just by being her.

I let go of her mouth to press my face into her neck, so close to the edge of everything.

"I love you, sweetness," I choked out.

Scarlett wasn't just my little lamb, she was the sweetest thing I'd ever tasted. The sweetest woman who opened her heart to four broken men, who needed her more than they needed air to breathe. She was dark like us, but she was brilliant and bright too. She was our light. There in the spaces where I ended. And I was there in the spaces she began. We were destined for each other.

Her nails drew down my back as I adjusted the angle between us. I shoved a hand down, finding her clit and rubbing it while I fucked her pussy. I fucked my woman into the mud, getting her dirty. It stuck to both of us while the rain battled to wash it away.

It was almost poetic, this moment. A symbol of our relationship. How we were so in tune with each other and yet the passion between us burnt so hot, it was an inferno blazing, devouring the two of us in a pit of twisted desire.

"Pres, fuck," she gasped right before she exploded, her body bucking and trembling beneath mine.

The moment she went limp, I pulled my hand away, gripped her hip and drove into her, seeking out my own end. I kissed her lips despite the fact she

was holding onto me weakly as if I'd sucked the life out of her. I would look after her and make it all better when we were done.

My climax hit like a fucking freight train. It raced up my body, ripping me apart and knitting me back together in the same breath. I collapsed on top of her, pressing her deeper into the muddy mess we'd made of the ground. She held me to her as if she didn't want me going anywhere.

"I love you," she whispered against my rain-drenched neck, "I love you so much."

Now we were spent, both of us trembled with the cold. I needed to get her back to the car and warmed up. I cupped her face with my palm, still needing to catch my breath. Still needing to regain my equilibrium.

"You're shivering," I murmured.

"So are you."

I chuckled.

"We're wet, muddy and cold, I think it figures."

Her arms around me tightened as if she was trying to give me her limited body heat. Was there anything my beautiful girl wouldn't do for me?

I was about to pull away from her when I froze at the sound of voices.

"You saw them come in here?"

"Yeah, I swear it, mate."

"It's too fucking dark, man, I can't see them anywhere."

Scarlett's fingers dug into my skin.

"Let's split up. Can cover more ground that way. The things we fucking do."

"Too right."

The noise of them moving off in different directions met my ears. I was up and off Scarlett the next moment, pulling her with me and pushing her behind the nearest tree. I covered her body with mine, pressing her into the bark.

"Help me with my clothes," I hissed in her ear.

She fumbled between us, tugging her wet dress down her legs before she got me put away too, zipping up my chinos in the process.

"Stay quiet, okay? Don't move."

She nodded. Her body shook against mine, but she was holding herself there, trying not to make a sound. I could hear one of the men moving through the undergrowth despite the rain. He wasn't being very stealthy. Peering out, I could

see him walking a few feet away with a light in his hand. My hand slid into my pocket, gripping a knife I kept in there. I pulled it out and then I left Scarlett, stalking after the guy with quiet steps. Knowing she would stay unless someone found her, I didn't look back to check on my girl. She wasn't stupid. Scarlett knew the risks.

I watched him as I moved after him. The man was so unaware of his surroundings. The rain didn't help, but even his fucking flashlight wasn't doing him any favours. Stuart was seriously getting sloppy if he sent these idiots to do his dirty work. Then again, Drake had said the men who came after him and Scarlett weren't the brightest sparks, either. Hired muscle didn't need to be smart, but Stuart knew we weren't stupid men. Clearly, he was desperate to get us. Desperate enough not to be clever about it. It would be his biggest mistake, underestimating the Four Horsemen and their goddess Nyx.

I got close enough to the guy to catch him unawares. I was on him the next moment, dragging him up against a tree with my knife pressed to his throat and my other arm locked around his chest. Before he could say a word, I growled low in his ear.

“You better stay silent or I'll slit your fucking throat and leave you to bleed out.”

TWENTY SEVEN

PRESCOTT

The man shook in my grasp but didn't say a word. There was nothing I wouldn't do to keep Scarlett safe, including killing this man. I'd known coming out to the woods was possibly a bad idea, but I couldn't help it when it came to my girl. We'd needed this. And now we were going to fight for our survival. Fight to stay safe, regardless of Stuart's fucking plans.

"You listen here," I murmured in the man's ear, "you're going to find your little friend and you're going to leave these woods. You won't come after us. If you do, I won't hesitate to gut you. Is that understood?"

Before the man had a chance to respond, I heard a high-pitched scream echoing through the woods.

Scarlett.

"Fuck!"

Then I was moving, dragging the guy along with me as I ran through the trees to get to her. The other guy must have found her. I'd known leaving her was risky, but I needed to get rid of this guy so we could escape. If she was taken away, I would never fucking forgive myself.

A minute later, I could hear the other man cursing and grunting. There was clearly a struggle going on, as the light he was holding was moving around wildly. I slammed the man I was dragging up against a tree.

"You fucking stay there, you hear me."

He nodded, fear lacing his features. Then I was running towards the light. The scene I was met with had me in a full-on fucking rage. The guy was struggling with Scarlett in his grasp. She was fighting for her life, kicking out and trying to bite his hand over her mouth.

“Listen here, you little bitch, you better fucking quit it.”

No one, and I mean no fucking one, got to call her that except me and the others during sex.

I leapt, crashing into both of them. My knife slid into the guy’s back, piercing through flesh. He howled in pain. Then I ripped him away from Scarlett, pulling him backwards with me while tugging the knife out and stabbing it into him again, right where his kidney was.

“You think you can take her from me? You think I’m going to fucking let you have her?”

He struggled against me, but I kept stabbing him again and again, making very sure he would bleed out and die. There was nothing else but the need to destroy him for having the audacity to try to deprive me of the love of my life. No one got to touch her. She was fucking mine.

“You came after the wrong fucking people. I’m your worst fucking nightmare.”

I threw him on the ground and knelt down on his back before shoving the knife between his ribs and piercing his lung. I did the same to the other side. He was wriggling, clawing at the dirt, but I didn’t give a shit. He wheezed as I pressed him harder into the mud. Digging the knife into his other kidney for good measure, I kept him there, knowing he was going to bleed out. His lungs would collapse too.

“Pres,” came Scarlett’s voice.

I looked up, finding her watching us without any sort of judgement.

“He has to die.”

She nodded and pointed to the other man. He was staring at me in absolute horror like he had no idea how vicious and unrelenting I could be. The fool didn’t know the lengths I would go to keep Scarlett from harm. She was mine to protect. Fucking mine.

“I told him to stay the fuck where he was. If he moves, I will chase him down and kill him too.”

There was no way this guy beneath me was surviving what I’d done to him. The man against the tree looked like he was about to piss himself at my words. Well, he better take me the fuck seriously. I wouldn’t hesitate if he tried anything.

“Get off me,” the man below wheezed.

“Shut the fuck up and die quietly, you piece of shit.”

I pushed his face into the mud with a hand to the back of his head. He struggled harder, the mud clearly getting into his mouth and airway as he tried to get me off him. We were silent as the rain continued to batter down on us and the man’s movements grew sluggish. I let him go the moment he stopped, checking his neck. There was no pulse.

I stood and faced the man against the tree. Walking towards him slowly, my bloody knife still clutched in my hand, I saw how pale he looked. Scarlett had her arms wrapped around herself, and she was shivering. Every part of me wanted to go to her, warm my girl up and look after her, but right now, I had to deal with this fuck.

I reached for him and put my knife to his throat, pressing against it, but not hard enough to break the skin.

“Listen here, fuckhead, if you want to walk away with your life, you’re going to do exactly as I say.”

He didn’t respond, but he’d seen me kill his friend. He knew I wasn’t playing around.

“You’re going to take a message to Stuart. I fucking know it was him who hired you, so don’t even try to deny it. You tell him we’re coming. We’re fucking coming for him and he’s not going to walk away with his life. He stole what was ours and hurt her. We don’t take kindly to anyone causing pain to what’s ours. Is that understood?”

He nodded and whimpered.

“Good.” I turned my attention to Scarlett. “Search his pockets for me, little lamb.”

She came over to us and started going through the man’s jeans without hesitation. From his back pocket, she pulled out a wallet. Then she was looking through it. She tugged out his driving licence and showed it to me.

“Now, Terrance, is it? I have another task. You’re going to take care of him for me.” I nodded over to the dead man in the mud. “You’ll get rid of his body and make sure you leave no fucking traces of what happened here.”

The guy swallowed at my words, but I wasn’t fucking done.

“If I find out you didn’t follow through, I will hunt you down and gut you

like a fucking pig. I will feed you your fucking guts and choke you to death with them, you hear me? I will do it in front of your family if you have one, then I'll kill them too."

The stench of urine hit me a moment later. I smiled at him. I'd clearly scared him half to fucking death. Served him right. He tried to come at me and my woman. I wouldn't let that stand.

"Do we understand each other?"

"Y-y-yes."

"Good. Now, you're going to let me and her leave whilst you deal with him."

He nodded and I released him. Scarlett gave the wallet to me and I tucked it into my pocket.

"I'm taking this just in case you decide to make the wrong decision, Terrance. There is no fucking place you can hide from me and my friends, so don't disappoint me."

I took Scarlett's hand, giving him one last significant look before I pulled her away from the scene. She didn't hesitate to run through the forest with me until we made it out onto open ground. The two of us didn't stop running through the park, both aware of the urgency. We needed to get the fuck away from here as soon as possible. Neither of us spoke. I had blood and mud all over me. This was an absolute fucking nightmare. I swear to fuck if that shit didn't do as I said, I would lose it on him. There would be no holding me back.

When we reached the car, I got Scarlett inside and turned the engine on, whacking the heating right up to warm her. I didn't see to her straight away. Something had me wondering how the fuck they'd found out where we'd gone. My first instinct was to check the outside of the car despite the rain. I looked around it and underneath everything. Pausing, I saw something sticking to the underside of the bumper that shouldn't be there. I reached out and ripped it off the car. They'd fucking stuck a tracker on it. I cursed, threw it on the ground and stamped on it several times until it smashed. Then I got in the car, put my seatbelt on, connected my phone up to the Bluetooth and set off.

"Are you okay?" I asked her, knowing we had to leave immediately.

"I'm just cold."

Scarlett was curled in on herself on the seat.

"I need to call Drake. They had a fucking tracker on the car, so I'm guessing

they might have put them on all the ones we own.”

She nodded. I hit dial on Drake’s number. He answered after the second ring.

“Where the fuck are the two of you? You were meant to be back well over an hour ago.”

“You have to promise me you won’t get mad at Scar for what I’m about to tell you.”

“Prescott.”

“Promise me, Drake.”

“Fine, I promise. Now, what the fuck is going on?”

I sighed, rubbing my face as I navigated the streets of London. Then I explained what happened after we left the club, not leaving out a single thing about what happened with the two men. Drake kept silent the whole time, letting me get it out without interrupting. And when I was done, I could practically feel his anger bleeding through the phone.

“Fuck. For fuck’s sake. Jesus Christ, this is a fucking mess.”

“You’re telling me.”

“Are you on your way back?”

I’d thought about taking Scarlett home, but I wasn’t sure it was safe given they were clearly watching the building and tracking our fucking vehicles.

“No, I’m taking her to Mum’s. You and the others have to make sure the building is safe, check all the cars and up our security. We’re not letting anyone take her from Fortuity again, you hear me? I won’t let it happen.”

“Are you sure that’s a good idea? Rosie is going to question why you’ve turned up at her place in the middle of the fucking night with Scarlett in tow.”

Mum was going to give me such a fucking hard time over it, but to keep Scarlett safe, I would do anything.

“Eliza and Jasper know about us. It’s only a matter of time before Mum finds out. I might as well get it over and done with now.”

“Fine. You keep her safe, Pres. We’ll deal with shit here. You sure that guy will get rid of the body?”

“I’m pretty fucking sure. Doubt he wants me coming after him and his family. Not after what I threatened.”

Scarlett snorted from beside me. She’d heard every word of what I’d said to the guy.

“Is our girl okay?”

“I’m fine, Drake,” she replied for me, “I promise. I’m just cold and tired.”

“I love you, little wisp.”

“Love you too.”

“Take care of her, Pres. I’ll call you tomorrow.”

He hung up. Scarlett looked at me.

“You sure about taking us to Rosie’s?”

I reached over and stroked her thigh.

“Yes. It’ll be fine. You’ll see.”

We lapsed into silence as I drove. What happened tonight was fucked up.

Scarlett fell asleep during the journey. When I pulled up at Mum’s house, I had to wake her. It had stopped raining by then. We’d be safer here than anywhere else, considering Mum didn’t have any close neighbours. I held Scarlett’s hand as we walked up to the front door and rang the doorbell. We were met with the sound of dogs barking. Boxer, Bean and Bone were Mum’s Labrador Retrievers.

The door was pulled open a minute later, revealing Mum in a dressing gown with her blonde hair up. She’d clearly locked the dogs in the kitchen, as they weren’t on her heels. Her blue eyes widened when she took me in. I’d put my coat on and wiped the blood from my hands and face, but there was still mud all over my trousers and trainers.

“Prescott? What on earth are you doing here? What happened?”

Then her eyes fell on the girl beside me and her mouth dropped open. Our clothes were still damp. Scarlett had muddy streaks all over her legs and arms.

“Who is... oh my god.”

“Hi, Mum, listen, I know this is a shock, but could you perhaps let us in? Scarlett’s freezing and I need to put her to bed.”

Mum stood back to allow the two of us into the house. I didn’t lean down to kiss her cheek as I usually would. She shut the door behind us and locked it.

“I’m going to put her in the shower and myself too. I’ll talk to you after I’ve put her to bed, okay?”

She gave me a nod, but I could see her wanting to ask me a million and one questions. Right now, my priority was my girl. I tugged her away to the bathroom on the ground floor, glad my mum had tiled floors. Easier to clean

the mud off them we were traipsing in. Scarlett came willingly and let me undress her after we got into the bathroom. We walked into the shower together when we were both bare. Scarlett's eyes were drooping. My girl was absolutely exhausted.

We washed thoroughly before I turned off the shower and bundled her up in a towel. Then I carried her from the bathroom after slinging one around my hips and took her upstairs into the bedroom Mum kept for me here when I visited. Setting her down on the bed, I dug out one of the t-shirts I'd left here and pulled it over her head.

"Pres..."

"Shh, it's okay. Get into bed and try to get some sleep. I'll be up soon, okay, sweetness?"

I tucked her up underneath the sheets and pressed a kiss to her forehead. I'd done my best to dry her braided hair, but it was still damp. She didn't seem to mind as she closed her eyes and drifted off.

I pulled on some jogging bottoms and a t-shirt before making my way downstairs. I gathered up all of our wet, muddy and blood-soaked clothes, taking them into the utility room next to the kitchen and stuffing them in the washing machine before turning it on. Then I grabbed our trainers and put them in the sink, washing away the mud and grime with the water. I set those on the side when I was done.

Taking a breath, I made my way into the kitchen. The dogs barked at me and I petted them so they'd settle down. Mum was sitting at the kitchen table with a mug between her fingers. I took a seat and dragged my fingers through my hair.

"What's going on, Prescott?"

"It's better that you don't know details."

"My son turns up at the door covered in mud with a girl who disappeared ten years ago in tow and you expect me to not ask questions?"

I sighed and looked away. The three dogs curled up around Mum's feet when they realised I wasn't going to give them more attention.

"I expect you to trust me when I tell you if I involve you in this, you won't like what I have to say."

Mum had no clue what me and the others had engaged in for the past ten years. We'd all made sure our parents were none the wiser about our activities. It

was better for them that way. And yet today, I'd brought Scarlett here for her safety.

"Are you in trouble?"

"Yes, and no. The only thing you need to know is Scarlett is back." I paused, hating keeping things from her but knowing I had to, for all our sakes. "We need to stay a couple of days... if that's okay."

Mum reached out across the table and took my hands.

"You can always stay, you know that. And Scarlett is welcome too."

"Thank you. Is it okay if we talk tomorrow? I don't want to be away from her."

Mum scrutinised me for a long moment.

"Are you and Scarlett...?"

"Together? Yes."

"I always thought it was her and West."

I shook my head and smiled.

"It's a long story. One I'll tell you tomorrow."

"Okay. You get off to bed. My questions can wait."

I got up and gave her a kiss on the cheek before making my way upstairs. Scarlett was dead to the world as I slid into bed next to her. I wrapped my arms around my girl and held her against my chest before I fell into oblivion myself. Things had got far more fucked up than we needed them to be. There were no two fucking ways about it. We needed to go after Stuart and bring him the fuck down. He wasn't going to stop until we were dead. We had to get to him first before he destroyed us all for good.

TWENTY EIGHT

SCARLETT

I awoke to the sound of birdsong. Prying my tired eyes open, I didn't recognise the room I was in. I twisted in the bed, finding it empty. My hand stretched out to find lingering warmth there. I hadn't been alone for long.

When I looked around the room after savouring that warmth for a long moment, I found a little black cat sleeping on the end of the bed next to a larger ginger one. It made me smile. Prescott told me Rosie had six cats.

I sat up abruptly, making both cats give me evils. Last night came flooding back to me in waves. We were at Rosie's house because Stuart was tracking us and had sent men to find me. Prescott had viciously stabbed one of them to death right after we'd gone to watch a sex show, then he'd chased me down and fucked me. It has been the rawest and most wild sex I'd ever had with him, cementing our bond with each other so deep, I could never tear him out of me. I didn't want to. Not even after I'd watched him kill and threaten another man to protect me.

I rubbed my face and gave the cats an apologetic look. Not like I intended to disturb them, but last night's events were fucking crazy in good and bad ways.

Next to the cats sat a pile of clothes. Presumably, Prescott had left them for me. I hauled myself out of bed and pulled them on. They were his, so miles too big for me, but being wrapped up in his scent comforted me. I tightened the drawstrings on the shorts and snuggled into his hoodie. Clearly, Prescott kept clothes here for when he visited his mum.

I ventured out into the hallway, finding an upstairs bathroom and going about my business. Then I padded downstairs, following the sound of voices into the kitchen. It was a big space with a huge kitchen table off to one side. Prescott sat

with Rosie, both with mugs of tea in their hands. They looked so alike, it was uncanny.

At Rosie's feet sat three brown Labradors, who all looked at me as I entered. Prescott noticed me next. He immediately got up and came over to me, tucking a hand under my chin and stroking my skin.

"Sweetness, did you sleep okay?"

"Like the dead."

I crashed out the moment my head hit the pillow last night. My hair wasn't too worse for wear this morning, still tamed by my braid.

"I noticed."

I wanted to wrap my arms around him, hold him tight, and tell him how much I loved him. Thank him for keeping me safe last night. However, I was conscious of the fact his mother was staring at the two of us. It made me wonder what he'd told her.

He drew me over to the table, giving his mother a tentative smile.

"Hi," I said, trying to remain calm.

While Francis' parents had been very welcoming and accepting, I wasn't sure what Rosie would think of me being back. Not to mention her feelings on the matter of her son being in a relationship with the same woman as his three best friends. Rosie was a free-thinking spirit, but even I understood this wasn't the most normal of circumstances.

Rosie got up out of her chair and wrapped me up in her arms. Her patchouli scent surrounded me, reminding me of my childhood spent in and out of her flat as we lived in the same building.

"It's so good to see you, Scarlett."

"You too," I murmured, unsure of what else to say.

She pulled away and gave me a bright smile.

"I'll make you some tea. Would you like breakfast too?"

I nodded.

"Thank you."

"Oh, it's quite all right. Please make yourself at home."

She bustled over to the kettle, leaving me with Prescott who took me in his arms and buried his face in my braided hair.

"My lamb," he whispered, rubbing my back in slow circles.

“I’m fine, Pres.”

It wasn’t a lie. I was fine. Last night didn’t bother me. I’d seen enough death now. And I certainly wasn’t scared of Prescott for what he’d done. If anything, I only fell deeper in love with him, if that was even possible. He protected me. It made me aware I had a seriously skewed sense of justice, right and wrong, but I no longer cared about any of those things. Not when I was with them. The loves of my life.

He let me go and pulled me over to sit down next to him at the table. His blue eyes were intent on mine as he placed a possessive hand on my thigh.

“What did you tell her?” I whispered, looking over at Rosie, who was busy preparing breakfast.

We had turned up on her doorstep, rain-drenched and muddy. It was a good thing she hadn’t seen the blood on Prescott’s polo shirt. That would have raised alarm bells and we couldn’t afford for Rosie to find out what he’d done last night.

“That you came to work for us and things happened... then you were pissed after you remembered us, but we’re all okay now. She doesn’t know about Stuart or any of the other shit we’ve done. It’s going to stay that way.”

“Did you tell her we’re all together?”

“Not yet.”

I gave him a look.

“You can’t keep it from her.”

“She knows we’re together.”

I snorted.

“Well, I think that’s pretty obvious.”

He leant closer and pressed his forehead to mine. I slid my hand along his shoulder and cupped the back of his neck.

“Is it? Should I make it even more obvious?”

“Pres—”

I couldn’t finish my sentence. He kissed me, making me sway into him. Then I pulled away, putting space between us. Rosie was watching us. I couldn’t read her expression. Was she okay with me being with her son? We’d been inseparable as kids, but we were grown up now. I didn’t know if it might be weird. It wasn’t for Eliza and Jasper, but they were different. They only wanted

Francis to be happy when he'd spent so many years tortured over the fact he felt like second best. They saw the way I raised him up when we were kids and how I did the same for him now.

I could only hope Rosie would see how much I loved Prescott. How I would do anything for him. He was my entire world.

"What's wrong?"

I looked at Prescott who was frowning at me.

"I'm just worried she will hate it," I whispered when Rosie went back to making breakfast.

"What? You being with us?"

I nodded. He stroked my cheek, those blue eyes of his softening.

"Listen, I don't need her approval. I love you, little lamb. I couldn't leave you even if I tried."

He let go of my thigh and wrapped an arm around me, drawing me against his chest. His warmth and reassurance bolstered me. We'd been in this bubble between the five of us and now reality was intruding, reminding me our relationship wasn't something society would look upon favourably. It wasn't normal. But I didn't care about normal. I cared about us.

We drew apart when Rosie brought breakfast over. She'd made a full English for us, something I appreciated after all the energy I expended last night. She didn't ask where I'd been, only querying how I was now and if I was glad to be back with my best friends. Prescott and I skirted around the issue of the real nature of our relationship until I nudged him with my foot after she asked if we were happy together.

"Mum, I feel like I need to explain something," he said, rubbing the back of his neck with one hand.

"About what?"

"Me and Scar... and the others."

Rosie raised her blonde eyebrows, eyeing the two of us with concern.

"Drake, Francis and West?"

"Yeah."

"So tell me."

She looked between the two of us when he didn't immediately respond. I leant forward on my elbows.

“You asked if we’re happy and we are,” I started, trying to think of the right words to say. “Pres, West, Frankie, Drake, and I are happy together... as a family.”

When Rosie frowned, Prescott took one of my hands, entwining our fingers together.

“What Scar means to say is we’re all in a relationship with her and it’s okay if you’re not on board with that, Mum, but we’re not going to hide it from anyone. We love her and she loves us. I won’t abandon her. Not now. Not ever.”

She didn’t speak for a long moment, her eyes remaining fixed on her son. Then she got up and came around the table before wrapping Prescott up in her arms.

“Do you have any idea how proud I am of you?”

Prescott froze as if he wasn’t expecting her reaction.

“Mum?”

She pulled back and clasped his face between her hands.

“You’ve always worried you’ll turn out like your father, but you’re nothing like him. You’re loyal, kind, and caring. Ezra doesn’t deserve to be called your father. He doesn’t deserve you. I might wish I’d never laid eyes on the man, but he gave me you. I love you so much and I want you to take care of Scarlett. I want you to love her the way I know you can. Make sure those three take care of her too. Francis is a good egg, but I know what West and Drake are like. You keep them in line.”

“Scar does that well enough herself.”

“I imagine she does. Never let you boys get away with anything, that one.”

Rosie pressed a kiss to Prescott’s forehead, giving him a bright smile. Tears welled in my eyes at the sight of it. Then she came around to me and I found myself caught up in her arms.

“If there’s anyone who can keep those boys and my son from doing anything stupid, it’s you, Scarlett.” She drew away and looked at me. “You were always saying you were destined for each other. I suppose this isn’t really surprising under the circumstances.”

I didn’t like to tell Rosie they’d done a lot of stupid and fucked up things, regardless of my presence or intervention. Instead, I smiled and nodded. She patted my shoulder before going back to her own chair. The three of us finished

up breakfast, the tension in the air somewhat dissipated from earlier.

Prescott and I stayed in the kitchen to deal with the dishes while Rosie took her dogs out for a walk. Prescott washed and I dried. He leant up against the counter when he was done, watching me as I put the plates away.

“What?” I asked when I folded up the tea towel and placed it on the counter.

“That was easier than I expected.”

“Telling her about all of us.”

He nodded. I reached out and took his hand.

“She watched us grow up together, Pres. It’s not like I’m some random girl you all decided to share between you. What we have is different. It’s special.”

He looked conflicted, making me wonder what was going through his head. When he let go of my hand, I almost protested, but he took his phone out and fiddled with it.

“I’m ready,” he said after a moment, staring down at the screen.

“For what?”

“To delete Ezra from my life.”

I moved closer and peered at his screen. His thumb hovered over the delete contact button.

“Yeah?”

“Mum’s right. He never deserved me. He’s a shit excuse for a man, and I don’t respect him. I might not be perfect, but I know I’m a damn sight better than him. I would never abandon my family.”

He pressed down, erasing Ezra’s contact details from his phone. Then he let out a breath and looked at me.

“I have you to thank, you know.”

“Me? I didn’t do anything.”

He shook his head, popping the phone on the counter and capturing me up in his arms.

“You came back to me, little lamb. For ten years, I hoped I’d get to see your face again. To see you laugh, smile and tell me when I’m being an idiot. You never abandoned me. You fought your way back even if you didn’t know that’s what you were doing at the time. Every day, you show me how strong and brave you are in the face of all the shit you’ve been through. And you love me, flaws and all. You’ve done everything, sweetness, absolutely everything just by being

you.”

I reached up and cupped his face, letting a tear fall down my cheek from his words. He had no idea how proud I was of him for being able to let go of his father for good. Ezra had done nothing for him other than be his sperm donor.

“I just love you, Pres. All I’ve ever done is love you.”

He pressed his forehead against mine.

“That’s all I need you to do, sweetness. Keep loving me no matter what happens.”

I kissed him, melting into his embrace. Loving him was effortless. And I’d keep doing it until the very end.

TWENTY NINE

FRANCIS

Drake and West weren't downstairs when the lift doors opened to reveal Prescott and Scarlett. The first thing she did was run across the room and barrel into me, almost knocking me off my feet from the impact.

"Hey, steady on there," I said, walking a few steps back into the counter to regain my balance.

The next thing I knew, she'd climbed on me, wrapping her legs around my waist and burying her face in my neck as she clung to me.

"I missed you so much."

She'd only been away for two days and yet our place felt empty without her. I stroked her back and breathed her in.

"I'm here. I'm right here."

She pulled away to look into my eyes.

"Take me upstairs please."

I raised an eyebrow, but she continued to look at me with an unreadable expression. Not wanting to deny her, I carried her towards the stairs. I caught Prescott's eye on the way, but he merely shrugged as if to say she hadn't told him what she wanted from me. She'd sounded perfectly okay on the phone last night when I'd spoken to her about when they were coming home.

"Don't you want to say hello to Drake and West?"

"I will later. I need you right now."

Her words made me move faster. There was nothing in this world that would stop me from giving Scarlett exactly what she needed when she asked for it.

When we got into my room, I set her down and shut the door. She stared up at me with an almost pleading look on her face.

“What is it, Scar?”

She reached out and took my hand, pressing it to her cheek.

“Will you bind me, please?”

I stroked her skin with the pads of my fingertips.

“Of course... in what way do you need it?”

“To feel safe.”

I nodded, knowing exactly what I needed to do. Taking her hand, I pulled her towards the bed. Scarlett came willingly and allowed me to take her clothes off, setting them aside before I encouraged her onto the bed. Going over to my wardrobe, I opened the door and selected a few lengths of rope.

“Arms behind your back,” I told her as I approached the bed again.

She did as I said. I knelt behind her and started binding her arms and chest. Then I created a harness at her back stable enough to hoist her up with. It was very similar to the way I’d bound her the first time I’d fucked her in the ropes. This time it would be to give her a sense of safety. I’d ask her why she needed it when she was settled.

She didn’t protest when I encouraged her to stand up so I could tie her ropes to the pole suspended above my bed. Nor when I bound her legs and ankles and pulled them up so she was left hanging in place, not exactly face down, but almost. I stroked her skin, making sure all the knots were perfect, and she wasn’t going anywhere.

Scarlett let out a breath when I lay beneath her on the bed so we could look each other in the eye. I reached up and touched her face, reassuring her I was right there before dropping my hand to my chest. For a few minutes, she didn’t speak as she settled into her bindings. She barely shifted in them. She couldn’t move much, anyway, but to know this helped her was everything to me. I always wanted her to feel safe.

“What’s wrong?”

She closed her eyes and sighed.

“Being away from you, Drake and West reminded me of when Mason took me. I know I had Pres, but it’s still so raw for me. I don’t feel right in myself when I don’t have you all near me.”

If she hadn’t been suspended from my ceiling by ropes, I would have wrapped myself around her. As it was, I shifted up onto my elbows and rubbed

my face against hers. She opened her eyes and looked into mine.

“Am I weak for needing you all so much?”

“No, we need you too, Scar.” I kissed her cheek. “And you’ve been through so much. You don’t have to be strong all the time. We’re here to catch you when you fall.”

A tear dripped onto my face. Fuck, she was clearly more emotional about all of this than I realised. I moved, wanting to get her down, but she let out a little sound of protest when my hands went to the ropes.

“No, please, I need it. Just stay with me.”

“Are you sure?”

“Please, Frankie. I’m just overwhelmed.”

I settled back down, but it didn’t stop me from reaching out and touching her shoulder, stroking her skin with my fingertips. A part of me needed the physical connection as much as she did.

Scarlett didn’t stop crying, allowing silent tears to drip down onto me. I didn’t wipe them away. They were evidence of her feelings. Her pain. And I would wear them to show her I wanted to rip the hurt from her chest. I would make it my own, so she didn’t have to carry the burden alone. No matter how much pain it caused me to see her this way, I’d let her get her feelings out.

After a few minutes ticked by, she let out a little choking sound.

“Frankie.”

I cupped her face, brushing under her eye with my thumb.

“What do you need?”

“I...”

“Should I get Drake and West in here? And Pres?”

She nodded, pressing her face into my palm. I held it there until she relaxed and then pulled it back to grab my phone from my pocket. I sent them a group text, warning them of the circumstances they’d find us in. Not like they hadn’t seen me bind her before, but her being suspended from my ceiling was different. This wasn’t for sexual gratification. Shibari was an art form and provided mental relaxation as well as stimulation. It was the part that initially attracted me. When I was tying the knots, it calmed me. I went into a different space. It was similar for the model, the feeling of being constricted provided safety and security. Not to mention the ropes looked beautiful on a body.

I pressed a kiss to Scarlett's face after I'd dumped my phone on the bed. She strained for more, so I gave her my lips, allowing ours to mould together as I cupped her face.

"I love you," I whispered against her mouth.

"Love you too," she murmured back before seeking my tongue with hers.

I vaguely heard the bedroom door open, too focused on giving Scarlett what she needed. The pad of footsteps had me pulling back and stroking her cheek. When I finally turned to look at the three men standing at the end of the bed, Scarlett let out a soft sigh.

Prescott was the first to kneel on my bed and reach for Scarlett, stroking her hair, which she'd French braided. I moved back slightly to allow the other two access to her. West came around to look into her eyes while Drake knelt on her other side, stroking his hand along her bare thigh. None of them questioned what was happening or why she needed this.

She smiled when she saw West. He didn't say a word, just touched her face to let her know he was right there. The silence spoke volumes. None of us wanted her to feel unsafe with us when she was at her most vulnerable, tied up and suspended from the bar above my bed. Her emotions on full display after her heart bled.

Another tear spilt from her eye. West leant down and licked it away, making her let out a shuddering breath. He cleaned her tears with his tongue. She shifted in her bindings. Drake held her steady as I put my hand on her calf.

The four of us waited when West pulled back. We didn't want to rush her. Her breathing evened out after a few minutes. Then she looked at me.

"Let me down, please."

I sprang into action, getting the others to hold her while I undid the bindings connecting her to the pole. Then we settled her on the bed, all kneeling around her as she lay there on her front, her hands still tied behind her.

"Do you want me to release you?"

She nodded, resting her cheek on the covers. I did as she asked, unbinding all the ropes from her body. The indents all over her skin calmed me. They were a symbol of our connection to each other. The safety she felt with me. Scarlett had let herself be at her most vulnerable with me and the others today.

She sat up and looked between us.

“I forgot to say hi.”

Raising up on her knees, she grabbed a hold of the back of Drake’s head and kissed him. He stroked her side but didn’t move to touch her further.

“Welcome home, little wisp,” he told her when they drew apart.

She practically pounced on West next, almost knocking him over. He didn’t seem to mind when she kissed him, wrapping her arms tight around his body. His hand went to hair, stroking the braid. She pulled back to look into his eyes.

“My beautiful little Scar.”

Her fingertips went to his mouth, stroking along his lips as if memorising them. Like she needed to trace the words he said. The two of them silently communicated for a long minute, then she moved closer to me. The way she looked at me spoke volumes.

I moved back against the headboard, settling myself against the pillows. She curled up in my lap, letting me hold her and stroke her skin. Drake and West took places next to me while Prescott put his head on her thigh as he sat between my spread legs.

It was reaffirming our bond with each other. Being without her had been as hard for me, West and Drake, as it had been for Scarlett. We were still settling into our relationship. We’d only just established we wanted a future with each other. None of us wanted out. It was more than fate and destiny. It had everything to do with who we were as people. Who we were as a family.

“Fletch wants to see me tomorrow for lunch,” Drake said, breaking the silence as he settled a hand on Scarlett’s shoulder.

“Do you want to go?” she asked, turning her head to look at him.

“No.”

“What if I went with you?”

He contemplated it for a moment before letting out a sigh and leaning his chin on her shoulder.

“You offering to hold my hand?”

“No, well... yes, but I meant going as your partner to support you.”

We’d spent the past couple of days removing all the fucking trackers on our cars, making sure our security was increased further and acknowledging no matter what we did, Stuart was coming for us. We’d finalised the plan between us. It was a question of enacting it. Drake wanted Scarlett home before we did

anything. She was just as much in this as we were. It was all together or nothing.

“And before you say no because of the danger of me leaving Fortuity poses, may I remind you of the three men you killed to protect me? You won’t let anything happen to me.”

I almost laughed. Drake would never allow anyone to take Scarlett again. Not after Mason kidnapped her from under our noses. He took it personally as he was the last person to see her that night, even if he didn’t like to show it. I swear losing her a second time had cracked the ice casing around his emotions and brought them all out to the forefront. At least around us and Scarlett.

“I won’t.”

“Well then.” She twisted in my lap and took a hold of his hand, pressing a kiss to his palm. “You don’t have to deal with your family alone. You have me now.”

“She’s right, you know,” I said, earning me a hard stare from Drake.

“She’s always right when it comes to you, Drake,” Prescott put in.

Drake sat up and looked at West as if he was going to add something. West’s amber eyes glinted with amusement as if seeing us give Drake a hard time was the highlight of his day.

“What they said.”

“I hate all of you,” Drake ground out, which only made Scarlett laugh.

“You do not. Don’t be such a big baby. I’ve already met your step-uncle once. What’s the worst that could happen this time, huh?”

I swear his eyes practically popped out of his sockets at her words. Then he crossed his arms over his chest.

“Fine. I’ll let him know to expect both of us.”

Scarlett leant over and pressed her lips to his cheek.

“See, that wasn’t so difficult.”

“You’re walking on very thin ice, Scarlett.”

She sat back against me and grinned. I put an arm around her waist, holding her closer.

“I think I earned myself a punishment,” she whispered to me.

“Do you think he’s going to do it in front of us?”

“Maybe... if we provoke him enough.”

“That’s it,” Drake announced before he grabbed a hold of Scarlett, tugged her

out of my arms and put her face down across his lap. “You asked for this, brat.”

She turned her head up to look at him.

“Oh, I know. Punish me so I can get my reward, sir.”

Drake ran his palm across her bare behind.

“And what reward might that be?”

“You, me, them and the playroom.”

I bit my lip as Drake smiled.

“I see someone has been missing her horsemen a little too much. We can’t have that, can we?”

He looked at the rest of us. I was certainly not going to complain, and neither was Prescott nor West. When he got our approval, he turned back to Scarlett.

“Well, let’s begin.”

Fuck did the night take a rather unexpected but pleasant turn for all five of us. Scarlett might have needed the ropes to calm her down, but us together, locked in ecstasy, was the very best way to celebrate her coming home.

Soon, things were going to get dicey. And it would be life or death for all of us in the end.

THIRTY

DRAKE

Scarlett had been right last night. I would protect her if anyone tried to take her. And forcing her to hide out was taking a toll on her. The whole incident with Prescott and her had only proven it was fucking futile. No matter what we did, Stuart would come after her. So we were going to bring the fucking pain to him. No more waiting. No more biding our time.

Well, we would go after him once I'd dealt with what Fletcher wanted. If Stuart's men saw us out and about without a care in the world after what happened a few days ago, it would piss the man off. Flaunting it in his face was better than keeping my girl locked up in an ivory tower. Rattle his cage to force him into making more mistakes. His biggest one was yet to come. Thinking we wouldn't have the balls to kill the motherfucker. Idiot. We killed his children when we were sixteen. What made him think he wouldn't be next after everything he'd done to us? To Scarlett? The cunt was far too secure in his position. Not any longer.

If we had to go down, he would be coming with us. Only he would be in his fucking grave.

I had to admit, it felt nice to have someone by my side as we walked into the restaurant to meet with Fletcher. Scarlett looked fucking amazing in a rather demure black dress and little peep-toe heels. It was the way she carried herself that had me enraptured. She was my queen, holding her head up high with her light brown hair falling in perfect waves around her shoulders.

The reaper and his goddess of the night. Heads turned as we weaved through the tables after the waiter, who was showing us to our table. I never cared what people thought of me, so I ignored it.

After last night in the playroom, we were all feeling a little... brighter. It certainly showed with the way she kept throwing me these little secret smiles. Her hand tightened around mine as if to reassure me this would be fine.

It was just lunch with Fletcher. I'd had them countless times before. However, something was off. He'd been incredibly insistent and wouldn't tell me why he wanted to see me. After he'd blabbed to my parents about Scarlett, I wasn't feeling particularly charitable, but curiosity had got the better of me. And I should have fucking known not to trust the cunt.

The moment we arrived at the table, my eyes narrowed on the second occupant. Now I knew exactly why he'd wanted me to come here. I had a hard time holding in my anger.

Sat there looking like my fucking older double was my father. Oscar Ackley. The man I hated almost as much as Stuart Carver himself.

Scarlett put her other hand on my arm when she saw him as if she couldn't believe her eyes. Of course, she remembered him, but it would be pretty fucking impossible not to notice we were related. Oscar might have greying hair at his temples, but his indigo eyes and dark hair mirrored mine. If he stood up, we'd be matched evenly in height. I hated it, but you didn't get to choose who you got your genes from.

"You came," Fletcher said, getting up and walking around to me. "It's nice to see you again, Scarlett. I'm glad he brought you."

The way he leered at her had me gritting my teeth. I'd already warned him about the way he'd been staring at my woman before. Now, I was plain fucking pissed off. At him. At my father. At the whole fucking situation.

"What is he doing here?" I asked, keeping my voice low.

Making a scene in a restaurant was not my style. And yet, the rage building in my gut needed an outlet. By fuck did I want to smack that smug smile off Fletcher's face.

"I told him you didn't want to see him, but he insisted."

I stepped closer to him, staring down at the man with no small amount of hatred.

"You know what, I don't have a good reason not to walk out of this place."

"Drake."

Scarlett's voice cut through the tension between me and Fletcher. My head

whipped to her. She was giving my father a rather venomous look as if she couldn't believe he had the audacity to turn up here. I had told her what kind of man he really was.

"We don't have to stay if you don't want to." She looked up at me then. "You don't have to hear either of them out. You don't owe them anything."

I could have kissed her in the middle of the busy restaurant right then. Everything inside me screamed at me to do so. The gnawing urge grew stronger until I was unable to resist pulling her closer. She understood. She knew. And she wasn't going to force me into speaking to my father.

My hand curled around her face, tipping up towards me.

"My little wisp," I whispered, leaning closer. "Love of my life."

Then I kissed her in full view of everyone, not caring in the slightest about the level of PDA as my tongue slid into her waiting mouth. She gripped the lapels of my jacket, letting out a small mewl of pleasure as if she couldn't help herself.

When I let her go, her cheeks were flushed and her pupils dilated. I smiled, knowing I'd done that to her. Made her fucking weak at the knees. Well, she affected me in the same way, but I wasn't about to show it. She knew the power she had over me. How she could make me do what she wanted with her words and her body. I'd followed this woman down the rabbit hole willingly and I was never coming back out.

I swiped my thumb over her mouth before releasing her. Then I walked over to my father, who hadn't risen to his feet. He stared at me like he'd never seen me before. I was a changed man now I had the woman I loved and my three best friends who'd all promised me forever.

"I remember telling you I never wanted to see you again, Oscar," I said, keeping my voice fairly calm and even.

"Drake—"

I held a hand up.

"I don't care if you're sorry. In fact, I couldn't fucking care less what you have to say to me. I don't think I made myself clear enough before, so allow me to remedy that."

I leant closer and lowered my voice.

"You are not welcome in my life. I have a family and it doesn't include you. If

you wish to keep your life, then I suggest you stay away. Next time, I won't be so nice."

I put my hand on the table, getting even closer.

"You don't know a single thing about me, and that's probably a good thing. If you did, trust me, it would make your blood run cold to know what type of man I've become. What type of man you brought into the world. They don't call me and the others the Four Horsemen for no reason. Just think about which one your son is next time you think it's a good idea to darken my door, hmm? Maybe it will make you think twice."

I didn't let him speak. In fact, I didn't look at him as I pulled back, turned around and walked away. My hand slid into Scarlett's as she followed me. The reaper and his little wisp made their way out of the restaurant without a backwards glance. And I felt a lot lighter for it. I was done with my father for good.

I sucked in a breath of air when we got outside and realised for the first time my burdens were no longer hanging over me. I wasn't alone.

Scarlett tugged on my arm. I looked down at her and smiled when I saw her eyes were full of pride.

"Let's go see my mother."

I pulled her away to the tube station nearby without letting her say a word. Fuck knows what had come over me. All I wanted was to re-introduce my mother to the woman I would spend forever with.

It took us thirty minutes to get across the city. Scarlett hadn't asked any questions or even brought up my father on the journey. Instead, we talked about our childhood. The little things that made us happy. I told her about all the music I'd written for her, including the song I'd played her on the rooftop when she'd first found me up there. She wanted to hear more, to know everything. I promised her when all of this was over, I'd give it all to her. I'd play each and every song, explain to her why I wrote them and what they made me feel.

I rang the doorbell and fidgeted, suddenly wary of turning up at my mother's house without telling her. She would be home as it was her day off. She was a nurse at the hospital nearby. The one we'd all been born at.

The door was pulled open, revealing the woman who'd given me life. May Ackley was short, with dark brown hair, brown eyes, and a stern expression on

her face. When she saw it was me, she broke into a smile. I was still pissed she'd decided not to change her name after the divorce but right now, I was riding on a high. Nothing would get me down. I had my girl. The rest didn't matter.

"Now, to what do I owe this pleasure?"

Then her eyes fell on Scarlett and widened almost comically.

"Hello, Mum. You asked to meet my girlfriend, so I brought her around for you."

Mum was momentarily disarmed by my words and seeing the girl who had disappeared ten years ago on my arm.

"Hello, May," Scarlett said. "It's lovely to see you again."

Mum cleared her throat, gave me a look, then smiled at Scarlett.

"Well, this is quite the surprise. Come in, come in, it's chilly outside and you're letting the draught in."

I kept a straight face as Mum stood back to allow the two of us in. This was the house I'd grown up in. Oscar had moved out, leaving it to her.

Mum led us through into the kitchen, waving at the table for us to sit down.

"Now, have you two eaten? I was just about to make some tea, but I can whip something up for you."

"We haven't. That would be nice. Thanks, Mum."

I took Scarlett's coat and mine, hanging them up in the hallway while she sat down at the table. Pulling out a chair, I sat next to her and enfolded my hand in hers on the wooden surface. Mum busied herself in the kitchen but kept throwing glances at me as if she was trying to work out what happened to her son. The answer sat next to me. The girl who'd freed me from my locked cage and awoken the past version of myself.

"I'm not going to beat around the bush here. You turn up with Scarlett, tell me she's your girlfriend and expect me not to ask where on earth she's been." She looked at Scarlett. "Sorry, dear, I should direct that at you. Where have you been?"

I squeezed Scarlett's hand, reassuring her I was right here.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that," Scarlett said. "It's better for everyone involved if I keep it to myself. All you need to know is I came to work for your son with my memories of the first sixteen years of my life missing. He and the others helped me remember what I'd lost. Now we have each other back. That's

the important thing, not what happened to me.”

While I knew the story we were telling our parents, I didn’t expect Scarlett to inform my mother in such a calm and collected manner. Like she wasn’t remotely scared of Mum or what she might say in response.

Mum pursed her lips and went back to making us lunch. I could see the cogs working in her mind as she poured three mugs of tea for us all.

“Okay, I can respect that. So tell me, how long has this been going on for?”

“A few months,” I said, saving Scarlett from having to. “And I need you to know something before you ask us any further questions. Yes, Scarlett is my girlfriend, but she’s also Francis, Prescott and West’s girlfriend too.”

The teaspoon Mum was holding clattered on the work surface. There was no point in me hiding it. It was better to tell her these things straight away, or she’d accuse me of keeping shit from her. And I knew I was in for one hell of a talking to the moment she turned around and met my eyes.

THIRTY ONE

SCARLETT

While I didn't know what to expect when Drake said he wanted to go see his mother, I certainly didn't think he would just come out with the whole me being in a relationship with all of them straight away. Judging by May's reaction, she wasn't entirely happy to be informed of our unconventional arrangement. The way she stared at Drake with disapproval written all over her face spoke volumes. May Ackley wasn't known for keeping her opinions to herself. Likely why Francis had told his mother to keep silent about it until Drake told May himself.

"If this is some kind of joke, Drake, it isn't a very funny one."

"It's not a joke." He squeezed my hand tighter. "Why on earth would I make light out of something as serious as informing you the woman I'm going to spend the rest of my life with is also in a relationship with my best friends?"

May shook her head. I knew she was going to be against this. I hadn't blamed Drake for not wanting to tell her. It seemed May hadn't changed much in the past ten years if this was anything to go by.

"You mean to tell me you are okay with... excuse me, Scarlett, I don't want to insult you, but how on earth are you okay with being with the same woman? That's..."

"It's what, Mum? Unorthodox? Unconventional? Have I ever not been either of those things?"

May looked at him with a raised eyebrow and put her hand on her hip.

"You've never had a girlfriend before, Drake, and now you're telling me you're in some kind of, what, polyamorous relationship with four people?"

Drake snorted, stroking his thumb down the back of my hand to let me know

he had this. He wasn't going to be browbeaten by his mother over his relationship with me and the others. He loved me and he'd proven to me just how much by protecting me against all the odds.

"I'm still straight, Mum, and I'm not having sex with the boys if that's what you're worried about."

"I did not... that's not what I was..." She let out a breath. "I wouldn't have an issue with you being... intimate with them if that was the case. This is just not what I expected from any of you."

Drake sat back in his chair and shrugged.

"It's not the first time we've shared."

I couldn't believe he was admitting this to his mother. I had to put my free hand over my mouth in an attempt to hide my smile.

"It's not the... lord have mercy, I'm not sure I want to ask what that means."

The way her face coloured up made me want to hide under the table and clutch my stomach. It was so difficult not to laugh at this situation and her reaction.

"This is why I don't tell you things, Mum. You clearly don't approve, but it doesn't stop this from being a reality." He waved at me. "You, of all people, should understand why we can't stay away from each other with the way you go on about how Francis and I were born on the exact same day. It's the same for all of us. We belong together. It's always been Scarlett for me. Always. It will never be anyone else. I can't stop loving her and I don't want to try. Not when she makes me happy. She completes all of us. We weren't okay without her. None of us were. And now we are. We're a family. I won't let anything come between us. Nothing will tear us apart. Never again."

He looked at me then. The love in his eyes almost knocked me off the chair. The intensity of those indigo eyes had me dropping my hand from my mouth and reaching out to touch his face. The fact he was standing up to his mother over me had my heart in absolute knots.

He pressed a kiss to my palm, making me practically swoon. There was nothing like being wrapped up in Drake's gaze when his full attention was on you. It was overwhelming, exhilarating and oh so fucking everything.

"Death needs his little wisp," he whispered. "I'm keeping you this time. Eternity isn't long enough, but it will have to do. I cannot imagine a world

where you don't exist next to me.”

I leant closer and rested my head on his shoulder.

“Listen, I love you and you're my eternity too, but your mum is staring at us and I'm kind of worried if I kiss you, she'll blow a blood vessel,” I whispered back.

He chuckled and pressed a kiss to my forehead.

“Don't worry, I'll handle her.”

He made me sit up and let go of my hand before rising from his seat. Drake dug his hands in his pockets and walked over to his mother, towering over the woman like he did most people. She stared up at him without compunction. May never backed down from a fight.

“You're allowed to feel whatever it is you want about the five of us, but you don't get a say in my life and who I choose to spend it with. If you have a problem with me and the others all being with Scarlett, then I'll take her and walk out of that door. I've already been ambushed by Oscar today. You know I have no issues cutting my family out of my life.”

“Your father ambushed you?”

He sighed and removed his hand from his pocket to place it on her shoulder.

“Fletcher decided to trick me into lunch with them. We walked out of the restaurant.”

May looked incensed.

“That man knows absolutely no bounds.”

“Why do you speak to him?”

“He's still your father, Drake. It's easier this way.”

“Easier for who? Him?”

She shook her head.

“No, for me. I will never forgive him for everything he put us through, but I have no wish for animosity between us.”

She let out a sigh. There were so many things written across her face, but she took a long minute to voice them.

“I want you to be happy, Drake. The fact you're here and in a relationship... well, I may need some time to deal with my personal feelings on the matter, but it doesn't mean I want you and Scarlett to leave. Please, sit and let me make you lunch.”

Drake nodded at his mother before returning to me, taking a seat by my side. May went back to preparing us lunch. I leant into him, wanting his warmth surrounding me. He wrapped his arm around me, pulling me against his chest.

“Are you okay?” he murmured

“I’m with you, of course I’m okay.”

“Scarlett...”

“It’s fine. I knew she would have a hard time with it. Besides, I’ve dealt with Eliza, Jasper and Rosie’s feelings on the matter. What makes you think I can’t cope with your mother?”

He cocked his head to the side as I stared up at him.

“It’s less about me thinking you can’t deal with it and more you shouldn’t have to. I don’t want anyone making you feel bad for choosing us.”

I stroked his chest, adoring the fact he felt that way.

“Hate to break it to you, but a lot of people aren’t going to be very receptive to this.”

“Does that bother you?”

I shook my head.

“Is it weird that I didn’t really question it when I ended up with all four of you? It was barely a fleeting thought about what it might mean. It has always felt right. Like we’re meant to be together. Fighting it seemed futile, you know... like what would be the point in denying ourselves what we need.”

It was the truth. I hadn’t thought much about it. Being with the four of them had been instinctual. A part of me recognised them as my four best friends. When I remembered them, it was far too fucking late. I’d gone and fallen in love. I couldn’t turn back. Couldn’t tear them out of my soul. They were too important to me.

“Denying fate is always futile.”

“Says the man who thought we were a curse.”

He gave me a dark look until I smiled at him.

“If you think I won’t punish you because we’re at my mother’s, you’re mistaken,” he whispered, leaning closer and nuzzling my hair. “I’ll tell her I’m taking you upstairs to see my old bedroom, push you down on my bed and lick your little pussy until you’re about to come, then bring you back down here all wet and unfulfilled. You can explain to my mother why you’re all flushed and

embarrassed.”

I was under no illusions about Drake and his punishments. He would carry it out without a second thought if I pushed his buttons hard enough. The thought of sitting through lunch with May when all I’d want was for him to make me come was enough to bring me up short.

“What do I get if I’m good?”

He put his free hand on my thigh, stroking the bare skin.

“Then I’ll reward you when we get home, although, I’m quite partial to the idea of fucking you where I used to fantasise about doing so as a teenager.”

I buried my face in his shoulder to prevent May from seeing how hot my face was at his words. The thought of Drake touching himself over me was making me want to rub my thighs together.

“Please stop talking, you’re making me want things I shouldn’t.”

“Like what?”

“Watching you touch yourself over me.”

“Oh yeah? You want to watch me wrap my hand around my aching dick and stroke one out for you? Will you lick the cum from my stomach afterwards?”

I nodded against his shoulder, absolutely dying with need and embarrassment clashing inside of me. His mother was right there. We weren’t speaking loud enough for her to hear what was being said, but even so.

“I think I’m going to need to take you upstairs.”

“Drake!”

He laughed. I lifted my head away from his shoulder in time to catch his mother staring at us. That made it all worse. I glared up at him and those blasted indigo eyes twinkling with amusement. Damn this man. Damn him for making me want him so much. And in front of his mother, of all people.

“You are on thin ice, mister,” I hissed, sitting up properly to regain my composure. “I do not need you making me wet in front of your mother.”

“Does that mean if I touch your pussy, I’ll find you wanting?”

He moved his hand higher up my thigh, pushing my dress up with his exploring. I grabbed hold of his fingers and subtly pulled them away, placing his hand back in his own lap. It was then I realised he was in a similar state of arousal to me. The smile playing on my lips at it couldn’t be helped. Especially when I looked into his eyes to find desire rippling and threatening to undo

everything.

“Later.”

“Promise?”

“I’ll sit in your lap at your desk and you can do whatever you want to me then.”

“Deal.”

May came over with lunch a few minutes later, making Drake and I pull apart. She didn’t give me a look of disapproval, something I could only be thankful for. The three of us enjoyed a quiet, reminiscent lunch without any further drama. I imagined she didn’t want to alienate her son when he was being open with her.

When Drake and I left, May gave me a hug and told me to take care of her boy. I barely got a chance to tell her I would before my sir was whisking me out of the house. Someone was rather impatient to get me back to the office. And I couldn’t deny I was looking forward to being alone with him.

THIRTY TWO

FRANCIS

My hands dropped as I finished securing Scarlett's hands above her. Two metal cuffs were around her wrists, attached to chains suspending her from a ring on the ceiling of the playroom. Her knees rested on the bed, spread apart for my viewing pleasure. She couldn't close them as I'd cuffed both of her ankles to a spreader bar.

"Okay?" I asked.

She gave me a nod, as she couldn't talk. I'd given her a ball-gag. Her muffled protests about what was going to happen next would be so sweet.

"And how do you safe word out?"

She clicked her fingers twice.

"Good girl."

Scarlett told me she wanted to play this evening after her encounter with Drake's mother yesterday. She wanted to feel safe under my command, hence why she'd chosen me, but she'd not specified anything else. I had free rein. It's why I'd chained her up the way I had. She wouldn't be able to do anything but watch and take what was given to her.

I got up on the bed in front of her and sat back against the headboard. She eyed me with an intense gaze as if she was trying to work out what I would do next. Picking up a little remote control from the side table, I turned on some sensual music, keeping the volume low.

"You like watching me, don't you, little whore?"

She nodded. This wasn't just for her. A part of me still needed to embrace the way she saw me. I'd fought so hard to stop feeling like I was second best. Scarlett had helped me. This would be another step forward. One that put me

slightly out of my comfort zone, but what the fuck was the point in living in a world where you didn't grow. Where you didn't face the things holding you back.

“Keep your eyes on me. I'm going to reward you for being such a good girl.”

I shifted up onto my knees and moved closer, within touching distance, but the way she was restrained made it impossible for her to reach out to me. My fingers went to my shirt buttons, undoing the top one as I bit down on my lip. Never in my life did I think I would be giving someone a striptease, but Scarlett was the girl I would do anything for.

Her eyes widened when she realised what I was doing. I undid the next button, taking it slow as I moved to the music slightly. The muffled moan she made kept me going. Each button exposed more of my skin. Her pupils had fully dilated. She shifted, making the chains above her rattle.

“Do you want to touch me, little whore?”

She nodded vigorously, letting out more muffled noises from behind her gag. I smiled and shook my head.

“Not yet.”

The whine she made had me undoing the last button. With extra care, I tugged my shirt off, letting it fall onto the bed below me. Then I ran my fingers down my abs, showing her what she was missing. Now the chains were really rattling as she strained towards me. My fingers went to my belt, teasing the buckle.

“Is the sight of me making that pussy wet, hmm?”

Oh, but the sounds she made, trying to talk when she knew she couldn't. Spit dribbled down her chin. I reached out and swiped at it with my thumb before sticking it in my mouth. Her eyes almost bugged out. Her knees shifted. She wanted friction between her legs. Too bad. It was impossible for her to close them.

I tugged the buckle open, undoing my belt to gain access to my zipper. Scarlett's eyes zoned in on my movements. My fingers ran over my straining cock.

“Do you want to see how hard I am for you?”

She tried to move towards me again, her need coming across in her muffled moans of agreement. I reached out and stroked my fingers across her stomach

to tease her. The way her chest rose and fell had me running my fingers up to her chest and stroking around her breasts. Her whines were so needy like she was begging me for more. I pulled my hands away and unzipped my trousers.

“Look.” I stroked my cock through my boxers. “See how much I want you.”

More spit dribbled down her chin. She thrashed in her chains, twisting herself to try to get to me. I smiled at her before shifting off the bed to shuck my trousers. Her eyes followed me, watching as I continued to stroke my cock, but I didn’t reveal it to her.

“I’m going to reward you soon, little whore. Give you everything you need.” I looked over at the chair in the corner. “We both will.”

Scarlett tried to whip her head around to see who I was referring to. She had no idea we weren’t alone. She couldn’t stretch that far. Her protest behind the ball-gag had me reaching out to stroke her side in order to settle her.

“Be a good girl and keep your attention on me.”

Her eyes immediately went to me as I pulled down my boxers, allowing my cock to spring free. I knelt on the bed again, right in front of her as I fisted it between my fingers.

“That’s it, watch me. Look at what you do to me.”

My hand moved up and down my shaft. She couldn’t keep her eyes off it. I couldn’t deny I wanted all of her attention. My need unshackled those final chains wrapped around my wrists, holding me back. Her desperation for me made it very clear. I was at the top of her podium. I was first place.

With my free hand, I reached out and cupped her jaw, stroking my thumb across her bottom lip. Then I indicated with my head to the person in the chair they should join us. Drake rose to his full height and stalked towards the bed. His indigo eyes glittered as he came to a standstill behind her. The crop in his hand rose and struck out across her behind, making her cry out as I held her steady.

“Good girl,” I soothed, my fingers leaving her chin and wrapping around her neck instead. “I’ve got you.”

He struck again. She took it this time, only a muffled whimper sounding from her throat. She shifted against me, her eyes intent on mine. Then they dropped to where I was still stroking myself. The desperation in her expression had me stroking her throat.

“More?”

She nodded. Drake slapped her with the crop again and again. Her moans were a mixture of pleasure and pain behind the gag. He kept going for a few minutes, then he dropped the crop on the bed and knelt behind her, careful not to disturb the spreader bar. His hands ghosted over her shoulders, making her skin prickle. Then he reached up and unbuckled the gag, discarding it on the bed next to us.

“Frankie,” she gasped, “please.”

“Do you want me... or do you want him?”

“Both. I want both.”

“Well, as much as I’d love to give that to you, it’s not what we have planned, my little whore.”

Drake shifted out from behind her, moving up the bed and not saying a word as he settled himself against the headboard facing the two of us. I ran my finger down the centre of her chest.

“What... what are you doing?”

“Wait and see.”

I moved behind her, pressing myself against her back and cupping her throat with my hand. My other hand slid along her stomach. Drake wasn’t wearing anything. His hand was circled around his cock. He’d told me about their conversation yesterday. About how she wanted to watch him. This went one step further. She couldn’t touch him. The only relief she’d get was from me.

“Look at him,” I murmured in her ear. “Watch him like you wanted to.”

While me and Drake weren’t into Prescott’s kinks, we recognised Scarlett liked to watch and be watched. We were willing to give her anything she wanted, including this.

Before she could say a word, I stuck my fingers in her mouth, making her suck on them in time to his stroking. She shifted against me, my cock slipping between her red cheeks. She moaned around my fingers, rubbing against me the best she could. Her attention was on Drake, but I was the one who could touch her and give her pleasure.

“Do you want me to fuck you?”

Her moan of agreement made me slide my hand lower, delving between her legs and finding out for myself just how wet she was for us. Avoiding her clit, I

pressed two fingers inside her. The aim wasn't to let her come but to let her imagine we were both fucking her. One of us in her mouth and the other in her pussy.

Drake's eyes were fixed on her, watching the way she moved against me, trying to gain more friction. My thrusts were shallow and slow as he stroked himself for her. She moaned around my fingers, clearly enjoying what I was doing and the little show she was getting.

"Pres told us how much you liked his surprise. We wanted to give you our own version."

Her whimper around my fingers told me she wanted it too. She needed it.

"Here's what's going to happen. He's going to make himself come for you. Then you're going to clean his cum from his stomach whilst I fuck you. And if you're really good for us, Drake's going to suck your clit until you come all over my cock."

I pulled my fingers from her mouth. She gasped for air for a moment before turning her head slightly.

"I want to be good for you."

My hand wrapped around her throat.

"Watch him."

I pressed kisses to her shoulder as her attention went back to Drake. He didn't speak as he stroked his cock for her viewing pleasure. I kept up my pace, pressing my fingers deeper inside her wet pussy.

"Frankie, please," she whimpered after a few minutes, shifting against me. "It isn't enough."

"You need my cock in you?"

"Please."

I shifted behind her, removing my fingers from her pussy to grab hold of my cock. Pressing it between her lips, I rubbed it back and forth, making her moan as it knocked her clit.

"Shall I fuck you whilst he comes all over his stomach, little whore?"

"Yes, fuck, please."

"You've been such a good girl."

I lined myself up and pushed inside her, groaning at the way she fluttered around me. No doubt, I loved to tease the fuck out of Scarlett and deny her

orgasms until she was fit to bursting, but it was pure fucking torture on my end too. All I wanted was to be wrapped up in her this way.

She moaned as I began to fuck her. I kept one hand around her throat as leverage and my other hand angled her body to give me better access.

“Tell him how much you want to see him come,” I whispered in her ear. “Give him an incentive to spray his cum all over himself for you to clean up.”

Scarlett ran her tongue over her bottom lip as if she was imagining how he’d taste on her lips.

“Sir... I want you to come for me. Show me how much you desire me,” she said a moment later, causing Drake’s eyes to darken further. “Paint yourself with it so I can clean it from your body. I want to run my tongue over your skin and taste every inch of you.”

Drake’s hand moved faster and his lips parted on a breath like he wanted to say something, but he had no idea what. As if the driving need to come for her had short-circuited his brain. To be honest, this entire situation was making mine a little fucking loopy too.

“That’s it, come, sir, please. I want to see you. Show me.”

And on her last word, Drake erupted all over himself, letting out a groan of satisfaction while ropes of cum splattered all over his stomach for Scarlett’s personal pleasure.

THIRTY THREE

FRANCIS

Scarlett shifted against me, clearly wanting to go to Drake as he slowed his strokes and stared at her with lust-drunk eyes. As if he'd totally got off on her watching him. Guess we all had an exhibitionist streak. After all, our best friend was into voyeurism. You kind of had to be okay with being watched when Prescott was around.

“Sir, please... I want to taste you,” Scarlett panted out.

Drake was slow to rise, taking his time to stand up and walk across the bed to us. He stood in front of Scarlett. His head canted as he took her in as if assessing whether he was going to help her lick the cum from him or not. Then he put his hand out to her, offering the sticky liquid he'd got on it to her first. Scarlett didn't hesitate to suck on his fingers, cleaning every last drop from his hand like it was her finest meal.

“Did you like that, little wisp?” he murmured, shifting closer. “Do you want some more?”

“Please.”

He wrapped his hand around the back of her head and directed her towards his stomach. With the way I'd chained her up, he was going to have to help her reach his body. He held onto the chains above her with his other hand and angled himself to allow her to lick the cum from him. Scarlett watched him as she did it. The way they stared at each other was almost mesmerising. The love and desire written all over their faces had me swallowing hard from the intensity of their feelings.

You'd think it would make me jealous to know how much she loved Drake and the others, but it didn't. We were meant for each other. All four of us were

hers, completely and irrevocably. We were each other's too, forged in friendship and blood. Bound for life in a way few would understand.

When she'd cleaned up every part of him, he let her go to kneel in front of her. He cupped her face above my hand around her throat and brushed his thumb over her bottom lip.

"My good girl deserves her reward."

She watched him lower himself further, his fingers sliding down her body until he circled her hips with his large hands. She shivered as he bent his head. There was no hesitation as his tongue sought out her clit. I continued to fuck her, groaning in her ear with each stroke.

"Oh god," she cried out.

"That's it, little whore, let him make you come."

"Please, sir."

Drake didn't let up, licking her like a man fucking starving for a taste of his woman. And it pushed Scarlett over the edge. She shook with her climax, clenching down hard on my cock. I tightened my fingers around her throat, holding back from spilling my cum inside her. It was a heady experience having her come apart on me like this. The very best kind of ending.

Her head lolled when she was spent. Drake sat back on his hands, staring at her with a smug smile. I merely hammered into her harder until I was coming apart too, unable to help myself.

"Little whore," I grunted, pressing my face into her hair.

I pulled away after placing a kiss on her shoulder, dropping down on the bed to catch my breath. She hung there, watching Drake, who was rubbing his thumb over his bottom lip. Reaching over to her ankles, I undid the cuffs and tossed away the bar, letting her close her legs even as my cum leaked from her pussy. I shifted up the bed to sit back against the headboard, leaving her there to wonder why I wasn't letting her go.

"Frankie?"

The frown on her face made me want to wipe it away.

"Did you think it was just me and Drake?"

"What?"

There was a reason I'd only turned the lights above the bed on. Scarlett had no idea all four of us had been in the room the entire time. West and Prescott

emerged from the shadows and knelt on the bed behind her.

“Hello, little lamb... you gave us quite the show.”

She turned her head, spying him coming around to her side and pressing a kiss to her shoulder. Prescott wasted no time leaning lower and covering her nipple with his mouth. She let out a moan as West came up behind her and pressed her back against him. I leant over, picked up the lube and chucked it over to him. He caught it before popping the cap open and giving me a wink. Drake shifted up to sit next to me, allowing Prescott to come around to her front and continue playing with her tits.

Prescott left her nipples a moment later to adjust the chains to give her more slack. Then he lowered her into his lap, forcing her to slide down on his cock. She didn't have time to say anything as he kissed her, cupping the back of her head to angle her face. Scarlett let out a sharp gasp in Prescott's mouth as West prepared her for what would happen next.

“You've been such a good little slut for Drake and Frankie,” West told her. “You're going to be one for us too.”

Prescott released her mouth, his hands on her hips to move them at the pace he wanted to set.

“Yes, I want to be good for you... be your good little slut too,” she panted.

West wrapped his hand around her neck, turning her face to him with his thumb. Her mouth was claimed a moment later in a bruising kiss that was West all over. He never did anything by halves. It was all or nothing.

When he let go, he grinned at her.

“Are you ready to take my cock too? I can feel how much you want it. My dirty bitch is in heat, isn't she?”

“Yes, yes, please. Fuck, please, West.”

“Good girl.”

He shifted back to coat his cock, leaving Prescott to kiss her again, his hands running over her body while she took over and rode him the best she could with her hands chained above her head. West gripped her hip and pressed inside her. She whined but didn't tell him to stop as he slowly worked his way up into her tight little hole. I couldn't take my eyes off them. The raw passion between those three was enough to make my dick twitch. Getting hard again wasn't the goal here, but fuck, anything to do with Scarlett had me rising to the occasion.

Especially hearing the neediness in her voice. The way she moaned as they fucked her. I couldn't get enough.

"I never thought I would understand Pres' fascination with watching... until her," Drake murmured low enough so only I could hear.

"Could it be because you're in... luurrrve?"

Drake gave me a dark look.

"Fuck off."

I poked his side.

"Go on, you can admit it. I won't give you a hard time."

"You literally just did."

"You do love her though."

"And?"

I grinned. He was just being stubborn for the sake of it.

"We're all glad you got with the fucking program."

He rolled his eyes, but I could see him trying not to smile.

"She's hard to say no to."

"Or perhaps you just don't want to."

He shrugged.

"That too."

I turned my attention back to the others. I couldn't help it. They were a sight I didn't want to miss a second of. Scarlett was in the midst of being bitten on the shoulder by Prescott while West held her neck and pounded into her from behind.

"That's it, slut, take it... let him claim you."

"Please, harder."

Prescott responded by shifting lower and biting her right underneath her war scar. She cried out with a mix of pleasure and pain. Just as I liked to see her skin covered in indents from ropes, Prescott liked to leave bite marks and bruises all over her. For him, it was a primal instinct. For me, the patterns of the ropes were my form of art, a painting on her body of my claim over her.

"You ready for tomorrow night?" I asked, hesitant to bring it up, but knowing all of us were a little on edge because of it.

"Yes, and no." Drake sighed and rubbed his face. "We're relying on things going to plan. Nothing ever does."

I slapped his arm before shifting onto my knees, wanting to get closer to the threesome in front of us. Drawn to the sexual energy radiating off them.

“Pres always tells us to take risks.”

Drake raised an eyebrow.

“Since when did you gain a devil may care attitude?”

I moved closer to Prescott, West and Scarlett.

“Since I realised we’re stronger together than apart and we have a bigger incentive than Stuart does.” Reaching for Scarlett, I stroked her face as she turned it to me. “Her.”

I looked back at Drake. The contemplation on his face had me grinning. I pressed a kiss to Scarlett’s mouth, wanting to get lost in her and leave Drake to his own thoughts. Much to my surprise, he arrived on her other side and stole her mouth from me. I put my hands on her instead, pressing one between her and Prescott to seek out her clit. She bucked against him and West, jerking in their hold and moaning in Drake’s mouth.

“You’re going to come all over them, aren’t you, little whore?”

She moaned again. I moved my fingers faster, circling her clit the way I knew she liked. It was the catalyst. She released Drake’s mouth and threw her head back on West’s shoulder, crying out with her release. It had Prescott gripping her hips and slamming her down on them until he was grunting. That was shortly followed by West, who couldn’t contain himself either.

I sat back, watching the three of them come down from their highs. When West and Prescott let her go, I sat up again. My fingers went to her cuffs, getting them undone so she could lower her arms. Drake was there, catching her and cradling her against his chest. Prescott took one of her wrists and rubbed down her arm before doing the other. Then Drake took her up to the top of the bed and stroked her skin until she’d fully recovered.

“That was... unexpected,” she said, looking around at us.

“In a good way?” I asked.

“In the best possible way.”

She gave me a smile and reached out her hand. I placed mine in it, letting her squeeze my fingers. Then I let go to get wipes for Drake to clean her up with. The five of us sorted ourselves out. Prescott and West each kissed Scarlett goodnight before retreating to their rooms, leaving me with Drake and Scarlett.

I put my hand out to her as I stood next to the bed. She crawled out of Drake's lap and took it, letting me help her up. Her eyes went back to Drake as if she didn't want to leave him. I leant closer, brushing her hair over her shoulder and kissing one of the bite marks Prescott had left on there.

"Do you want us both tonight?"

Her attention came back to me.

"I already had you both."

"I meant to sleep in between."

She chewed on her lip. I straightened, then my eyes went to Drake.

"Your room or mine?"

He rubbed his cheek.

"Mine."

I took hold of Scarlett's hand as he rose, snagged my boxers from the floor and tugged her towards the door. She glanced back at Drake as if she was surprised by him allowing me to spend the night with them. Drake passed us as we walked to his bedroom and opened the door. I pulled Scarlett in with me, shutting the door behind me and pressing her towards the bed. Drake was getting a clean pair of shorts from his wardrobe as I slid my boxers back on. Scarlett sat on the end of his bed with her eyes intent on both of us as we approached her.

"Get in, little wisp."

I tried not to smile at his commanding tone. She scrambled back and got under the covers. He got in on the right side and me, the left. I immediately cuddled up to Scarlett, not giving a shit what Drake had to say. As far as I was concerned, the moment he agreed to this, all bets were off. Scarlett put her arms around me, nuzzling my bare chest with her nose.

It took Drake a minute to curl himself around her back, resting his hand on her waist above where I was holding her. She let out a soft, contented sigh, pressing a kiss to my skin.

"I love you."

"Which one of us?" I asked, knowing full well what she actually meant.

"Both. I love you both with all my heart."

"Love you too, Scar."

I closed my eyes, feeling relaxed and wanting to fall into oblivion to forget

what we were going to do tomorrow. Scarlett shifted, burrowing herself further into both of us. I could feel her pressing back against Drake, clearly wanting more of him against her. I could hear him let out a huff and couldn't help my smile.

"Comfortable?" he asked a moment later.

"No, you're being a statue again. You didn't have to agree to sleep with both of us. Relax, or you can go sleep over there and I'll stay here with Frankie."

That made him let out another huff. I cracked an eye open to watch him shift against her, clearly trying to get more comfortable himself. He pressed a kiss to her shoulder and curled his hand around her stomach, stroking it with his fingers. It meant he was touching me, but I didn't give a fuck. Drake had been in my life for as long as I could remember. He was my best friend.

"I'm sorry," Drake whispered against her skin. "Can I kiss you goodnight?"

Scarlett turned her head to look at him, her eyes soft.

"Of course you can."

He did just that, giving her a soft kiss. With each stroke of his mouth against hers, I could see the tension leaving him until he sagged against her. Then he let her mouth go and Scarlett rested her cheek back on the pillow, a small smile playing on her lips. All of us lapsed into silence. I closed my eyes again, starting to drift off with her soft breaths lulling me to sleep.

Before I dropped off, I heard Drake whispering, "I love you, little wisp," to Scarlett. And I knew he was as invested in this relationship with her as the rest of us.

THIRTY FOUR

SCARLETT

West looked over at me as we turned into the private road that led up to the estate where I'd spent ten years locked up and unable to leave. I tried not to fidget in my seat, knowing I had an important role to play. Being here again made my stomach twist into knots. It brought back horrifying memories I wanted to push down into the recesses of my mind. And I hated everything about it.

“Little Scar.”

“I'm fine.”

“No, you're not.”

I sighed and worried the seatbelt at my chest with my gloved fingers. I wore all black, just like the others. Tonight would be messy and the blood would be less conspicuous on black.

“I keep thinking about it... about what he did to me here.”

West stroked my shoulder with his free hand while keeping his eye on the dark road. We were about to come up to the security gate. Two people were stationed there twenty-four-seven. The fence around the estate loomed, making me tremble. It was built high to keep people out, like this was some kind of fucking military base. Stuart was far too paranoid for his own good. When you make enemies of the Four Horsemen, you should be concerned about your safety. And keeping them away from the girl you kidnapped. Stuart was stupid enough to let me out of my cage. He made a grave error of judgement, thinking he'd done enough to keep me on his side. Fear didn't breed absolute loyalty. Love did.

“Take a deep breath and remember I've got you.”

I did as he said, dropping my hand to grip the syringe sitting in my lap and hiding it beneath my sleeve. The planning we'd done for the past couple of weeks was all coming to fruition. We'd had to create a diversion when we left Fortuity to make sure Stuart's spies wouldn't discover we were coming for him tonight. That required enlisting Penn's help.

His men had driven all four of the boy's cars out the car park under Fortuity and had them all go off in different directions to send them on a merry chase. We'd left the building on foot and made our way to the cars Penn had provided for us a few streets over with all our supplies already inside. Then we'd left London behind us to travel to Stuart's estate in Kent.

West pulled the car up outside the security gate. One of the men inside came out and looked the car over before tapping on the window. The floodlights on the gates were shining in our damn faces, but I turned and wound down the window. Then I smiled at him when he recognised me, his blue eyes bugging out.

"Hello, Sam."

Before he had a chance to say a word, I reached out through the window, grabbed a hold of his shirt and pulled him down. I stabbed him with the hidden needle, pressing down on the plunger.

I shoved him back, causing him to stumble. The other man was coming out of the building, but he was met by Francis, who had been hiding in the back and had slipped out while Sam was occupied. He had a needle in his gloved hands. Francis grabbed hold of the other guard from behind and stabbed him in the neck. The man cried out and struggled against him, but Francis ripped the needle out and kicked him on the ground, holding him down with a foot to his back.

West got out of the car, putting his phone to his ear to let Drake and Prescott, who were in the car behind us, know we were ready for them. Then he looked up at the camera sitting above the gate and smiled. We weren't taking any prisoners tonight.

I slid out and walked over to Sam. He'd dropped to his knees. I stared down at him with disgust. Then I shoved him over onto his back and gave him a smile.

"You can go to hell, you sadistic fuck."

I'd injected him with cyanide, as had Frankie with the other guy. He would be dead within minutes. I didn't give a shit. He'd said some pretty nasty things to me while shoving me in the cell for Stuart. Not to mention the times he'd kicked me in the stomach for good measure. He deserved to die painfully. To be honest, everyone on the estate deserved it. They were all complicit in holding me captive.

West walked into the security building to work out how to open the gate. Francis looked over at me, a slight look of concern on his face.

"You okay, Scar?"

I shook my head. I wouldn't be okay until this was over with. Until everyone was dead. Until I'd destroyed this place where I'd been brainwashed and held against my will for ten years. It would be my fucking reckoning. I'd never believed in revenge or an eye for an eye, but what Stuart had done to me... it was unforgivable. This wasn't revenge. It was justice.

I put my hand up when he made to walk over to me. If any of them comforted me during this, I might break. They could catch me when I fell, but only after we'd destroyed Stuart Carver for good. Right now, falling apart was not an option.

"Let me do this. I need to."

Francis gave me a nod, but the concern didn't leave his face.

This was personal for me. I was the one who'd been kidnapped. I'd been stolen from my life. I was the one who'd make them all fucking pay.

Drake and Prescott pulled the second car up behind us, both getting out. Prescott immediately came over to me. My eyes were on Sam, whose breathing was shallow now. He'd passed out a minute ago.

"Take him to the car," I said, my voice hollow.

Prescott put a hand on my arm and gave it a squeeze. I turned away and got back in the car to wait for them to deal with the men and the gate. My hands splayed out over the dashboard as I took a deep breath, bowing my head to try to regain some semblance of control over my warring emotions. I vaguely heard the gate opening before West and Francis got back into the car. West started it and then we were moving. I looked up, watching the dark road ahead of us and the trees surrounding the estate.

The moment the main house came into view, I sat back and put my hand

over my mouth, bile rising up in my throat. My prison held ugly memories. Being back at the scene of the crime was horrific. My low moan of fear had Francis reaching forward and squeezing my shoulder. He said nothing, just gave me the reassurance they were all here for me.

West pulled the car up near the fancy turning circle in front of the house with a fountain in the middle of it. Drake and Prescott stopped next to us, getting out of the car a moment later. The two men we'd poisoned were in the back of their car.

I stared at the building in front of us through the windscreen. It was strange to see it all lit up, given it was nearing eleven o'clock at night. Dark deeds were best done at night when the country was sleeping. When no one would be any the wiser until the morning light arrived.

"Ready, little Scar?"

My eyes flicked to West. Seeing his amber eyes so full of love had me taking another deep breath and unbuckling my seatbelt. I could do this. I had my boys with me.

"As I'll ever be."

The three of us got out of the car, joining Drake and Prescott, who stared at the estate with thinned mouths and angry expressions on their faces. They knew what had gone down in the walls of this place.

You'd think we would have had a party to meet us with all the security Stuart had for this place. I smiled. He didn't account for how much I knew about his fucking estate. Instead of guards, there was a single man waiting for us at the front door.

I walked over to him as the boys got the two men out of the car. Gio had a tight smile on his face when I stood before him.

"Hey."

"Miss," he replied with a nod.

"Is it done?"

"Yes. It wasn't easy, but you shouldn't have any trouble."

I hadn't told him what we were going to do to everyone, but I'm sure he was more than aware. After all, the boys had threatened his life if he didn't help us. This had been the hardest part of our plan, getting Gio alone so we could have a conversation with him. Of all the people in Stuart's employ, his chef had been

the only one who was nice to me. Everyone here was complicit in what had been done to me, but I had no interest in harming this man. He'd given me comforts no one else had, like the birthday cake he'd made for me last year when I'd been locked in the cell. The memory of Mason giving it to me was sour, but that wasn't Gio's fault.

"You should get out of here."

He reached out and squeezed my shoulder.

"Live well, Scarlett."

Then he walked away towards the car nearby. If he said a word or revealed his involvement in this to anyone, the boys would hunt him down and end his life. He knew that. They hadn't wanted to let him go. Gio wasn't innocent, but his help had meant we could destroy this place and get away with it. At least, that was the plan.

I watched him start the car and drive away towards the road leading off the estate. The one we'd just driven along.

The boys joined me, Prescott and Drake, carrying the two men who were now dead. I stared up at the house, dreading having to walk inside. It wasn't a place I had any interest in returning to, but soon it would be gone. Eviscerated from the world. I kept that in mind as I stepped into the lobby through the open front doors.

The building had two large wings on either side of the centre part. One of them was for the staff, the other for Stuart and Phoebe. The middle part held all the entertaining rooms, places for the public when Stuart held dinners and parties here. I was never allowed to attend those, but I'd snuck out and watched on several occasions just to see something outside of my limited worldview. I got caught a lot, landing me in the cell, but it didn't stop me. My need for something more outweighed the risk.

The lobby was a grand affair with a staircase curled around each side ending in a landing overlooking the marble floor below. My footsteps echoed around the vast space as I made my way into the centre of it and looked up at the painted ceiling. Stuart had commissioned the artwork when I was still in my teens after he'd visited the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. He liked over the top shit to demonstrate his wealth and influence. Everyone always admired it when they walked in. I personally thought it was excessive, but there was no

accounting for taste. Everything about Stuart Carver was lavish and fucking gaudy if you asked me.

West came to a stand next to me, his eyes darting around the place as he rested a sledgehammer on his shoulder. His face was a picture of disgust.

“What the fuck is this shit?” He waved at the ceiling with his free hand. “Who does he think he is? The lord of the fucking manor? What a cunt.”

“You could say that. He likes to show off his wealth.”

“This is a fucking neon sign blaring in your damn face saying look at me, I’m so far up my own arse, I can see the fucking sun. Jesus, if I didn’t hate the guy already, this would make me want to bash his head in on sight.” He spat on the floor. “Fucker knows no bounds.”

I couldn’t help breaking out into a smile at his words. His words shoved their way through my paralysing fear of being back here. Reaching out, I laced my fingers with his, making him look down at me as Francis dumped a bag down next to me.

“You can bash his head in later. First, let’s make sure Gio did what we asked. I’m ready to end this.”

West grinned at me. This was it. There was no going back. We had committed to ending Stuart for good. And nothing would stop us now.

THIRTY FIVE

SCARLETT

The first place we needed to check was the security room. This was key to our plan going off without a hitch. Not that I imagined any plan we had would end up the way we envisioned, but we couldn't afford to go off script unless circumstances changed.

Prescott and Drake dumped the two dead security guys in the lobby and shut the front door. I squatted down, opened the bag Francis had brought and pulled out a crowbar, swinging it between my fingers when I stood up.

"Careful with that," Drake said.

I turned to him.

"Why? Do you think I'm going to hit you with it?"

The way he smiled had my heart thumping.

"No, but if you're planning on bludgeoning anyone to death, warn us first."

I winked, then took a deep breath, reminding myself I had nothing to fear here. We had the upper hand. We'd done everything in our power to make sure this was as painless as possible... for us. It wasn't going to be painless for them. We planned to make it hurt.

"If you want to kill someone that way, I brought the sledgehammer. Much more effective," West said as I started towards the staff wing.

I shook my head, trying not to imagine what kind of damage West would do to a human being with it. The house was eerily quiet, even at this time of night. I could only hope for the best and expect the worst. Gio wouldn't have been able to get to everyone. We knew that, but the important people would be none the wiser as to who had just entered the main house.

The security room wasn't far off the lobby and, as expected, was locked.

There was one thing about this old house no one had thought to replace. The fucking wooden doors. I stepped back, waving at it. West gave me a grin before stepping up to it. Then he looked up at the camera blinking above it.

“Did you think this flimsy piece of shit would keep us out?” he said before his foot slammed into the door, making it groan under the impact.

He took a step back, taking the hammer off his shoulder, and proceeded to smash the door repeatedly. It lay in pieces by the time he’d finished. I was the first one to step through, holding the crowbar tight in my fist.

The man in the room scrambled back away from the safe he was trying to get into and looked like he was about to shit himself.

“Well, hello, Alex. I bet you didn’t think you would see me again.”

I looked back to find West had followed me in.

“Tell Drake it’s bludgeoning time.”

Then I turned to Alex, head of fucking security and the biggest cunt out of all of them. I swung the crowbar back and forth as I approached him. He backed up into his chair, his knees buckling under him.

“Scarlett...”

“You fucked with the wrong girl.”

West came around and forced him into the chair. He stood behind Alex, holding the man down for me. I pressed the crowbar into his chest, making him wince.

“Who knows we’re here?”

“N-n-no one.”

I canted my head, pressing the points of the bar harder against him.

“Are you sure about that?”

“Yes! Everyone else is...”

“Is what, Alex?”

He looked towards the screens.

“Passed out. I was going to phone the police, then you all barged in here.”

“A likely fucking story.”

Pulling the bar away from his chest, I brought it down on his hand instead. He screamed at the impact, the sound of bones snapping filling the air.

“How long until you noticed, huh? Or were you too busy wanking over porn as usual?”

The only reason I knew about Alex's proclivities was due to overhearing two guards complaining about walking in on him masturbating in here. There were a lot of things I'd heard in the past ten years I probably shouldn't have. I stored it all away. When you lose your memory, keeping your new ones becomes imperative. I never wanted to forget anything again. Guess it worked in my favour. I could tell the boys information about the estate they couldn't have found out any other way.

"I... I... only a few minutes before you got here. I was..."

"Wanking."

"Yes."

West snorted but didn't say anything. Why was I not surprised? For all Stuart's paranoia and security protocols, he hadn't employed the most vigilant of men to do the job.

"Well, it's too fucking bad for you. If you'd been paying attention, maybe you would have seen us kill your fucking security at the gate. Now... you're going to die too because of your own stupidity."

I brought the crowbar down on his other hand, making him scream again. Tears slid down his cheeks, but I didn't care. This man wasn't worth my pity or regret. He was worthless scum. He'd taunted me more times than I could remember. Sometimes when they threw me in the cell, he came in and beat me further for good measure. He made my life hell. I wasn't going to let him get away with it. No one here deserved my mercy.

"That's it, Alex, cry like a little fucking baby. Maybe in your next life, you won't try to manhandle women like they mean nothing, you worthless piece of shit."

The way he blubbered had me watching him for a moment. I gripped the crowbar at the end with both hands and swung it, smacking him across the side of the head. The crack of his skull sent a shiver down my spine, but I didn't stop there. Blow after blow came until he was bleeding profusely from the shattered side of his face. His eyes were open, but dull and lifeless.

I looked at the bloodied crowbar. A sick sort of satisfaction washed over me. Francis' words from the day I first killed clicked into place. The thrill of taking another life. One who had hurt you. Who had given you too much pain.

Justice. This is justice. Every part of it.

Reaching out, I used Alex's shirt to wipe away his blood from my weapon. West had let go of him after the first blow came, knowing it would have knocked him out. He leant back against the desk, watching me with pride.

"My little warrior has sharp claws."

I shoved the chair with Alex in out of the way before stepping up to West. Placing the crowbar on the desk, I looked up at the man I'd loved my whole life.

"Your little warrior is a goddess."

He brushed my cheek with his knuckles.

"My goddess of the night."

"If you two are quite done mooning over each other," Drake's voice came from behind us. "We've got to find out where the fuck that cunt has got to."

West wrapped an arm around me, pulling me away from the desk to give Drake room. He strode right up to it, but not before giving me a smile as if he was proud of me too.

Prescott whistled as he walked in and saw Alex. He nudged Francis when he followed and indicated me and West with a nod of his head.

"Peas in a pod, those two."

Francis rolled his eyes and went over to help Drake. They'd obviously heard Alex screaming and knew what to expect when they came in.

Prescott came over to us. West kept his arm around me, holding me to his chest as if letting go would tear him in half. Prescott, on the other hand, leant down and pressed a kiss to my forehead.

"My brave little lamb."

"More like your murderous little lamb."

He laughed.

"That too."

"For fuck's sake," Drake ground out, making me turn to the screens.

"What is it?"

He pointed at them.

"They're all over the place, not in their rooms. We're going to have to stage everyone and that's going to add time."

My eyes scanned over the screens, finding he was right. The staff had all passed out where they stood. Gio had drugged the food and spiked drinks. We'd got him the drugs to knock everyone out, but we knew there would be outliers

like Alex he wouldn't be able to get to. I was sure there would be other security guards in the building too. We just had to find them.

"There's a plan for the building, along with everyone's room assignments," I said, pointing at the board to their right. "We can't afford to leave them where they are. Now, where's Stuart?"

Drake flicked between more cameras until we came across a room with two people passed out inside. Stuart and Phoebe were both slumped on a sofa. It would have taken time for the drugs to work through their system.

"Here."

"That's their private sitting room."

Drake stared at the screens for a long moment. Then he straightened and turned to all of us.

"We only have limited time before the drugs wear off. Francis, I want you to restrain Stuart and Phoebe. Take Pres with you. If you find anyone along the way, you know what to do with them."

We needed to take their lives. Everyone here would die. It was the only way we could guarantee no witnesses. No one would ever know the truth of what we'd done.

"West and I will start dealing with the rest of the staff and make sure all the security is dead. Scarlett, you can direct where everyone goes. Remember, we need to make it look like they were all in their beds, okay?" He pointed at Alex. "This fuck can stay here. He was meant to be watching the screens all night."

"We need to search Stuart's office too," I put in.

"We can do that later... after everyone is dead."

I nodded and gave him a smile. We weren't going to leave without going through his shit. This man had haunted our lives for ten years. He'd made mine a living hell. We needed to find out everything we could before we razed this place to the fucking ground.

Francis dug the things we needed out of the bag and handed them to Prescott and Drake. Then we were looking over routes and moving out. I held West back for a moment, eyeing the safe with suspicion.

"Do you think we can get this open?"

He looked at it, then at his sledgehammer.

"We're better off finding the combination. Would take too much time."

I nodded and followed him out. While I wanted to know what Alex was trying to access, in the grand scheme of things, it wasn't important.

"What are you two doing?" Drake asked, crossing his arms over his chest as we emerged from the security room.

"Nothing, let's go," West said, adjusting the hammer on his shoulder and walking off in the direction of the staff living room where we'd identified a few people who had lost their battle with consciousness.

Drake and I walked after him, me gripping the crowbar tight in my fist. I wasn't planning on killing anyone else with it, but it made me feel safer.

"Are you okay?" Drake asked after a moment.

"I guess so. Being back here is... difficult."

I was keeping my memories at bay, trying not to think too hard about what was done to me here. Killing Alex had been cathartic, but I wouldn't feel okay until everyone who had hurt me here was eradicated from the world.

He reached out and tucked me up against his side as we continued walking. I nuzzled his jumper, feeling his warmth and presence surrounding me. Drake could be cold, but with me, he'd changed. There was tenderness and affection in his gestures. He had more than proven he was willing to do anything for me. The fact he'd stood up to his mother in the face of her disapproval over our relationship spoke volumes. Not to mention him allowing Francis to sleep in his bed with us last night. After he'd relaxed, he'd drifted off quickly, leaving me between two slumbering men I loved fiercely. They were my shelter. My safety. And I'd fallen asleep knowing they'd protect me until their dying breaths.

The five of us would be each other's guardians. We'd fight until the very end.

"I know this isn't easy for you, little wisp. I want you to know I'm proud of you for coming here."

I held back the emotions swirling in my gut from his words.

"You're going to make me cry," I whispered.

He leant down and kissed my forehead before straightening.

"When we're done, you can fall apart and we'll put your pieces back in place together as a family. Okay?"

I nodded, knowing I had the strength of my four men behind me.

We reached the staff living room and stepped in after West, who was surveying three of the people in here.

“Who are they?” he asked, swinging the hammer down and placing it on the floor with the handle sticking up.

I walked over and checked each person.

“Norman, Granger and Mirabelle.” I pointed at each of them in turn. “Why?”

“Do you want to kill any of them?”

I bit my lip and shook my head. They were the groundskeepers and had never given me any trouble. West cracked his knuckles and dug out his knife.

“Then allow us to do the honours.”

Drake flicked out his own knife, then the two of them approached the three groundskeepers. They were dispatched with ease. One quick strike between the ribs to the heart. Drake taking the first two and West the last one.

“Right, where do we put them?” Drake asked, looking over at me with a smile.

I tossed my crowbar from hand to hand, having memorised the room assignments. It was time to stage the bodies.

“Follow me.”

THIRTY SIX

SCARLETT

After we'd deposited the bodies in their bedrooms, we walked out and heard a noise. The three of us froze. Drake put a finger to his lips and signalled to West he was going to check it out. I moved closer to West as Drake broke off from us, creeping in the direction of the noise. West took my hand and pulled me in the other direction towards the stairs. We still had a job to do. Drake could handle whatever that was alone.

When we were far enough away after making our way downstairs, West pulled me into the kitchen, somewhere I'd been many times in the past. We made our way over to the pantry, finding Cecilia, Gio's assistant, passed out there. West set his hammer down, pulled her out of the pantry and placed her on the large kitchen island. His eyes went to me.

"This one?"

I shook my head. She wasn't that bad compared to the other staff. The housekeeper, Moira, was the one I hated the most. Stuart had a fucking butler too. Gendry. He was a cunt who gave me shit for anything I did wrong. When I found him, I wanted to cave his head in with West's sledgehammer, not that I thought I could wield it. Maybe I would find another way of ending his sorry existence.

West took out his knife and ran it along her throat, staring down at Cecilia with a dark gleam in his eyes.

"How would you like me to kill her, little Scar?"

I looked her over. She'd merely turned a blind eye to the abuse dished out by the others. It didn't make her any better than them.

"We can't have her bleeding out everywhere in here."

He set his knife down and pulled out a syringe from his pocket, flipping the cap off.

“Cyanide it is then.”

I watched him inject Cecilia in the neck. She was unconscious so wouldn't feel any pain. I suppose that was a small mercy, not that I believed she should have any. In this situation, beggars couldn't be choosers. We were here to dispatch them all with efficiency.

He put the cap back on the syringe, pocketed it with his knife, then indicated the hammer with his head. I took a hold of the handle while he put Cecilia over his shoulder. Then we left the room, me dragging the sledgehammer long behind us.

We walked down the hallway towards the stairs leading up to the staff bedrooms where we'd just come from. I left the hammer at the bottom of the stairs for West to collect later.

We deposited Cecilia in the room she shared with one of the maids, Jemma, who had been asleep in her bed. West had taken a knife to her, uncaring about the bloodshed. I'd said nothing, merely watched him kill her with a fatal wound to her heart.

“Is there anyone specific you want to kill yourself?” he asked me when we were walking back down the stairs.

“The butler and the housekeeper.”

“Did you see where they were on the cameras?”

I nodded. They were in the family wing. We could circle back if there was anyone else left when we were done.

“Let's go find the fuckers then.”

We made our way back to the lobby, where West deposited his sledgehammer, knowing we had no further use for it right now, and across to the other wing. I swung the crowbar as I walked. West kept checking me to see if I was okay. Keeping my mind off the memories of this place was difficult, but I kept my shit together. Being in the family wing was worse. This is where I'd lived for ten years. Where everything had happened to me.

“What did they do to you?”

“Gave me shit all the time. They said things... called me names and made me feel worthless.”

I swallowed as we entered the family sitting room. In the far corner, the two of them had passed out with their clothes in disarray. My lip curled up in disgust as we approached them.

“Well, well, looks like these two were having quite the party in here,” West said, looking them over with a sneer. “Would they be in their rooms at this hour or should we fuck them up and leave them here?”

Seeing Gendry’s limp dick hanging out of his clothes made me sick. Made me see fucking red.

“We need to move them into his bedroom.”

I didn’t tell West what I was planning to do when we got them into the butler’s room. We heard a noise behind us and found Prescott walking in. He had blood on his face.

“Just in time,” West said. “Help me with these two.”

“Where’s Frankie?” I asked as Prescott came over to us. “And what did you do?” I pointed at his face.

“He’s keeping an eye on Stuart. We ran into some trouble on the way, a couple of guards who were still awake.” He grinned, blood-lust written all over his face. “Don’t worry, they aren’t breathing any longer.”

Prescott and West lifted up Gendry and Moira. West waved at me to lead the way. We retraced our steps to the staff wing. I noticed the two guards were no longer in the lobby.

“Did you move those two?” I asked Prescott.

“Yeah, we took them to the big dormitory bedroom you said the guards stayed in.”

I nodded as we walked up the stairs and got to Gendry’s bedroom. Before the boys could put them down, I dragged a chair into the middle of the room.

“Put him here. Do you have any rope or something to secure him with?”

“Why?” West asked, depositing the man down in the chair.

“I’m going to wake him up. I would rather he be witness to his own demise.”

“What about this one?” Prescott asked.

“Put her on the bed. He can watch me kill her.”

Prescott did as I asked, looking over at West with a raised eyebrow as if he wasn’t expecting me to be quite this ruthless. Well, those two were in for quite the experience. He pulled out a couple of cable ties from his pockets and

squatted behind Gendry, securing his arms for me. It would have to do.

I went into his bathroom and poured a glass of water before coming back out. Then I threw it in Gendry's face.

"Wakey, wakey," I shouted at him, slapping him across the cheek.

He jerked into consciousness, spluttering and blinking. It took him a minute to recover from being drugged. Then he stared at me with wide eyes when he realised we'd secured him to the chair.

"Scarlett?"

"Yeah, it's me. And before you ask, no, I'm not answering any of your fucking questions."

I slapped his face again for good measure before walking away towards Moira.

"You see, Gendry, we're here to kill you. But first, I'm going to gut this bitch."

"W-w-what?"

West came over and handed me his knife, giving me a smile before he stepped back with Prescott. I'd told them all before we came here I wanted to be in on the murder. I didn't want them to stop me from taking lives.

Before Gendry could say another word, I stabbed Moira in the guts and twisted the knife, tearing it through her flesh. She would bleed out all over the fucking bed, but I no longer cared. My gloved hand was covered in blood as I turned around. Gendry looked white as a fucking sheet when I approached him again.

"She called me a dirty little whore and made me feel like shit. You, on the other hand, tried to force yourself on me. Don't think I've forgotten. You're fucking lucky Stuart didn't want me sullied or no doubt that cunt Alex wouldn't have pulled you off me."

His bottom lip trembled as I looked down at where his dick was still hanging out.

"Do you know he's dead now? I bashed his fucking head in. But what you deserve... well, that's so much worse."

I didn't want to touch him like this, but my disgust with this man made me do it. Reaching down, I grabbed a hold of his dick and then I was sawing through the flesh with West's knife. The horrific screams emitting from Gendry's mouth

were ignored. When I severed his dick from his body, I smiled at him before shoving the limp organ in his wide open mouth.

“That’s it, take it like a good fucking boy.”

He choked and tried to spit it out, but I refused to let him. While I held his dick in his mouth, I stabbed him between his ribs right where West had explained to me the heart was. I did it again for good measure before stepping back and watching him choke on his own dick while he bled out.

“Well, remind me never to get on your bad side,” Prescott said from next to me.

I looked up at him with a smile.

“He deserved it.”

He leant down and kissed my forehead.

“He more than deserved it.”

I turned to West, noting the way his amber eyes gleamed with violence.

“I think that’s everyone... we should meet up with Frankie.”

West gave me a nod before he strode over to Gendry, hauled him off the chair and threw him on the bed on top of Moira, not giving a shit about how he was placed. I put the chair back where it should be by his desk and washed my bloodied gloves off in the bathroom.

“Let’s go.”

The three of us made our way across to the family wing and upstairs to the private sitting room. Francis was sitting in one of the armchairs scrolling through his phone. He looked up when the three of us entered. Stuart and Phoebe were both tied up. I noted Francis had shaped harnesses around them using ropes and chains. His attention to detail made me smile.

“Have they woken up?” Prescott asked, leaning against the wall.

“Not yet,” Francis replied as he got up, stuffing his phone back in his pocket.

I looked around the place.

“Have you seen Drake?”

“No, I thought he was with you and West.”

I shook my head.

“He was until he heard a noise and went to investigate.”

Retracing my steps, I walked back outside the room and looked down the hallway. A door opening caught my attention. I froze in place as the person

exited the room. My breath whooshed out of me, spying familiar the black hair of the man I loved dragging someone out with him. My feet were immediately carrying me over to him.

“Drake!”

He looked at me and smiled.

“Where have you been?” I asked when I reached him.

He abruptly closed the door behind him. It was the master bathroom. I frowned, wondering why on earth he would be in there.

“Dealing with a stray guard and a couple of other staff members.”

I looked at the man he had a hold of. His throat was slit, but there was no blood dripping from it any longer.

“What were you doing in the bathroom?”

Drake looked behind him, then back at me.

“Nothing really.”

I waved at the man.

“That does not look like nothing.”

He shrugged.

“Where are the others?”

“In with Stuart and Phoebe. We think we got everyone.”

He started towards the open doorway I’d come out of, dragging the man behind him.

“We’ll deal with this guy, do one last sweep of the place, make sure everyone is where they should be and then we can wake Stuart up.”

I wanted to ask Drake further questions about the bathroom but decided it wasn’t worth it. We had more important things to do.

He left the dead guy outside the sitting room and walked in.

“Right. We can leave those two here. They’re not going anywhere. Let’s all walk the building, then we’ll deal with them, okay?”

The others nodded and followed him out the door. Drake picked up the dead guy and strode off in the direction of the staff wing.

It was time to make sure everything was handled here before the final act.

The one we’d all been waiting for.

The deaths of Stuart and Phoebe Carver.

THIRTY SEVEN

SCARLETT

After we walked the house, the boys carried Phoebe and Stuart from the main house to one of the outbuildings nearby. It was an old barn with beams running across it. From there, Francis and West secured a meat hook to a chain and hoisted Stuart up onto it, hanging him on the hook. He was left dangling in the middle of the space. They did the exact same thing to Phoebe.

Drake had been looking around the barn for something. He appeared next to me with two large plastic containers. I raised my eyebrows as he placed them underneath Stuart and Phoebe's hanging bodies.

"What are those for?" West asked as he stood back to make sure their handiwork was secure.

"I want their blood," Drake said with a shrug.

"Why am I not surprised?"

West rolled his eyes and came over to me and Prescott, who was laying out a few implements on an abandoned table we'd found in the barn. Drake's statement, combined with the whole keeping me out of the master bathroom before we left the main house, made me suspicious about what he had planned.

West put his hands on my shoulders and gave them a squeeze.

"You ready for this, little Scar?"

I leant back into his chest and turned my face up towards him.

"As I'll ever be."

He bent his head, seeking out my mouth with his and kissing me. Then he stroked my neck when he let go, giving me a wicked grin. I'd put my hair up in a braided bun to keep it out of the way.

"Do you want to go first or last?"

“Last.”

“As my little Scar wishes.”

He released me. I curled myself into Prescott’s side. He wrapped an arm around me, giving me a half-smile as he stroked his fingers down the handle of the butcher’s knife.

“You planning on using that?”

Prescott snorted and picked it up, swinging it a few times.

“Perhaps.”

He set it back down and leant closer, capturing my mouth in his. I turned and gripped his jumper between my fingers to keep him there while he took his fill of my lips. I smiled when he let me go, smoothing down his clothes.

“Time to get this show on the road, little lamb?”

“Yeah... just give me a minute.”

He stroked my face and let me go, giving me a nod.

Drake and Francis were conversing in low tones as I approached them. I brushed my hand against Drake’s arm to get his attention. His indigo eyes were dark as he turned to me.

“Ready, little wisp?”

I went up on my tiptoes, wrapping my hand around the back of his neck.

“Kiss me first.”

He did as I asked, pressing his mouth against mine and devouring me with one of his heated and toe-curling kisses I would never get enough of. I was breathless when he pulled away. The smirk on his face told me he knew how he affected me.

I shifted closer to Francis, who had a pensive expression on his face as he stared up at Stuart and Phoebe.

“Frankie.”

His eyes darted to mine as I curled my arms around his waist. His hands moved to my behind, pulling me tighter against him.

“Are you okay?”

“Just thinking about how this is almost over.”

“Is that a bad thing?”

“No.” He squeezed my flesh. “I’m ready to leave this chapter of our lives behind and start a new one. But first, I want to make him pay for the things he’s

done to my family.”

“You will.”

He bent his head to mine, brushing his mouth along my lips.

“And then you’ll be free of him forever.”

I nodded, pressing my mouth firmly against his. Francis kissed me like I was his sun, moon, and stars. He had me locked up in his arms, demonstrating to me I was his everything in the moments before we would show the man who’d hurt us his rule was over.

When he released me, he smiled and reached up to stroke my cheek.

“It’s time.”

I nodded and turned to find the others had joined us. Drake moved over to Phoebe, flipping out a knife and grabbing a hold of her wrist. He made a single cut down the centre of her forearm. Blood flowed when he dropped her arm, dripping down to her hand and then into the container below. He did the same to the other side.

“Wake him up.”

West had a bucket of water and threw it at Stuart’s head. It had been ice cold and the shock of it jerked him awake.

“W-w-what’s going on?”

His eyes were wide as he tried to focus on us and his surroundings. It took him a minute, then his face paled when he realised he was hanging from a hook and the five of us were standing below him.

“Hello, Stuart,” Drake said with a sneer. “Nice of you to join us.”

“What the fuck is this?”

Prescott stepped forward, the butcher’s knife swinging between his fingers.

“This? Oh well, it’s our little surprise for you.”

“Surprise? A fucking surprise?”

He wriggled in his restraints, which only made him swing back and forth. I tried to suppress a smile. He looked utterly ridiculous trying to get out of the harness Francis had fashioned.

“You bastards. You mother fucking bastards.”

“Well, that’s not very nice,” West said. “What did we ever do to you?”

“What did you do? What did you fucking do? You killed my sons!”

West shrugged and smiled at him.

“You still harping on about that? Wow, you’re like a broken fucking record, aren’t you? Boo-fucking-hoo.” He took a step towards Stuart. “What about the lives you stole from us, huh? From her.” He pointed at me. “You took everything you could from her, but you couldn’t take us. No, you tried to destroy what we had, but you didn’t succeed. And now? Well, now you’re going to pay.”

The way Stuart seethed at West’s words had him swinging vigorously in his harness. The veins in his temples were popping and his face had gone puce. He was about to open his mouth when his head turned sharply, and he caught sight of Phoebe next to him.

“What did you do to her? What the fuck did you do to my wife?”

“She’s not dead... yet,” Francis said, stepping closer to Phoebe. “But you see here?” He pointed at the cuts Drake had made, the blood steadily flowing from her hands into the large container below her. “For every one of your crimes against us, we’ll make another cut. She’s going to bleed to death because of you.” He shrugged as he looked at Stuart. “But I don’t know why you care. Not like she was faithful to you.”

Stuart was so enraged by Francis’ words, the spittle from his mouth sprayed out with his shout.

“You worthless fucking piece of shit. Let her go!”

Drake tutted and took hold of Phoebe’s wrist. He dragged the knife down, making another slice next to the first one.

“We can’t do that.” He took her other wrist and slid the knife down it too. “You see these? Well, the first one is for when you kidnapped Scarlett. The second, for when you had her mother killed.” He indicated her arm. “This is for the beatings you gave her. And this? Well, this is for locking her in a cold, dark cell to nurse her wounds.” He cut Phoebe again. “You’re lucky she’s unconscious for this, not that she would stay awake for long. Too much blood loss.”

It was dripping down faster now. A red river flowed down her hands.

“This is for when you decided you were going to give her to that cunt Mason.” Drake looked up at Stuart. “She killed him, you know. Stabbed him to death. It was beautiful watching her butcher him after all the pain he’d caused.”

He sliced Phoebe’s other wrist.

“And this one? It’s for you trying to take her again.” He made another cut. “And again.”

Then he stepped back and stared up at the woman I’d been made to call mother for ten years.

“It’s such a pity you underestimated us, Stuart, but your worst mistake was underestimating the girl you stole from us.”

Stuart had been raging at Drake’s actions, but I’d been too busy watching my man explaining each cut he made. It was almost poetic when I thought about it. Phoebe wore his crimes on her wrists.

“Begin,” Drake said, waving at Stuart.

Prescott grinned as stepped up to Stuart and took a hold of his leg. The man tried to kick Prescott away, but West was there, holding onto his free leg, preventing him from doing so. Prescott cut down Stuart’s trouser leg, exposing the flesh. Then he used the butcher’s knife to flay the skin from his leg. Stuart’s scream made me flinch, but I kept watching as Prescott left the flesh attached but hanging off Stuart’s leg. Blood ran down it, dripping into the container below.

“That’s for taking her from us,” Prescott ground out before he spat on Stuart’s bloodied leg and stepped back.

West took the butcher’s knife from him and proceeded to flay another piece of skin from Stuart’s leg. He then gave it to Francis, who did the same, followed by Drake. Stuart was screaming and crying by the time they were done. I could see his bone. It was kind of gruesome, but I didn’t care. The fucker deserved it.

The boys repeated the same steps on his other leg. The blood was flowing heavier now from both Phoebe and Stuart. It was mesmerising.

West took his knife and dragged it down Stuart’s stomach, slicing through flesh to expose his guts. They fell out of the wound. I could see Stuart’s horrified expression. I smiled at it.

“I would feed you these, but I don’t really want to deal with the fucking smell,” West spat at Stuart before stepping back.

I watched Drake, Francis, and Prescott slice through the tendons in the exposed parts of Stuart’s forearms, not bound by Francis’s ropes. He was beginning to lose consciousness now with all the blood loss.

The three of them stepped back. West set a chair in front of Stuart and

gestured to me. I walked over and took a hold of his knife. He helped me up onto the chair. Stuart hung there, half-conscious and blubbing incomprehensibly. I patted his cheek.

“There, there. It’s almost over now,” I crooned, my voice mocking. “We thought we’d leave you with one last little parting gift before we send you to hell.”

I gripped his chin between my fingers and pushed his face up, exposing his fat neck. Even so, I met his eyes and smiled.

“They did kill your sons. They killed them for me. And you know why? They tried to rape me. They were going to force themselves on me like they did to all those other girls. The rapes you covered up along with Mason’s dad.”

His eyes flared with pain.

“And they’re buried beneath the foundations of the building you never checked. They drowned them in concrete. I just thought you should know. Goodbye, Stuart. This is for everything you did to me and my men.”

“Death comes to all,” Drake murmured from behind me.

The words settled over me. He was my reaper, but this was my kill. I was the executioner today. Destroying the man who’d abused me for ten years was only right and fair. It was justice.

I sliced the blade across Stuart’s throat, cutting through flesh to end his sorry existence. It took several slices because his neck was so fucking big. After I’d watched Drake slice those guys throats, I knew exactly what to do. It was satisfying seeing the blood pouring down his body.

I stepped down from the chair, set the knife down on it and stood back with the boys, watching Stuart gurgle as blood flowed from the wounds we’d made. We watched the life drain from his eyes together, knowing we’d finally brought an end to this man. The one who’d caused us nothing but pain. It was done. We’d killed him. He was gone.

The boys crowded around me a moment later, holding me against them to reassure me it was over. I breathed out a sigh of relief, sinking into them as silence descended over us.

The silence in the wake of death brought upon the world by the Four Horsemen and their goddess, Nyx. The silence to end it all.

THIRTY EIGHT

DRAKE

Once we got Stuart and Phoebe down from the hooks when the blood had stopped dripping, the four of us carried them back into the house. We laid them down in their bed together, Francis removing the harnesses so we could dispose of the ropes and covered the bodies with their sheets.

“Go get the containers and bring them to the master bathroom,” I told Francis and Prescott who gave me a look but left the room as I’d requested.

I had to admit, this was a diversion we could do without considering this whole thing had taken longer than I expected, but I couldn’t pass up the opportunity. In a sick sort of way, I needed this.

“I knew you had something planned in that room,” Scarlett said, crossing her arms over her chest and giving me a look.

“And you will find out very soon what it is.”

“We don’t have time to waste.”

I raised an eyebrow and stalked over to her.

“It won’t be wasting time, little wisp.”

She didn’t look as though she believed me. To be honest, I hardly believed myself. This was going so far off book, I wasn’t sure I recognised myself. It was reckless. Maybe Prescott had rubbed off on me. He had almost got Scarlett caught by Stuart’s fucking men after agreeing to chase her in the rain. Thankfully, nothing had come our way because of the man he’d killed. We’d checked up on the guy who was meant to dispose of him when Scarlett and Prescott had been at Rosie’s. He’d taken Prescott’s warning to heart. We would have killed him if he hadn’t got rid of his friend.

“Since you decided you wanted their blood, I have an idea of what the fuck

you're up to," West said as he left the bedroom.

Scarlett stared up at me for a moment before retreating from the room too. I shook my head as I exited the bedroom. West and Scarlett stood outside the bathroom door. He rubbed her back and nuzzled her hair with his face. I sighed and leant against the wall outside. Scarlett didn't like me keeping anything from her. I wasn't sure she'd agree if I told her in advance.

Prescott and Francis appeared at the top of the stairs, each carrying a container with care. I shoved off the wall and opened the bathroom door, stepping inside the bright, white-tiled room. In the centre of it stood a huge Victorian-style claw-footed bath. And in that bath, I'd drained three people of their blood before I'd taken them to their rooms.

Scarlett came to a standstill next to me, taking in the rest of the space. There was a huge rainfall shower on one side of the room and the other had double sinks on the counter. The huge window looked out over the dark garden beyond.

Her eyes went to the bath. Then she took a step towards it, cocking her head to the side.

"A blood bath," she said without any inflection in her voice. "You made me a blood bath."

"Yes."

West whistled as he walked around to the bath and then rolled his eyes.

"You really are a kinky little shit, Drake."

I shrugged and continued to watch Scarlett. She dragged her fingers along the lip of the bath as she circled it.

"You want to bathe me in the blood of our enemies?"

"Yes."

She nodded, then walked over to the sink counter and ripped off her gloves, setting them down. Next, she began to remove her clothes as if she wasn't going to question this any further.

"Put it in the bath," I said to Prescott and Francis, who had joined us.

"This might be the most fucked up thing we've done," Prescott said as he walked over to the bath and carefully poured out the blood into it.

"We just flayed a man's skin from his body, and you think Scarlett taking a bath in blood is fucked up?" Francis asked as he walked around the other side

and poured in his container, making sure not to spill it.

Prescott shrugged and looked at Scarlett, who was still undressing and placing her clothes in a pile on the counter.

“I suppose you have a point.”

“My argument would be us not having time to do this shit.” Francis looked at me with amusement. “But if the boss says it’s okay.”

“I’m making time,” I said, closing that line of conversation down as I looked at my watch. “It’s just past midnight.”

“You haven’t forgotten what else we need to do, right?”

I shrugged.

“No, but you know how to run, don’t you?”

Francis gave me a look but set the container aside and walked over to the window where West was standing. None of them were against this happening. Francis just wanted to give me shit because he could.

Scarlett stepped up to the bath when she was bare and looked at me. I made my way over to her. Prescott stood back, leaning against the counter and crossing his arms over his chest. I took Scarlett’s hand and helped her step into the blood. She shivered but lowered herself into the red liquid. Watching her submerge herself in blood had my dick rising to the occasion. The way it slid over her skin was more than I could take. As she settled in it, I rolled up my sleeves and dipped my arms into the blood before running them along her arms. It had got cold in the intervening period since we’d killed the owners of it, but I didn’t care. It was fucking everything.

“Little wisp,” I ground out through my teeth, aching for her in a way I never had before, “so fucking stunning.”

She looked back at me, her hazel-green eyes wide. Then she reached up and stroked my face, getting blood on it. I let out a breath and wanted to steal hers. I wanted to get in there with her. To impale her on my length and fuck her until she came all over me. My hand rose out of the blood. I gripped her chin before I caught her mouth with mine. She let me part her lips and slide my tongue inside, tasting every inch of her sweet little mouth.

“Fuck, I want you,” I whispered, “I can’t wait until later.”

“Then have me.”

I let her go and then I was practically tearing off my clothes. I could feel

Prescott, West and Francis staring at us, but I didn't give a shit. I bundled them up, kicked my shoes away, and dumped my clothes on the counter. Then I stepped into the bath behind Scarlett, who moved to give me room. Sinking down into the liquid, I shuddered at the sensation of it on my skin. Scarlett turned around and straddled my lap, her hands wrapping around my neck before she kissed me. Her body rubbed against mine, making the blood slosh around the tub.

“Take me, Drake,” she whispered against my mouth. “Take me the way you need. I want you to.”

Maybe it was the events of this whole night making us both lust-drunk for each other, but I shifted us out of the liquid for a moment, allowing her to sink down on me inch by inch. She moaned, continuing to kiss me until she was fully impaled on my cock. I lowered us back into the blood. Scarlett started to ride me, making the blood slosh even more. Some of it ran down the sides of the white tub.

She pulled away and arched her back, holding onto my shoulders to keep herself steady. The way her eyes glinted had me gripping her hips, my fingers digging into her skin.

“Well, fuck,” Prescott hissed from near us.

I noticed West and Francis had come closer and were standing next to him. They could do whatever the fuck they wanted as long as I could have this. Have her this way. There would never be an opportunity like this again. Not if I had anything to do with it. We were going to have a normal life together when this was done.

Well, normal for us. We would never conform to society's whims. We made our own. And we revelled in it.

My hand ran up from her hip along her body, dragging more blood across it. I pinched one of her nipples between my fingers, making her mewl in response. Her gaze was still fixed on mine as she rode me faster.

“That's it, you're such a good girl.”

“Drake,” she moaned, her voice all breathy and filled with desire, “more. I want more.”

I smiled, leaning towards her and kissing my way down her throat. My mouth met hers again, and I bit down on her lip, making her whine in response. My

teeth dug harder until she bled for me. Then I sucked at the wound, groaning in her mouth.

It never occurred to me I'd want to fuck her when I bathed her in blood. Sure, I'd thought about doing it afterwards, but this was far beyond any fantasy I'd ever had of my little wisp. We'd killed together. Now this, clinging to each other, desperation lacing our veins in our lovemaking. There was nothing like this adrenaline rush.

Letting go of her mouth, I pulled her against me, our chest brushing together as I thrust up into her. I buried my face in her neck as she panted out her pleasure, her nails digging into my shoulders.

"I love you, little wisp. You have my heart. You have it all. I will never belong to anyone but you."

She shifted, then she was biting down on my earlobe, making me grunt. She sucked it into her mouth to soothe away the sting. I shuddered, holding back the need to come inside her. The woman had just discovered what would make me detonate on her within minutes. I dug my fingers harder into her skin, locking her in place as I continued to thrust up into her.

"Fuck," I hissed.

"I love you too," she murmured, pressing kisses down the side of my neck.

It was then I understood what it meant to be destined for each other. What it truly felt like to know you had found the person you'd spend eternity with. Who embraced everything you were and gave you what you needed without hesitation. Scarlett was my destiny. She was our fate. Our birth wasn't a coincidence, it was a sign we belonged with each other. People had tried to tear us apart. They hadn't succeeded. They had only strengthened our bond because we'd fought for it. We'd jumped through so many hoops to come to this moment. And it was everything.

She was everything.

"Drake, harder, please... I need it."

I encouraged her to get off me, turned her around and made her grab hold of the sides of the tub. Getting up on my knees, I pressed inside her tight little pussy once more, holding onto her hips as leverage before I pounded into her. Scarlett cried out, her fingers whitening around the tub. Then one of her hands left it and snaked between her legs. She stroked herself, letting me fuck her until

she exploded around me. Her garbled cries were music to my ears.

“That’s it, good girl, come over my dick.”

“Drake.”

“That’s not my name here, is it?”

She tipped her head back.

“No... you’re my Death.”

My hands tightened around her hips.

“Good girl.”

She arched her back and shuddered against me. Then she was slumping down, only holding herself up by one hand. Letting go of her hip, I stroked a hand down her back, wanting to soothe her as she came down.

“I think one of you needs to join them,” came Prescott’s voice.

My head turned, finally looking at the three of them leaning against the sink counter. Their eyes were fixed on us. The blood had got on the floor, soaking the white tiles. It was quite the fucking sight, seeing this perfectly pristine bathroom marred by red. I couldn’t help smiling. It was exactly as I had envisioned it when I’d come in here. I wanted to paint it red.

“You want us to fuck her in the blood too?” Francis asked, raising an eyebrow.

Prescott looked down at where Francis was clearly sporting an erection.

“I think that says you wouldn’t be averse to it.”

Francis shifted, his cheeks going red. Then he waved at West.

“He’s more into blood than I am with all his knife shit.”

West was too busy watching Scarlett with a dark gleam in his amber eyes to respond to Francis’ dig.

“Both of you can join in.”

The next thing I knew, West was pulling off his clothes, clearly unphased about giving it to Scarlett in blood. Francis stared at him for a long moment.

“Well, shit.”

Then he was tugging his clothes off too. Scarlett’s head raised, her eyes widening at the sight of them stripping off. Her gaze went to Prescott who hadn’t moved to do a thing.

“If they’re going to join us, then you need to get naked too,” she said a moment later, giving him a significant look.

Prescott straightened, dropping his arms from his chest.

“Is that so?”

She smiled as she straightened and rested her back against my chest.

“Yeah, Pres... it’s all or nothing with us, remember?”

He nodded slowly. Then he was pulling his clothes off too.

I guessed Scarlett was right. It was all of us or nothing. We weren’t known for doing anything by halves. And fucking in blood? Well, that was going all the fucking way and then some.

THIRTY NINE

FRANCIS

West moved to the bath, placing himself on the edge of it before reaching down into the red liquid and coating his forearm in it. He stroked his palm up Scarlett's body, cupping her breast to flick her nipple with his thumb.

"Look at you, little Scar, covered in the spoils of war," he murmured.

She let out a pant as he leant closer and brushed his lips along her cheek.

"Beautiful."

His hand slid higher and curled around her neck, angling her jaw to his advantage. He stroked his lips across hers.

"Make him come. Work his dick with that little pussy until he coats you with cum. Mix it with the fucking blood, you hear me? Make Death feel good. He made this happen. Without him, we'd never have found you. Show him how much you appreciate his hard work."

He kissed her, pushing his tongue into her mouth to taste our girl. She put her hands on the sides of the bath and started to move up, rocking herself back on Drake. His hands were guiding her, helping set the pace. West released Scarlett's mouth and smiled before looking at me.

"I think you should reward Famine too, little Scar. He needs your pretty little mouth wrapped around him."

West shifted away and pointed at the bath. Given Drake had embraced all of our kinks when we shared, I wasn't going to complain about the blood. I had to admit I was turned on watching the two of them fuck in it.

I climbed into the tub, feeling the cold liquid against my skin, and stepped up to Scarlett. She looked up at me with lust-filled hazel-green eyes. Then she reached for me, pulling me closer as her hands curled round my hips.

“Make me take it, Famine. Deprive me of oxygen when you fuck my mouth.”

This position reminded me of when we'd first all fucked Scarlett. She took Drake while I fucked her mouth. This time I could see desire written all over her face. And I wasn't about to deny her anything.

My hand wrapped around the back of her head. She'd put it up in a braided bun. I was careful not to disturb it as we didn't want her getting blood in her hair. Scarlett opened her mouth for me to slide my aching cock in. I groaned as she curled her tongue around me.

“Fuck, little whore.”

She moaned around my cock. I pressed deeper, wanting to make her take it all. This woman was a goddess, giving us everything we needed and so much more. She continued to ride Drake, making him grunt and let out a series of harsh pants. Then he nuzzled her neck, pressing kisses to her blood-soaked skin.

“Good girl. That's my good little wisp. Suck him harder.”

We were all running off an adrenaline-fuelled high after what we'd done tonight. Death hung in the air. We'd finally orchestrated our revenge against Stuart Carver. And after this kinky little interlude, we'd destroy the place Scarlett had called her prison for good. We'd make sure there was nothing but a shell left.

Prescott remained by the sinks, watching the four of us with evident need in his eyes. West stroked his fingers down Scarlett's chest, dipping his hand into the blood again. Scarlett moaned around my cock. Her fingers dug into my skin. I forced my dick further into her mouth. She swallowed and allowed me into her throat.

“Go on, make them come, little Scar. Let them paint you with it. I want to see it running down your fucking face.”

I almost came right then with West's words ringing in my ears. Scarlett hummed around me. I fed her more until my dick was jammed so far down her throat, she choked around it. My hand held her in place, revelling in the way she swallowed repeatedly around it, trying to breathe. My woman had told me to deprive her of oxygen. I pulled back and pumped in again, listening to her gagging sounds and the way the blood sloshed around the tub.

“Fuck,” Drake ground out through his teeth.

Scarlett rode him harder. His head fell back against the lip of the bath, and he

let out a low grunt. I pulled out of her mouth, allowing her room to breathe as Drake came inside her. Her gasps echoed around the room. She gripped my hips in an iron hold, clearly trying to stay upright while West continued to stroke her. His eyes were intent on her face, watching each and every one of her little tells. We'd all become so in tune with our girl, knowing exactly what made her tick in the bedroom.

“Oh, god, fuck,” she panted. “Jesus, West!”

Scarlett fell back against Drake, her whole body twitching with her second climax. West pulled his hand from the blood and cupped her throat.

“Good girl,” he told her. “My good little slut.”

She shuddered, closing her eyes as Drake stroked her shoulders and down her arms with his palms to soothe her. When she recovered, Drake lifted her off his cock, making her move closer to me.

“Up on your knees, little whore,” I ordered her as I took a few steps back.

West let go of her throat to let her crawl towards me. She curled her hands around my hips and ran her tongue up my shaft.

“Pres, find something we can use as lube,” West said over his shoulder before he put his hand to Scarlett's throat again. “And you, little Scar, you're going to take his dick down your throat. I want to feel it against my palm.”

I held onto her braided bun and placed the head of my dick at her lips. She opened her mouth to me, allowing me to slide back in. The angle she was at made it easier for me to shove it down her throat. She gagged but didn't complain. West watched my cock disappearing with complete rapture. Seeing her take it and feeling it.

Prescott rummaged around in the drawers and then approached us with a bottle of coconut oil. He handed it to Drake and sat on the edge of the bath next to West. Then he ran his hand down Scarlett's back. She arched into his touch as I began to fuck her throat.

Drake leant forward, popping the cap on the oil and drizzling it on his fingers. I watched him rub her tight little hole before pressing a finger inside. I had a perfect view of what he was doing from where I was standing. If anything, it only made it harder not to come. Feeling Scarlett's tight throat encasing my cock was more than I could take.

“Fuck, I don't know if I can hold on. You feel so fucking good, little whore.”

“Paint her face,” West said, “make it drip down her chin.”

I gripped her braid harder, ramming my cock into her mouth with short, hard thrusts. She was holding on for dear life at this point, her eyes watering with the force I used. That sight pushed me right over the edge.

I pulled out of her mouth, fisting my cock, and then I erupted. My cum sprayed over her still open mouth and chin. I pulled her head back and directed it all over the bottom of her face. It ran down her skin and dripped into the blood. I released Scarlett, my chest heaving with my climax. She turned her head to look at West and Prescott, showing them both her cum-drenched face.

“What a messy little lamb,” Prescott said.

Her tongue darted out as she licked it from her chin. Prescott’s blue eyes heated. She let go of my hip and dragged her fingertips through the cum. She grinned as she crooked a finger at him.

“Come infect me, Pestilence.”

I stepped out of the bath, making room for him and West if they wanted to play with her. Seeing the blood running down my legs didn’t bother me. Drake shifted out of the blood and sat on the edge of the bath to give them more room too.

“Turn around, little lamb.”

She did as he asked. He took her cum covered fingers and put them in her mouth, making her suck on them. Then he made her clean up the rest of her face, directing her fingers with his own.

“Good girl, you wouldn’t want to waste what Famine gave you.”

She shuddered at his words. He released her and stood up, walking away to the space between the bath and the window.

“Come here.”

Scarlett rose from the blood. West stood and helped her out of the bath. The blood clung to her skin as she walked over to Prescott. He drew her down on the tiles, making her straddle his lap. Drake gave the coconut oil to West, who grinned at him. I sat on the lip of the bath, watching Scarlett impale herself on Prescott’s dick as she held onto his shoulders.

“Do you remember when we fucked you together the first time?” he asked, stroking her bloody skin.

“Yes.”

“We’re going to fuck you like that again.”

West walked over to them and knelt on the tiles behind Scarlett. He coated his fingers in oil before sliding them into her. Drake moved back into the blood and then leant his arms on the end of the bath, watching the three of them from his position.

Prescott lay back, pulling Scarlett down with him to give West better access. She moaned as Prescott gripped her hips and made her ride him. Her hands were flat on the tiles by Prescott’s head, the two of them staring at each other with lust and love radiating from their expressions.

“Good girl, little wisp. Let them make you feel good,” Drake said, a smirk appearing across his lips.

He knew what he’d done by initiating this whole thing. A fivesome in the blood of our enemies was at the top of the most depraved acts we’d engaged in. This would probably make most people squeamish but fuck it, I’d long since stopped caring about right and wrong. I’d embraced who I was. There were no more chains holding me back. No fucking way I’d pass up an experience like this. It’s why I’d even got in the bath with Scarlett and Drake. I wanted to have this moment together.

It was a fucked up form of celebration, but that was us all over. We weren’t named the Four Horsemen for nothing.

“Please, War, I want your cock,” Scarlett whined as she continued to fuck Prescott while West had his fingers in her arse, preparing her for his dick.

“Do you? Mmm, I don’t know if you deserve it yet, slut. I think I need to hear you beg a little more.”

“Please, I want you so fucking badly. I need you inside me. Stretch me out... make it hurt, War. I need you to make it hurt.”

When she begged, it made it very hard for any of us to think straight. The sound of her voice was like a fucking beacon, guiding us to her, pulling the four of us under her spell. Our goddess would not be satisfied or tamed. She was as wild and free as her horsemen. She didn’t take no for an answer.

West gripped her hip and shoved a third finger inside her.

“You want the pain, slut? Are you thinking about that night when I made it hurt so bad you screamed against your gag, hmm? Did you like tasting yourself whilst I fucked you?”

“I loved it... every moment. Please give it to me. I want you to hurt me again, War. Break me.”

Drake looked at me with a raised eyebrow. We’d heard West say some pretty fucked up things to Scarlett since the night after she’d run to him. To hear her want it just as much. Well, our girl was full of fucking surprises.

“You’ve been such a good girl tonight. You did so well.” He stroked her back. “You deserve to get fucked the way you need.”

Releasing her, he poured the oil over his cock, coating it thoroughly, then pressed it against her. Scarlett cried out when he breached her. He didn’t give her any time to adjust, but she’d told him she wanted the pain. He shoved deeper, making Scarlett grip Prescott’s shoulder, her nails digging into his skin. He grunted and stroked her arms, trying to calm her as West impaled her completely on his dick.

He leant over her, ghosting his lips over her ear.

“That’s a good girl, you’ve taken us so well... now, little Scar, War and Pestilence are going to fuck you until you scream. Until you come all over our cocks from the pleasure and pain. Is that understood?”

She nodded, her eyes still fixed on Prescott’s.

“Good girl.” He straightened and gripped both her hips. “Let’s begin.”

FORTY

PRESCOTT

The feel of Scarlett impaled on both West and I was the highlight of my fucking night. Yes, I'd enjoyed all the death and violence we'd engaged in and ridding the world of Stuart Carver. But this moment with Scarlett? This was what I longed for. The times when we were all together like this. Where I could watch them fuck her and then take my fill of the woman we loved. The woman we'd devoted our entire lives to.

My little lamb.

West gripped the back of Scarlett's neck, pulling her upright to press her against his chest. I wrapped my hands around her hips, directing her movements. West circled her neck and nibbled her ear.

"Make your tits bounce for Pres," he told her. "Show him how much you want him to touch you."

Scarlett let out a harsh pant, placing her hands on my chest as leverage. Then she was riding us harder. I watched the way her breasts moved with each rise and fall of her hips against mine. I couldn't deny how fucking alluring it was, watching her use us for her own pleasure. Showing us exactly how much she needed our cocks inside her.

"Good girl, such a good little slut you are for us."

She bit her lip, staring down at me with such intensity, it threatened to undo me. The way this girl loved us. The fierceness of it. The absolute pure devotion she had for us. It was fucking awe-inspiring. Everything we did was for her. Even this evening had been for Scarlett.

Yes, we'd killed Stuart, his wife and all his fucking staff because he would never stop coming after us. But we'd exacted justice for her. He'd abused our

girl. Made her life a living hell. When she explained the extent of the damage inflicted on her, I'd been utterly incensed. The need to destroy everything Stuart stood for burnt in my veins. Soon, this place would be fucking ashes.

One of my hands left her hip and ran up her abdomen, stroking her bloody skin. Drake and his blood kink. Admittedly, watching him fuck her in it was a sight to behold. She was our queen, wearing the blood of our enemies on her skin. I may have been slightly hesitant before she told me to get naked, but now I was all in. There was nothing I wouldn't do for Scarlett and the boys. Nothing in this world would stop me from giving them everything they needed.

My fingertips grazed her scars. The ones painting a picture of the trauma she'd been through. Scarlett was so fucking strong. She was still healing, but you could see when you looked into her eyes, she would fight through anything thrown at her. We'd be right by her side as she did it. Our woman could take on the fucking world if she wanted to.

"Look at you, little lamb. Our goddess bathed in blood," I said, cupping her breast and pinching her nipple between my fingers. She moaned and her nails dug into my skin.

"You want to tell Drake and Frankie what you did to the butler, little Scar?" West asked a moment later, gripping her throat tighter.

Scarlett looked at the other two. Drake was leaning on his arms watching us while Francis sat on the edge of the tub.

"I cut his dick off and fed it to him for the time he tried to force himself on me. I don't know if I'd call Alex pulling him off me as lucky since Stuart didn't want me sullied, but I made that fuck pay for even trying."

Drake raised an eyebrow.

"Such savagery," Francis said with a smirk. "Tell me more. How exactly did you do it?"

"You want to know exactly how she severed a man's cock from his body?" Drake asked, looking at Francis with a frown.

"Yeah, I do. You got a problem with that?"

Drake put his hands up.

"No. I can't really since you just let me fuck our girl in blood. Whatever floats your boat."

Francis gave him a wink before turning back to Scarlett, who was grinning at

him.

“Pres cable-tied Gendry’s hands behind his back on the chair,” she said, stroking my chest and not faltering in fucking me and West. “Then I woke him up by throwing water in his face and screaming at him. He was all disorientated, but I got his attention by killing the housemaid, Moira. She was a bitch to me and those two had been fucking each other for as long as I can remember.”

Francis leant forward as if he was completely enthralled by what she was saying. This wasn’t something he’d expressed finding a turn on before, talking about the killings we’d carried out, but apparently, it was a thing for him and Scarlett. Who the fuck knew.

“I stabbed her in the guts using West’s knife, twisting it to mess up her insides. Then I went over to him, told him why I was doing it before grabbing hold of his dick and sawing through the base of it. He screamed the whole time, but I didn’t care. I stuffed his limp dick in his mouth and held it in there before stabbing him in the heart and leaving him to bleed out.”

West stroked her neck.

“You missed the best part, little Scar,” he murmured.

She turned her head slightly.

“What’s that?”

“When you told him to ‘take it like a good fucking boy’.”

Francis shifted off the bath and knelt down next to us before taking Scarlett’s face between his hands.

“My savage little whore. I’m so proud of you.”

Then he kissed her, his tongue tangling with hers. Her hand left my chest and curled around Francis’ neck. He pulled back slightly to lean his forehead against hers.

“I love you,” he told her, staring into her eyes as he did it.

She stroked his face, pressing her lips to his once more.

“Forever,” she whispered, “you’re my forever.”

Then he let her go and sat back, allowing her to concentrate on me and West again. Scarlett looked at West, who was continuing to give it to her without missing a single beat. There was nothing like being inside her this way. Having Scarlett take us both. I would never get enough.

“I want to make you come. I want to feel you both inside me, coating my

insides. Bring me War.”

The way West smiled would be chilling if I didn't know him so well. It was sinister in nature. The desire for violence ran through his veins. But this wasn't the type of violence where we would pay dearly or with our lives. It was the kind where raw passion and lust mixed with brutal fucking.

“As my little Scar wishes.” His free hand went to her pussy, stroking her clit as the hand around her neck tightened. “Give it to her, Pres, make her fucking feel it.”

I held onto her hips and thrust upwards, making her take more of me with each movement. It was clear he was depriving her of oxygen, but she didn't struggle against him. She took it, her eyes wide as she clutched West on one side and kept her other hand on my chest.

“Is this what you need, hmm? Want us to use you like our own little fucktoy and give you our cum?”

“Please.”

“Such a dirty little slut, all covered in blood, begging for dick like you can't get enough. So wanton and needy. Don't worry, I'll give you what you need. Make it hurt so bad, you cry. Your pleasure is my fucking purpose.”

It was getting harder to hold back with the way we were both fucking her. Everything in my body was taut. I strained against the urge to explode, keeping up my pace. A tear leaked out of Scarlett's eye. West licked it from her cheek. She moaned and struggled then, clearly feeling the effects of our brutality.

“Please,” she whimpered, “please.”

“Go on, infect her, Pestilence, give her what she needs.”

His words brought it on, tipping me over the edge. I groaned with it, feeling my body shake as I came inside her, giving my woman exactly what she asked for.

“Feel that, little Scar?” he hissed in her ear. “Feel him coming for you?”

“Yes, fuck, yes.”

“Now I want you to come for me, then I'll give you War.”

As I came down from my high, I could feel her getting closer to hers. The way she clenched and strained as West held her throat tight and stroked her clit was a clear sign. Her nails dug into my skin, making me grunt from the pain, but I didn't care. She could claw me all she needed if it meant she came. Because

Scarlett always came so fucking sweetly.

The moment West pushed her over the edge, she fell, bucking and writhing in his hold.

“Good girl,” he murmured, pressing a kiss to her cheek. “Such a good girl.”

Then he was fucking her almost violently, pursuing his own end like there was nothing else in the world he needed more. He growled when he came, making Scarlett take it all. Take everything he had to offer her.

He released her and Scarlett collapsed on me, resting her face on my chest. The three of us were spent, all needing to catch our breath for a few long minutes.

Francis was the one who helped Scarlett up off the two of us as West shifted backwards. Drake had got out of the bath and unplugged it, draining the blood. The place was a mess, with blood all over the tiles. We were covered in it too. Drake stepped up to the shower and turned it on, rinsing the blood off him. We all took turns to do so, drying off and dressing again. We didn't have time to linger now we'd done this. Not when we had shit to get on with.

Drake held Scarlett for a moment, whispering something in her ear and kissing her forehead before he looked up at us.

“We need to clean this room with bleach. I'm not taking any chances no matter what we're planning on doing to the house.”

West and Francis disappeared to get us new gloves and cleaning supplies. Scarlett remained curled around Drake as if she needed his comfort and security. I went over to them and rubbed her back as she nuzzled her face on his chest.

“You're okay, little wisp,” he murmured, “I've got you.”

I gave him a curious look.

“She just needs a minute,” he told me. “This is a lot, you know.”

I nodded. It had been. Her being back here in the place where she'd experienced so much pain. While this might have been cathartic for her, it was also hurting her too.

I moved closer and pressed my face to her hair.

“You're okay, sweetness, it's almost over. We're almost at the end now, okay? We can go home soon.”

She nodded and continued to hold on to Drake until West and Francis got back. Then the five of us cleaned the room, removing all traces of the blood and

piled up all the towels and cleaning supplies into bags. We didn't want to risk traces of us being found here.

We made our way downstairs and out to the cars, stuffing everything in the boot of one of them. Drake opened the other one and stared down at the large jerry cans we had in there. We lifted them out, setting them down in front of the house.

West had snagged his sledgehammer along the way and had it hoisted over his shoulder. He looked at Scarlett with a pensive expression on his face.

"You know the plan," Drake said, picking up one of the jerry cans and unscrewing the cap. "We cover every room and the outbuildings. Make sure that barn is done too, okay?"

Inside those jerry cans was petrol Penn had sourced for us. It was all untraceable, so even if they suspected arson, and they would, there was no fucking way they would find out how we got hold of it.

"Scar will come with me," West said, his tone brokering no objection. "We'll do the outbuildings and join you in the house when we're done."

Scarlett looked up at him with a frown.

"Just don't take too long," Drake replied before striding off into the main house.

Francis and I picked up our own cans, watching Scarlett take one and follow West towards the outbuildings.

"What do you think he wants to do with her out there?" I asked as I walked into the house with Francis.

He shrugged.

"Fuck knows. This is West we're talking about. Let's just get this done, then we can leave. I'm sick of the sight and stench of this place already."

I grinned. I was about done with this place too. And he was right. We should get this over with. Whatever West needed from Scarlett, I was sure it wouldn't take up more time we didn't have to waste after our little bit of fun with the blood bath. At least, I hoped. You never knew with West. I trusted Scarlett to make sure he didn't do anything stupid. She was the only one who could keep him in line.

"You're right. Let's get ready to burn this place down. I'm sick of it too."

And with that, the two of us parted ways, each walking into opposite wings to

cover the place in petrol. The blaze it would create would leave little trace of what we'd done here tonight.

Good fucking riddance.

FORTY ONE

WEST

When we were out of earshot of the others, Scarlett turned her face towards me and gave me a look. I knew she was suspicious of why I'd asked her to come to coat the outbuildings in petrol with me.

“What?”

“You could do this bit by yourself, so why do you want me here?”

I adjusted the hammer on my shoulder.

“We went through the whole house, including your bedroom, and there was no room like the one you described. The concrete cell. I'm guessing it's out here somewhere. I want you to show me. I need to see it.”

Maybe it was fucked up and twisted of me to force her to take me to her concrete prison. I had to see the place. Needed to know what she'd gone through. Seeing her bedroom wasn't enough. Scarlett hadn't wanted to go inside, so we hadn't made her. She told us there was nothing for her other than memories of screaming at night and the metal bars across the windows. Her bedroom was on the ground floor of the family wing at the back of the house. It made me sick to see the bars keeping her inside. The whole place made me violent, but I was keeping a lid on it. I couldn't afford to lose control when we had shit to do.

Scarlett faltered in her steps, shifting the can in her hands.

“You want to see the cell?”

“Yes.”

“I don't want to go in there, West.”

“You don't have to. Just take me to it and you can wait outside.”

She almost shook her head, her eyes full of sadness and pain.

“Okay, but we need to go deal with the barn first. It’s furthest away from the house.”

I touched her arm with my free hand, but I don’t think it reassured her. It made me feel like a dick for forcing this on her. She’d already dealt with so much this evening, being back in the place holding most of her worst memories. We’d made new ones for her. Killing all the people who’d wronged her. Not to mention the fuckery in the bathroom. That was unexpected, especially for Drake, who was so fucking anal about everything. Our girl had changed him. Brought out the old Drake. I’d known she could. Only Scarlett had the power to set us all free from the trauma and pain of losing her. She was the key to everything.

She was quiet as we reached the barn. I set the hammer down and took the can from her, going into the place and coating the area with petrol. I came out and drew a line from the barn to the first outbuilding. Scarlett brought my sledgehammer over and we swapped, so she didn’t have to carry it.

We dealt with the first outbuilding together. It was a storage unit filled with all sorts of crap, like old furnishings. The second contained gardening supplies. And the last building made her hesitate in her steps.

“This is it, isn’t it?” I asked, giving her shoulder a squeeze and pulling her to a stop.

“It is.”

“You don’t have to go any further.”

She looked up at me.

“Why do you want to see it so badly?”

I set the hammer down and took the can from her, placing it on the floor too. Then I put both my hands on her shoulders and came down to her level, meeting her eyes.

“You went through some of the worst experiences in your life in that place. I need to see and feel it for myself. Your pain is my pain. I need to live it and breathe it with you. Only then can I help take away the hurt and suffering lingering inside you.”

Tears welled in her eyes.

“West...”

“You’re mine and I’m yours. We’re half alive when we’re apart. We don’t exist

without each other. Let me carry your pain.”

Her hand came up and settled on my jaw.

“You want to share my burdens?”

“Yes. That’s what soulmates do, little Scar. You don’t need me to stand on your own two feet, but it doesn’t stop us from belonging by each other’s sides, breathing the same air and our hearts beating in tandem. It doesn’t stop us from needing each other to feel alive.”

Those threatening tears burst through, spilling down her cheeks. I gathered her up against my chest, stroking her back and pressing my face to the top of her head. Little sobs erupted from her mouth, showing me how much she struggled with her memories and the past. Scarlett had come so far with us, but there were still miles to go, so many things she had to heal from. I would help her in whatever way I could.

When she settled down, her sobbing abating, she pulled away and wiped her eyes with her sleeve.

“Let’s go see the cell,” she told me in a small voice as if she was unsure of herself and the decision to take me to it.

“You can stay outside, I promise.”

She nodded and picked up the can. I placed the hammer back on my shoulder and guided her into the building. Scarlett turned the light on when we entered. There were shelves and shelves of canned goods and other food supplies. We walked by them until we reached the end. There stood a metal door. She didn’t need to tell me this was the place.

“Will it be unlocked?”

She nodded, placing the can down next to us as she stared at the door. I moved closer to it. Reaching out, I grasped the handle and pulled it open. It swung back without any resistance. Then I stepped inside. The ghost of her pain hit me like a ton of bricks. My eyes darted around the bare concrete walls, floor, and ceiling. There were no windows. Not even a fucking lightbulb hung on the ceiling.

“You were in the dark here.”

“Yes,” she replied from behind me.

I walked around the concrete cell. The only light was coming from the open doorway. On the floor, there were several old bloodstains. Seeing them made

me want to destroy this place. Made me want to smash it into tiny pieces. That was her blood. My girl had been made to stay in here while she was bleeding from wounds inflicted on her by that cunt we'd killed and his fucking security guards.

I took the sledgehammer off my shoulder and gripped it between both of my palms. While I wouldn't be able to obliterate it, I could do some fucking damage. There was a primal need inside me, begging to get out, begging me to fucking well erase her hurt from these walls.

I let out a roar before swinging the hammer into the wall, causing the concrete to smash. That first hit brought more. I kept swinging and swinging, smashing the room each time the end of the sledgehammer hit the concrete.

“Fuck!”

The more I destroyed the room, the more I wanted to end this shit for good. I needed to see this fucking place burn, razed to the damn ground. To know their fucking bodies would be completely unrecognisable. Everything needed to be gone. I wanted only ashes and dust to remain.

My fight left me when I saw the mess I'd made of the walls and floor. I stood there in the middle of the cell, panting, with concrete dust settling all over me. There was a certain sort of catharsis that came from such destruction. At least now, the place was unrecognisable.

My head turned to find Scarlett standing in the doorway. Her eyes darted around the ruined room before they came to a standstill when they met mine. Her hands fisted in her clothes at her sides. Her lips parted, but no sound came out. We stared at each other across the small expanse for a long minute. I thought she might turn away at that point, but she didn't.

Scarlett licked her bottom lip, released her clothes and put her hand on her heart.

“I love you.”

Her statement slammed into me, almost knocking me off my fucking feet. And without thinking about it, my mouth formed the words I'd struggled with for so long.

“I love you too.”

I let go of the handle of the hammer and stalked across the room. The next thing Scarlett knew, she was whisked off her feet, and I was kissing her like my

life depended on it. I held my woman against my chest, devouring her mouth with each stroke of my tongue against hers, proving to her once and for all she was mine and I was hers. That our love had never disappeared. It had been waiting for us to grab hold of it all along.

She wrapped her legs around my waist as I moved out of the cell. I pressed her up against the wall outside, continuing to kiss the life out of her. Her hands were in my hair, disturbing the dust and debris. One of mine circled her throat, laying across her skin where it belonged. The only necklace she should ever wear was mine.

“I love you, West,” she choked out as I kissed her jaw. “I’ve loved you my whole life. I never stopped. My heart has always and will always belong to you. I don’t know why it took me so long to tell you, but I love you.”

I captured her mouth again, tasting her words from her tongue and the desperation in her voice. The feeling was entirely mutual. Telling her I loved her felt like a fucking impossibility until she said it. Until she set me free with her declaration.

Words had never felt quite adequate to describe the way I loved Scarlett, but I had to try to explain it to her. Pulling back, I stared into her hazel-green eyes. The ones that had captured me from the day I set my own eyes to hers.

“From the moment I saw you, I knew you were the one, little Scar. I knew you were the only person in this world I belonged next to. You are the other half of me. You’re my strength, my ambition, my joy and my light. You are my heart.”

Her hand slid from my hair to my neck.

“I will never love another. I can’t when you’re buried so deep inside me, tearing you out would kill me. I refuse to let you go, no matter what happens. No matter how much life continues to throw at us because you are mine. My love. My only love. Fuck, little Scar, I’m so in love with you, it hurts my fucking heart. It hurts so bad and yet I will endure the pain to be by your side. I will endure anything for you because I love you with every inch of me.”

She swallowed then pressed her forehead to mine, staring at me with such love and affection, it fucking killed me. As if on instinct, the two of us touched the places where we’d scarred each other. A reminder we belonged together. You couldn’t have me without her.

“We’re each other’s forever.”

I nodded and smiled at her. My beautiful, perfect girl who ruled my world. There was nothing and no one better or more important to me than her.

Neither of us moved. Both savouring this moment. Allowing our declarations to settle into our bones. It was a fucking miracle we’d found our way back to each other. That we’d put the hurt, pain, and strife behind us. Sharing it with each other so we no longer felt so alone. Now we were one again. We were together with nothing holding us back.

“We should get back to the others,” she whispered. “We still have to finish this.”

I reluctantly set Scarlett back on her feet. She gave me another lingering kiss before she picked up the jerry can and unscrewed the cap. I went back to get my hammer and took it out of the cell, allowing her to throw petrol into it. Then we coated the rest of the building. Scarlett stopped me outside, brushing off the concrete and debris from my clothes and hair. I did the same to her, as I’d got it on her when I’d kissed the living shit out of my girl. Then we walked back towards the main house together, trailing a line of petrol behind us.

We found the other three outside the house waiting for us. Scarlett poured the petrol right up to the front door, then down towards where the boys were standing.

“You took your time,” Prescott said, crossing his arms over his chest.

“We had something we needed to do,” Scarlett said with a shy smile in my direction.

She handed me the can when I approached her. I put the hammer and final jerry can in the back of the car, closing it and walking over to them. The five of us stood staring at the house for a long minute.

“Are we ready?” Drake asked, taking a box of matches out of his pocket. “You get to do the honours, little wisp. This is your fight, not ours.”

He handed them to Scarlett, who took them, staring down at the box. She stroked her fingers along it.

“I’m ready.”

FORTY TWO

SCARLETT

The box shook as I opened it and slid a match out. My hands were trembling, but I ignored them. This was how it had to happen. I stared at the house. The one to cause me so much hurt and pain. Then I remembered only a few minutes ago West and I had told each other about our feelings. He'd destroyed the cell for me. My heart swelled, and I took a deep breath.

I struck the match against the box, lighting it. The flame was so small, but it would create havoc the moment it hit the petrol. It would engulf the whole building in flames.

I threw the match into the line of it I'd trailed here. The match hit the ground, the flames rising up a moment later. The five of us watched it streak up towards the house. It branched off towards the outbuildings too. It took a few minutes before flames appeared in the windows of the place.

"I opened the safe in the security room," Drake said, startling me.

"You did?"

He nodded.

"I found the combination for it in Stuart's office. I copied the data from his computer whilst we were dealing with the rest of the house. We have everything we need now."

The flames were mesmerising. I couldn't stop staring at them as they grew higher. The sound of glass cracking under the intense heat from the blaze made me smile.

"What was in it?"

"Two guns with their licences and bullets. I left them there. Good thing we got into the security room when we did."

So that's what Alex had been going for. Drake was right. We were lucky. I didn't know those were on the property, but it was hardly surprising. Stuart kept a lot of shit from me.

"Thank you for looking. I would have wondered otherwise."

He set his hand on my shoulder.

"You're welcome."

We fell silent then, all five of us contemplating the blazing building. Then I turned to Drake, staring up at my man, who stood tall, the dancing flames reflecting in his indigo eyes.

"I've seen enough. We should go."

"It's over now."

I smiled.

"Yeah... almost."

He gave me a nod, dropping his hand from my shoulder and walking towards the cars. I followed him and got in the one I'd come in. The others joined us, West getting into the driver's seat as Francis got in the back. My eyes fixed on the burning house as West started the car and set off. Francis reached forward and stroked my neck, resting his forehead on the headrest behind me. I sighed and put my fingers on his.

"You're okay, Scar. You're going to be okay."

I knew I would be, eventually. It would take time to put this all behind us.

My eyes darted to the building one last time as West drove back down the long driveway. Then I closed them, leaning my head against the window and drifted off, exhaustion settling over me.

I jerked awake when the car stopped. West stroked my leg and smiled at me.

"Time to switch cars."

I stretched and got out, finding the others opening the doors of Prescott's Jeep. Inside was a change of clothes for all of us. We were at the back of a dark car park, so no one could see us undressing and switching out our clothes. Drake put them all in one of the cars we'd brought, then encouraged me to get into the Jeep. I slid into the back, getting settled in the middle as West joined me. Prescott got in the other side and pressed a kiss to my temple.

"My little lamb."

I curled up against him as he wrapped his arm around me. I must have fallen

asleep again because the next thing I knew, he was shaking me awake as we were home. I climbed out of the Jeep and followed the four of them to the lift. The cars we'd gone to the estate in would be taken care of by Penn and his men. There was one thing we had left to do after this, but for the most part, everything was wrapped up this evening.

We were finally free of Stuart Carver once and for all.

"What time is it?" I asked as we rode up to the penthouse in the lift.

Drake looked at his watch.

"Almost three."

No wonder I was tired. We'd been at this for hours.

"You can go to bed if you want. We were talking about having a drink on the roof, but it can wait."

I shook my head.

"No, I'll come up... just want a proper shower first. I stink of petrol."

West snorted.

"We all fucking do."

"You have dust in your hair," Francis said, nodding at West's head. "Dare I ask why?"

He shrugged.

"Smashed up the cell they kept Scar in."

Drake shook his head and rubbed his face.

"That wasn't the plan, West."

"Nothing about tonight went exactly to plan. It is what it fucking is."

Drake dropped his hand and looked up at the metal ceiling.

"You're right. What's done is done."

The doors opened a moment later and the five of us piled out. I joined West in his room. He made no complaints about me taking a shower with him. In fact, he was gentle when he undid my braid so I could wash my hair. The two of us stepped into the hot water after stripping off. It was soothing against my skin. He wrapped his arms around me from behind under the spray and pressed his cheek to mine.

"How are you feeling?"

"Tired, but okay. Guess it hasn't fully hit me yet, you know, that he's no longer a threat to us. That he's gone for good."

“You ended him. We’re safe now.”

I nodded. We were. I would be forever grateful to my men for giving me this. For letting me help them take the lives of the people who’d stolen mine. It was surreal to think it was all over.

West turned me around and pressed me against the tiles. His hand curled around my throat, thumb stroking down my wet skin. Those amber eyes of his glowed in the low light.

“You never have to live in fear again, little Scar. Not whilst you’re by my side.”

His other hand stroked down my chest until his fingers met my pussy. I shuddered, unable to help myself from arching into his touch.

“I love you.”

Leaning down, he kissed his way down my neck until his lips met the scars he’d given me.

“You’re mine.”

His tongue ran over them.

“You belong to War.”

I gripped his arms, my knees almost buckling. The way West loved me was overwhelming. It consumed me, filling all my empty spaces and making me whole again.

“I love you too,” I panted as his fingers slid inside me, the heel of his palm grinding into my clit.

“Good girl.”

I was lost in him as the water beat down on his back. West kissed me, his fingers working inside me until I was crying out my pleasure against his lips. Then he hooked my legs around his waist and fucked me. The two of us needed this after we’d declared our love for each other. Needed to reconnect. Have a moment of passion and possession. And when we came together, it was a meeting of two souls destined for each other.

West washed me afterwards, shampooing and conditioning my hair with gentle fingers. The way he could be so tender after all his brutality made my heart sing. I was the only woman who saw this side of him. The only one he granted it to.

We dried and dressed after we got out. West left me to blow dry my hair,

telling me he'd see me up on the roof. I didn't want to go to bed later with wet hair, so I took my time with it.

I padded out of West's room and made my way up to the roof. The door was open, and I could hear their voices. I slid on some sandals before I came up here, so I wasn't wandering around with bare feet. The boys were sat out on the benches in the garden area with bottles of beer in their hands.

When I reached them, Francis handed me a cider, as he knew I didn't drink beer. He was sitting on the bench. I sat in his lap and put my feet on Prescott's legs. Drake was on one of the loungers, with his guitar resting on his lap. West leant against the wall, staring out over the city with his beer bottle dangling between his fingers.

Francis curled his arms around me and kissed the top of my head as I rested it on his shoulder, breathing in his hypnotic scent. The one that soothed me. Cinnamon and apples. My fingers curled into his hair as I held the bottle against my chest with my other hand. He let out a noise of contentment.

Prescott slid my sandals off, setting them on the floor before he began to massage my feet. His smile as he caught my eyes was electrifying. I was a very spoiled woman having these four. They took care of me in a way no one else ever had. And I did the same for them.

"Will you play me something, Drake?" I asked, turning my attention to him.

"What do you want to hear?"

"The one you wrote about me."

He chuckled.

"They're all about you, little wisp. You'll have to be more specific."

I looked over at him. His indigo eyes twinkled in the moonlight.

"The one you haven't let me hear yet."

He didn't hesitate, putting his fingers to strings as he continued to watch me. He'd mentioned he was writing something new the morning after he told me he loved me for the first time. The melody wasn't haunting like the others. It spoke of acceptance and understanding. It told me of his love for me. I could see it in his eyes. And it made my heart hurt.

I didn't know it was possible to love four people so intensely. We'd built bonds with each other that would last an eternity. We were made for each other. That's how I saw us. Fated to be with each other for life. As Drake had once

said... we were born together and we would die together.

When the song was over, Drake set the guitar on the lounge and rose to his feet, digging his hands into his pockets. He looked over at West, who hadn't turned around yet. Then he met Francis' eyes before turning to Prescott, who'd finished massaging my feet and was merely stroking my bare legs with his fingertips.

"We going to ask her?" he said with a raised eyebrow.

"Ask me what?"

Francis encouraged me to sit up and drop down on the bench next to him. West turned around and came over to us, swinging his bottle with his movement. Prescott got up along with Francis and the four of them stood before me, their eyes all fixed on mine.

"What?" I asked again, wondering what they wanted from me.

We'd already had sex together tonight. I didn't think I could take another round. Not after West had fucked me in the shower.

"We have a proposition for you," Drake said. "One we hope you'll agree to."

My fingers curled around the edges of the bench.

"Planning things behind my back again?"

"No, we just wanted to surprise you."

I let go of the bench and waved a hand at them.

"Okay, well, tell me what it is and I'll give you my answer."

Drake stepped closer.

"We wanted to know if you would consider what would be, for all intents and purposes, a marriage between us and you. We know it wouldn't be legal. It would just be for us. To show our devotion to each other. And if you say yes... we'd like to do it now."

FORTY THREE

SCARLETT

My ears started ringing the moment Drake said the word marriage. My hand went to my mouth as I tried to process it. The idea of it. The implications. And I had no idea what to say. It's not like I expected them to ask me for this, considering it wouldn't be legally recognised. It never even crossed my mind. The only thing I'd ever been sure of was spending my life with them.

What did Drake even mean by right now?

Did they want to do some kind of ceremony?

What exactly were they expecting from me?

I dropped my hand from my mouth and frowned.

“We can't get married.”

“It wouldn't really be a marriage, little lamb, more of a lifelong commitment to each other with vows and stuff,” Prescott said, cocking his head to the side.

“We want to show you how much we love you and we're in this for life.”

“We want to hold a commitment ceremony... of sorts,” Francis added.

I looked at West, as he hadn't said anything. He smiled at me, his amber eyes glinting. Then he put his beer down on the bench and knelt at my feet. He took both my hands in his.

“We've made so many promises to each other over the years. Let us reaffirm them. Your forever is our forever. You're ours and we're yours.” He pressed a kiss to my fingers. “Are you in this with us, little Scar?”

He knew I was but that wasn't what he was asking. It was about tonight and the things we'd shared together. Would one more step towards the future be too far? I'd already devoted my life to them. It was quite frankly adorable, sweet and completely romantic that they wanted a commitment ceremony with me. These

four men were so dark and depraved, but with me, they could be kind, understanding, and loving. They treated me like their queen now we'd moved beyond our past. Now everything was out in the open and we were no longer burdened by lies and secrets. They were everything I could ever ask for and more.

“I'm in.”

West smiled, placing another kiss to my fingers before he let go of my hands and stood. He turned his attention to Francis.

“Did you get everything?”

He grinned and moved away to Drake's glass structure. They'd planned this. I didn't mind them hiding it to give me a surprise. It was a good one, not some nefarious shit they'd been involved in.

Francis came back with a box of things and set it down on the bench next to me. He took out a small box, which he opened and placed in my lap. Nestled inside it were five platinum rings. One of them was smaller than the others, clearly meant for me. I picked it up and looked on the inside, finding a little horsehead had been carved into it. It made me smile. Next, Francis took out a long length of rope that was braided with different colours. Green, red, purple, blue and black woven with silver thread. The final items he extracted were a knife and bandages.

I had an idea of what all of this meant and who had chosen these things, but I smiled up at him as he put his hand out to me. He helped me to my feet and pressed me closer to Prescott.

“How is this going to go?” I asked as Prescott took my hand and kissed my knuckles.

“Follow Frankie's lead,” West said with a shrug as he dug his hands in his pockets.

No surprise Francis was the one who had planned out the ceremony part.

“Okay, we all need to get in a circle for this to work,” Francis said, giving me a wink.

The boys herded me into the circle. I was standing next to West and Prescott with Drake and Francis in front of me.

Francis picked up the rope and slid the knife into his pocket. He made us place all our forearms together in a circle, so our hands were pressed to each

other, then proceeded to bind our hands and wrists together with Drake's help.

"This cord represents the binding of our souls. The knots are a symbol of our love and devotion to each other. May the five of us bring each other peace through the years. May we grow stronger with each passing day bound by our vows and commitments to each other. May the cord running between us never break. May we always be together as one."

We all stared at the cord as Francis tied it off.

"Okay, Scar, you're going first. So repeat after me... I vow to be your guiding light in the darkness, to cherish every moment we spend together in this lifetime and the next, to give you my heart and soul to keep safe, and to love you no matter what life brings our way."

I repeated the words, smiling at all of them in turn.

"Thank you, Scar." He turned his attention to Prescott. "Now you, repeat after me... I vow to be your protector in the darkness, to cherish every moment we spend in this lifetime and the next, to give you my heart and soul to keep safe, and to love you no matter what life brings our way."

They all repeated after him and he said the words himself when it was his turn. Then he untied us and made us all put our hands out with our palms facing upwards. He took the knife from his pocket and set the point of the blade in Prescott's palm.

He sliced across Prescott's hand, then moved to West's, cutting his hand too before his own. He took Drake's, slicing through it and, finally, mine. I winced from the cut but didn't complain about it.

"May our blood bind us for eternity."

He made each of them rub their bloody palm against mine, mixing all our blood together. No doubt this was Drake's contribution to this ceremony. The handfasting was definitely Francis. The knife, so very West. And the rings with the horse carvings in them? That was Prescott all over, with his little obsession with the horsemen.

Lastly, Francis picked up the box of said rings and had me place them on their ring fingers. West was the one who slid the ring onto mine, giving me a devious smile as he did it. It felt fitting for it to be him. We had fallen in love with each other when we were kids. He was the one I'd envisioned spending my entire life with. I just had four men now instead of one. And it was everything to

me. They were my life, my loves and my home.

“May these rings symbolise our commitment to each other and guarantee no one else will hit on our woman because we will gut them if they do.”

I snorted and shook my head.

“That’s not very romantic, Frankie.”

“It’s what we do,” West said with a shrug. “You’re ours.”

Prescott took my hand and rubbed the ring.

“No one gets to touch or take what’s ours, little lamb. Never again.”

I gave him a look.

“So you’ll just kill anyone who does? I thought we were done with that after tonight.”

“Drake will. He’s our executioner.”

I rolled my eyes and glanced at Drake, who merely shrugged and rubbed his face.

“If I have to kill again to keep you safe, I will.”

Why on earth was I not surprised our commitment ceremony had included talking about murder?

“Can we please get back to this rather than talking about killing?” I waved between us. “I know it isn’t a wedding, but I think kissing the bride should totally be a thing.”

The words had barely left my lips when I was gathered up in Prescott’s arms and his mouth was on mine, tasting me like a man starved. I melted against him, letting him have his fill of me until he pulled away and smiled.

“My sweet little lamb can have whatever she wants whenever she wants.”

He set me down and pushed me towards West, who kissed me next. It was hot and heavy. His bloody hand wrapped around my throat to remind me who I belonged to.

“Mine,” he murmured against my lips. “Forever, little Scar.”

When he released me, my knees were a little weak. Francis was there to catch me as I stumbled. I found myself bent over his arm as he kissed me, his fingertips in my hair, stroking my scalp. His scent surrounded me, making me feel at home in his arms. He smiled when he pulled away to look at me.

“My little whore, so beautiful,” he whispered.

He set me upright and pushed me towards Drake, who stared down at me for

a long moment without moving. He lifted his hand and curled a lock of my hair around his finger. Then he was tugging me towards him and bending down to capture my mouth in one of his searing kisses. I was a puddle of goo by the time he let me go.

Francis made me sit down so we could all bandage up our hands where he'd cut them and clean away all the blood. I smiled at him before I picked up my bottle of cider.

“Can I make a toast?”

They all grabbed their beer bottles and held them, giving me an expectant look.

“I just want to say thank you for giving me tonight. We've been through so much shit in our lives, and today we can put it all behind us.” I looked at them each in turn. “Also, it just occurred to me it's technically our birthday, so happy birthday.” I raised my bottle. “To us.”

“To us,” the boys said in unison, raising their bottles before we all took a drink.

“Did you deliberately choose last night to be the day we did everything so we could do the whole commitment thing on our birthday?”

Francis smiled.

“Maybe.”

I pointed at him.

“You, mister, are a sneaky, deviant little shit.”

He came closer and stroked my cheek.

“You love that about me.”

I rolled my eyes.

“I suppose I do.”

The next thing I knew, I was yawning, as if everything had finally hit me all at once. Exhaustion washed over me, making me feel like I'd aged a hundred years. We were only twenty-seven today, so I suppose that might be a slight exaggeration.

“I think someone needs to be put to bed.”

I set my bottle down and took Francis' hand.

“Mmm, and so do all of you.”

An idea formed in my mind. One I was pretty sure certain people wouldn't

like, but I didn't care. They could deal.

"We're all going to go down to the playroom and sleep together. That's the only bed big enough for the five of us."

"Excuse me?" Drake said, his eyes widening.

I tugged Francis towards the door to the roof, expecting them to follow suit.

"You heard me, and I will have no objections raised by any of you. We've fucked together. We can sleep in the same bed together."

I heard Drake grumbling behind us, but he didn't say anything else.

"You need to teach me how you do that," Francis murmured in my ear.

"Do what?"

"Get him to agree to anything you want."

I smiled.

"You'd have to make him fall in love with you."

Francis made a face. I laughed, the sound of it echoing around the stairwell as we entered it.

"Look, he's my best friend and all, but I'm not sure I want him being that devoted to me. He's kind of a lot to deal with."

"Lucky for you, I know how to handle him."

"Mmm, you have mellowed him out a lot. We're all very grateful for it."

I leant my head against his shoulder as he pushed open the door to the penthouse. We made our way to the playroom, stopping to get extra blankets on the way. I busied myself making up the space for the five of us, while the others went to get ready for bed. When I was done, I wandered into Drake's bedroom, as it was closest to the playroom, to brush my teeth. He was leaving the bathroom when I entered. My eyes roamed over his bare chest. There was no question about it. This man was a god. And I loved him for it.

"Do you really not want to spend the night with us?" I asked when he paused to stroke his fingers down my arm.

"It's not that. You know I have trouble sleeping."

I stepped closer before wrapping myself around him, my fingers tracing a line down his spine.

"That's why you have me," I whispered into his chest. "I make it better."

He chuckled.

"I won't deny that, little wisp."

When I pulled away, he pressed a kiss to my lips and left me to finish getting ready for bed. I brushed my teeth and pulled my dress off, leaving me bare. I walked back into the playroom to find all four of them already on the bed. Their eyes went to me, darkening when they realised I wasn't wearing anything.

“Sleeping only. I'm exhausted and you've already had your fun with me tonight,” I said as I crawled on the bed and nestled myself between West and Francis. Prescott was next to West and Drake next to Francis.

Prescott leant over and gave me a kiss goodnight. Then they tucked me under the covers and one of them turned out the light. I snuggled up to West, pressing my face into his chest while Francis curled himself around my back, pressing a kiss to my cheek. I let out a contented sigh and rubbed my thumb across my ring. A part of me felt more secure knowing we were all together like this. We devoted ourselves to each other tonight after committing what could only be described as a massacre.

It's over now. You don't have to be afraid any longer. You can heal in peace with them.

The thought had me relaxing deeper into the embrace of my men and drifting off into oblivion. I was finally safe and free to choose my life. And I'd chosen to live it with them.

FORTY FOUR

SCARLETT

My feet practically dragged along the damn lobby as I made my way across it towards the lifts. The whole day had been exhausting. I wanted to curl up in a ball and fall asleep. Who would have thought you'd get grilled so much for being a missing person. The victim of a kidnapping. Although, I supposed, given the circumstances of my captor's death, I kind of had to give it to the police for being thorough.

I rode up in the lift, leaning against the mirrored wall, and closed my eyes. Three days ago, we'd set fire to Stuart's estate, having killed everyone inside. Today, I'd turned up at a police station near the estate looking worse for wear with a story about how I'd escaped during the fire.

In order to get my life back on track, I had to deal with the whole being a missing person business. I'd spun them a story about me being held against my will for ten years, missing out the fact I knew exactly how and why Stuart had taken me. They didn't need to know I'd forgotten everything all that time. There was no one around who could tell them otherwise. Anyone who could was either dead or had left the country. We'd made it possible for the chef, Gio, to disappear and start a new life in exchange for keeping his mouth shut.

The police had little choice but to take what I'd told them at face value. There was nothing to prove my story otherwise. We'd made sure of that when we'd burnt down the estate.

When I got up to the penthouse, I went straight upstairs and took a shower, washing away the hours I'd spent in an interview room. Drying and dressing, I made my way up to the roof where I knew the boys were. They'd finished work for the day an hour ago, and they weren't anywhere else in the penthouse.

I found them in Drake's glass structure, talking and drinking. They all fell silent as I entered. Drake put his hand out to me. I went and curled up in his lap. He was in his favourite armchair. He petted my hair and let me bury my face in his neck.

"How was it?" he asked a minute later.

"Shit."

He rubbed my back and kissed the top of my head.

"I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault. They just asked me so many questions. It was exhausting going over everything, but it's okay. At least I'm no longer considered missing. Means I can go on with my life, you know. I don't have to worry about being on their records or anything else."

I sighed, rubbing my face against his skin.

"It got tense when they started asking me where I would go, what with Mum being dead, but then this lady officer came in and told them she would take it from here. She drove me home without any questions being asked. Like she'd been told to get me out of there when they'd finished questioning me."

I turned my face up to his so I could meet his eyes.

"It's a relief it's over even if it was a lot to deal with."

"You did so well, my good girl."

My heart fluttered at his praise. He knew when I needed it and gave it freely. I would always be Drake's brat, but right now, I wasn't in the mood to push his buttons. All I wanted was to breathe him in. To let him comfort me and help me feel more at ease.

"You don't have to worry anymore, Scarlett. We'll take care of the rest."

I smiled and rested my head on his shoulder again. There wasn't anything to worry about. The thing about having dirt on the police commissioner was you could get him to do what you wanted. That included making sure I never had to deal with any repercussions regarding my disappearance after this. Not to mention he would make sure the investigation into the fire would be wrapped up quickly.

Stuart's estate straddled the border between Kent and Greater London, meaning jurisdiction could technically fall under the Met's purview. Drake had a conversation with the commissioner the day after the fire, essentially telling him

to make sure the investigation was handled by his force, otherwise, we'd release the evidence we had against him. Safe to say, it had made the news because of who Stuart was. Good thing none of us had been linked to it. And they certainly weren't going to find out about me, either. Drake had been very clear about my name being kept out of the public eye. He didn't want me being all over the news and getting harassed. I guess I had the commissioner to thank for getting me out of that interview room and home safe.

"We have something for you," he said after a few minutes had gone by.

"Another surprise?"

"You could say that."

They'd already sprung the commitment ceremony on me. What was one more thing?

I sat up and gave him a look.

"I'm beginning to not like surprises."

He stroked my cheek.

"You'll like this one, little wisp."

He encouraged me off his lap so I could say hello to the others. Then they were dragging me back downstairs into the penthouse. I fiddled with my ring on the way down. Prescott had informed me it contained a tiny tracker embedded in the metal. They didn't want to be in a position where they couldn't find me again after everything with Mason. I could hardly blame them for that. It made me feel safe and secure, so I hadn't given them any shit for it.

When we got into the living area, Francis took my hand and pulled me closer to where the war room was. It was then I noticed there was no longer a bookshelf in front of it. A white door stood there now. Drake opened it and gestured for me to enter. I gave him a curious look before dropping Francis' hand and stepping inside.

My hand went to my mouth. On one wall there was an open wardrobe space with all of my clothes hanging in neat lines. A whole section was dedicated to all my shoes and trainers. Then there was a beautiful chest of drawers. I walked over to them, finding a framed photo of the five of us when we were teenagers. It brought tears to my eyes seeing us like that. We'd been through so much since it was taken, but it was a reminder of a time when we were innocent of things to come.

I set it down and continued looking around. There was a dressing table on the opposite side of my clothes with a mirror on the wall and all my makeup set out. A large rug covered half the room. It was black with little silver stars running across it, representing the night's sky. There was a huge dark blue sofa by the window facing the cityscape. I went over to it, running my fingers along the soft fabric. My eyes darted up to the picture hanging above the sofa on the wall. It was a painting of Nyx, the goddess of the night, and four horses below her, each representing the horsemen.

I'd complained to Drake about not having a space in the penthouse. And they'd made me one. They'd changed their war room with its creepy photo display into a room for me. A space of my own. It not being a bedroom didn't bother me. It would mean my clothes were all in one place. My very own personal dressing room and somewhere I could come when I needed space.

I turned and practically sprinted across the room. Then I was jumping on Drake, who had to take several steps backwards to stay upright. My legs wrapped around his waist as I buried my face in his neck.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you."

He put his arms around me. I shifted my head back and started planting kisses all over his face. Not sure how he felt about it, but he was smiling by the time I was done.

"You're welcome."

It was definitely him who had made this happen. When Drake got an idea in his head, he usually followed it through.

"I won't tell anyone else how sweet you are to me. I mean, they know already." I waved at Prescott and Francis. "But it'll stay between us."

He laughed and set me down, pressing a kiss to my forehead.

"Well, you can thank those two. They designed the room for you. I merely suggested we should."

"When on earth did you have it all done?"

"We had people up here whilst you were at work to install all the wardrobe space. Today, we had all the furniture delivered and the finishing touches added."

For Drake to be so thoughtful was a miracle in itself, but he'd changed so much since I'd broken down his walls. He'd become more like the boy of our

youth while still maintaining the man he'd grown into. I got to see all sides of him and it made me appreciate him all the more.

"I love you so much."

He bit his lip and stroked my cheek.

"My heart and all its love are yours, little wisp."

I rushed to Prescott next, who gathered me up in his arms, his blue eyes glinting as he smiled down at me.

"My perfect king made me a perfect room."

"I'm glad you like it, little lamb. We wanted it to be special for you."

"I love everything about it."

He kissed me, making my heart melt. The way I loved this man and all his beautiful imperfections made my chest swell. He might like to think he was bad, but in my eyes, he was kind, caring, and compassionate. He loved me fiercely, knew exactly what I needed before I did, and never failed to give me whatever I asked him for.

"I love you," I whispered against his lips.

He nuzzled my nose before he pulled away.

"I love you too, sweetness."

His arms fell back to his sides. I stepped up to Francis. The way his silver-grey eyes glittered as he took me in had my heart soaring.

"Let me guess, you chose the colours and the furniture."

"How did you know?"

"Because it's you, Frankie."

He took my hand and tugged me against his chest.

"Me, eh?"

"Yeah, my sneaky deviant who knows me so damn well, it's scary sometimes."

He rested his forehead against mine and cupped the back of my neck.

"I'll take that as a compliment."

"It's a compliment of the highest order because I'm so in love with you, I don't know what to do with myself."

His smile could have lit up the whole damn room. Francis deserved all my love, praise, and compliments. He was my safety in all the madness of our lives.

"My beautiful little whore, I love you to the stars and back."

I didn't want to leave his embrace. Never wanted to be apart from him. And I had him for life, along with the others. What more could a girl ask for? What more could she want? They had given me everything and so much more.

Francis pressed a kiss to my lips and let me go, stroking his hand down my arm. I looked around and frowned.

"Where's West?"

He appeared at the top of the stairs just as I spoke. I watched him descend them and come right up to me. In his hands, there were a bunch of papers. He grabbed my hand with his free one and tugged me back into my new room. I found myself deposited in his lap on the sofa a few seconds later. He set the papers down next to me and cupped my face in both of his hands.

"My little Scar."

"What part of this room is your input?"

He smiled and nodded up at the painting of Nyx and her horsemen. I couldn't help grinning.

"It's perfect."

"No, you're perfect. My little warrior."

"And you're the love of my life."

West kissed me, reminding me of why I'd fallen in love with him all those years ago. And the breach between us was healed after all these months of being in a strange sort of limbo. Repairing what had broken between the five of us was tough, but every second had been worth it. I wouldn't change our lives for the world.

Francis, Prescott, and Drake joined us on the sofa when West released me. It was big enough for the five of us to sit comfortably. They'd made sure we could all be in here together whenever I wanted.

"We have one final thing for you," West said, picking up the papers he'd set aside. "These are the deeds to your mother's flat. We were able to buy it after we made Fortuity a success. We've taken care of it for all these years, and now, we want to give it to you."

I took the pages from his hands and looked them over.

"When you're ready, we'll sort out transferring it into your name, but it's yours, little Scar, to do with what you wish."

I remembered when I'd gone there to search for my mother. The guy next

door told me someone came to visit it regularly. It had been the boys all along. It made me happy to know they'd done this for me. They'd made sure I had a home if I wanted it. The home I'd grown up in. Was there anything they wouldn't do for me?

“Thank you... I don't know what I'll do with it but thank you. I appreciate it so much.”

I set the pages down and curled up in West's lap, holding him close, and kissed his neck. He pressed his lips to my forehead.

The five of us watched the sun setting over the city together. There was a certain sort of peace in knowing all the things and people who had caused your suffering were gone. One that left you content and safe. And I couldn't have asked for more from the taxing day I'd had to come home to these four, surprising me with such a beautiful space.

FORTY FIVE

SCARLETT

My hand tightened in West's as we trod down a path we'd been along before many times when we'd been younger. I tipped my head back to look up at the night's sky. It would be dawn soon, but for now, the moon shone above us. There were a few stars out, but most were obscured by the light pollution in the city.

Perhaps this was an absolutely crazy idea, but neither of us were known for taking the sane route in life. We'd always played by our own rules. Done things our own way. This was no different.

West and I had come here with one specific purpose. To fix what had broken almost eleven years ago after the most traumatic event of our lives. Because, really, both of us were deeply affected by the night of my accident in the worst possible way. We'd lost each other. The person we thought we would spend our life with. And, although we were together now, it was our own personal trauma related to what happened we wanted to address.

West led me into the shell of the building and up the three flights of stairs to reach the place where it had all come to a head. Someone had cleaned away the sick from when I'd thrown up here last time. I'd learnt from Drake this site was owned by the same man who ran the club Prescott had taken me. Zayn Villetti, the son of the mafia kingpin, Gennaro. A man I wasn't sure I wanted to be properly introduced to.

Before I'd come back into the boys' lives, I had no idea what lurked beneath the surface of polite society. The criminal underworld was not something I ever

expected to be involved with. I guess from the moment I became a killer, it became a part of my life even if we were done with that side of things now.

It had been a couple of months since the fire at the estate. The police had wrapped up their investigation last week. It had been deemed an accident, and the case closed. I was pretty sure if it had been fully investigated, they would have opened a homicide and arson case, but it never got that far, thanks to the commissioner. He made sure any evidence of foul play wasn't brought to light. We were in the clear. Not that they would have had evidence of our involvement as we'd been thorough, but you could never be too careful.

West set down the bag he'd brought and kissed my forehead. He left me to look out over the city while he prepared things. Being here made me feel all sorts of things, but I kept a lid on it. Having West there helped me stay in control. His presence was my grounding force.

We'd talked about this for weeks before making the decision to return to the scene of my accident one last time. Some places had the power to keep you captive in your own mind. I didn't want to be afraid any longer. I wanted to take back my power and set myself free. It was lucky West felt the exact same way.

"Little Scar."

I turned to find he'd set out a blanket on the concrete along with several items we would need. Now we were here, there was no going back. I had no qualms about doing this with him.

"Come here and kneel at my feet. Now."

I hurried towards him, dropping down to my knees on the blanket and bowing my head. We'd already talked about how this would all go earlier. He'd given me the option of a safe word and we'd agreed if I really wanted out, I would say red or click my fingers twice like I did with the others. We both knew I wouldn't use it regardless because I wanted this. I needed it. And he did too.

"I would call you a good girl for obeying me, but we both know that's not true. You're not my good girl today, are you? You're my dirty little slut."

He pointed at something on the floor.

"Put that in your mouth."

I reached out and picked up the gag, securing it in my mouth with a buckle at the side. His hand went to my hair, gripping onto the braid, but he didn't tip my head up to look at him.

“Did you do this so I had something to hold on to?” He laughed in such a cruel way, I almost flinched. Then he tugged on the braid. “My bitch wants her hair pulled whilst I fuck her, doesn’t she?”

I couldn’t reply with the gag in my mouth. His hand tightened around my braid, pulling my hair until my scalp burnt.

“You think I don’t require an answer because you can’t talk, do you? Mistake number one.”

I yelped as he tugged my hair again, this time harder.

“Let’s try that again, and this time, you’re going to answer me. My bitch wants her hair pulled, doesn’t she?”

I nodded. The pain made me feel alive. Reminded me I was in control of all of this, even though I was at his mercy right now.

“Mmm, that’s better. Don’t fuck with me, slut, or I’ll make this worse for you.”

The darker part of me wanted him to make it worse. Wanted him to hurt me so I cried and purged everything holding me back. To exorcise my demons in the place where all our heartache and pain started. To heal me once and for all.

“Now, you’re going to bend over and put your hands behind your back. I want your chin on the blanket so you can stare out at the view, you hear me?”

My moan behind the gag was his answer. He let go of my braid. I did as he asked, leaning on my chin with my hands behind my back, facing the city. It was super fucking uncomfortable, but this wasn’t about my comfort. It was about pushing me right out of it.

He took a hold of my hands and cuffed them, making it ten times worse for me. I whimpered behind the gag, but it was ignored. My skirt was pushed up over my behind, exposing my skin to the air. A chuckle burst from his lips.

“Look at this bare little pussy, just waiting for cock.” Then he ran his thumb between my cheeks, knocking the little plug he’d inserted earlier. “And this? Mmm, I think someone wants to be fucked here, doesn’t she? What a cock hungry little bitch you are.”

I shifted, growing ever more uncomfortable leaning on my chin and because of the ache between my legs. Being degraded by him had me desperate for his body against mine. To feel all of his brutality.

“Mmm, yes, you are, waving this pretty pussy at me. If you think that’s going

to make me fuck it quicker, you're mistaken."

The slap across my behind radiated up my spine a second later, the sharp sting of it making me cry out against the gag.

"You see, you've been a bad girl. Bad girls get punished before they're fucked. Especially dirty little sluts who want nothing more than to be railed to within an inch of their lives. That's what you are, isn't it? A slut. A bitch desperate for all her holes to be filled at once. You want to be used until you're crying from shame, pain, and despair. Only then will you ever be satisfied."

More slaps came. I cried out from each of them, trying to keep my chin in place. He stopped, giving me a second's reprieve before my braid was in his fist and he pulled me upright by it. His other hand circled my neck as he pressed his front to my back, pinning my arms between us.

"Look. Look at the place it happened. Do you feel it, slut? Do you feel how much pain is in this place? How much we've fucking suffered for our sins?" He stroked my neck with his thumb. "You do, don't you? You know how much it fucking hurts."

I whimpered, straining against him. His words dug into the parts of me still shattered by what happened that night. They shone a light on the wounds, making them visible to both of us.

"That's right, my little slut, you know how it feels. How much we've burnt for each other in ways no one should. Feel it. Fucking feel it. Let it rip through you."

My heart hurt, the memories surfacing and slamming into me. The way he'd shouted my name when I fell. The pain in his amber eyes. The horrifying sound my body made when it hit the floor. All of it burst through, leaving me defenceless and utterly at his mercy.

"That's it." He tightened his hand around my airway, squeezing the sides. "Let it out. Show me your pain. Let me have all of it."

Tears slid down my cheeks. They dripped onto his hand. He pressed his lips to my ear, his tongue tracing the line of it. I tried to talk behind the gag, but it was impossible. Spit dribbled out of my mouth as I struggled against his hold on me.

"That's right. You know you need this. Give me your fucking pain."

I wanted to scream and tell him I couldn't do this. Tell him I wasn't strong

enough. West held me through it, allowing me to purge the memory of the worst experience of my life. Even as he used harsh words, they soothed me. They made me whole again.

“Scream it, my little slut. Tell the whole fucking world how much it hurts.”

No matter how loud I tried to scream, no matter how much it burnt my throat to do so, the noise was hampered by the gag. It’s why he’d given it to me. To allow me to purge my pain without anyone but him hearing the sound.

I sobbed, shifting against him and my bindings. I let it all rip, the pain seeping out of my pores onto the concrete floor. West took my pain. He took it all. The memory replayed over and over in my mind. The moment my hand slipped from his and I fell. How I’d told him I loved him. How he screamed for me. And how I’d landed, passing out from all the pain.

When I was finally spent from the crying and screaming, I slumped against him, closing my eyes. It was done. The memory dissipated, leaving just me and him alone in the building where our lives had split apart.

“Good girl,” he murmured. “You’re my good girl, little Scar.”

Then he removed the gag from my mouth, tossing it to the side.

“I’m going to make it better for you. I’ll heal you, my little warrior.”

He laid me down on the blanket on my back with my arms still cuffed behind my back. My eyes opened, staring up at him looming over me with a dark glint in his eyes. His hands slid up my legs, making me bend my knees for him. My skirt was bunched at my waist, leaving me utterly exposed.

“West...”

His finger traced a line along my pussy, making me shiver.

“My little slut is still so wet for me. I think I should take care of this little pussy, don’t you? Then I’ll take care of this too.” He knocked the plug. “You can’t stop me from taking whatever I want, can you?”

I shook my head. No part of me wanted to. Not even after I’d sobbed my heart out. The memories of the past no longer clung to my skin. West had torn my suffering out of my mind, laid it bare for both of us to see. He set me free, just like he told me he would. He exposed the burden I carried. The burden I’d thrown away. This place couldn’t hurt me. It couldn’t do a single thing any longer.

“I’m going to take all of your little holes, my dirty whore, and I’m going to

make them mine.”

He reached over and stroked the scars he'd given me.

“Tell me who you belong to.”

I swallowed hard.

“I belong to War.”

His deviant smile was the only warning I got before West did what he did best.

Broke me to fix me all over again.

FORTY SIX

WEST

Had it hurt me to go through this experience with Scarlett? Of course, it fucking had. I purged my pain right alongside her as she cried and screamed behind her gag. It poured out of me with the memory of the night she fell crowding my brain. The way she shook and struggled against me, experiencing it all over again was horrifying but necessary. We both had to go through it together so we could finally lay our demons to rest.

I stared down at my woman, my fingers resting on her scars as her chest heaved with her harsh breaths. My little warrior had come into her own, proving once and for all just how strong she was. How she endured no matter what was thrown at her.

My goddess. The light of my life. How I fucking love you with every part of me.

There was no one else in this world who understood me like Scarlett. No one else loved me the way she could. My destiny was right here with her.

Her beautiful eyes were bloodshot from her tears, but she stared up at me with so much love, trust and affection, it threatened to undo me.

“Remember, we’re forever, little Scar.”

I straightened and undid my clothes, freeing my aching dick. One hand went to her knee, and the other wrapped around my cock. I pressed the head of it to her wet entrance, teasing her with it. She let out a little whimper but didn’t move. She didn’t try to force me to give her what she wanted. How I loved her all the more for her patience. I could see her need in her eyes. The desperation to feel the connection between us. She didn’t have to worry. I would give her the world because she deserved it.

Pressing forward, I slid inside her, taking it achingly slow. Too fucking slow. I

let out a breath, trying not to feel so fucking overwhelmed by the pleasure of this moment. The feeling of contentment and belonging washed over me from being with her like this. It was breaking me apart on the inside in the best fucking way possible. Every inch she took knitted those shattered pieces together. My little Scar made me whole again.

Her mouth parted on a little exhale when I was fully encased inside her sweet, wet little pussy. She pulsed around me. A small smile played on my lips at the deviancy in her eyes. I placed my hands down on either side of her head, leaning over her delicious little body.

“Desperate, are we? Do you want me to fuck you until you’re crying all over again?”

“Please.”

“Dirty girl.”

“I’m your dirty girl.”

“Mmm, yes, you are *mine*.”

I lifted one hand and stroked her neck with my finger, making her shudder. Pushing myself upright, I gripped the backs of her thighs, pressing them against her chest. Then I pulled back and slammed inside her, making her yelp. There was no reprieve. My thrusts grew ever harder, the pace I set leaving her panting and crying from the intensity.

“Fuck, yes, West, please, fuck, don’t stop.”

The bond between us flared as we stared at each other. The heat and raw passion reformed our souls, entwining them together the way they were always meant to be.

This place had once broken us. Now, it would cement us forever. Scarlett and I as one.

“Mmm, my dirty little slut is taking it so fucking well. You’re such a good little slut for me, aren’t you? Your pussy loves my cock.”

“Yes, yes, yes.”

My eyes darted towards the city. The light was creeping along the edges of the horizon. Dawn was breaking on us and I couldn’t think of a more perfect moment than this.

My attention went back to Scarlett. I gripped her throat in one hand. Her eyes flared with heat.

“My fist is your necklace.”

Then I tugged her upright, sitting myself on the blanket with the movement. Scarlett settled her knees on either side of my legs so she could ride me. I kept her steady with my hand around her neck.

“That’s it, show me how much you want it.” I ran my tongue up the side of her face, licking away her tears. “Show me you want my cock, slut.”

She rode me harder, whimpering with each movement. I could feel the vibrations of her little sounds against my palm.

Such perfection. You were made for me, little Scar. A goddess to ride through the world with me.

“Good girl. You’re my good little slut. I think you deserve a reward.”

My free hand dug between us, my fingers circling her clit. She moaned with the movement, pressing against me as she rode my dick.

“Mmm, come for me. I’m going to make you clean it when you’re done. Then you know what’ll happen next.”

She whimpered with her agreement. She fucking knew. I’d promised to fuck all her little holes. I planned on seeing it through.

“West,” she cried when she came, her body trembling and bucking against mine.

Her head fell back, her eyes closing as it washed over her. The beauty of this woman as she climaxed was indescribable. My goddess was everything, and so much more. The depth of my devotion to her couldn’t be explained. I would endure the worst life had to throw at me as long as I had Scarlett.

I pulled her off me when she was spent, then forced her head down to my dick. She opened her eyes and looked up at me, her tongue darting out to circle the head. Her mouth opened and enclosed over it a moment later, making me groan. My hand gripped her braid, not to force her, I just needed something to hold on to. Needed to touch my beautiful girl to remind me she was here. She was mine.

After she’d cleaned my dick of her cum, she sat up and waited for me to move. To put her in the position I wanted. I turned her around, unlocked her cuffs, then put her on her hands and knees.

“You’re going to stay right there and take it like a good little slut,” I told her as I pulled out the plug from her tight little hole.

Tossing it aside, I picked up the lube and pressed some inside her with my thumb. I coated my dick next before notching it to her. She let out a sigh as I entered her as if it was what she wanted all along. To feel me here, claiming the last part of her she had to offer me. I wrapped a hand around her hip, stroking her skin with my fingertips.

“Take me, little Scar. Impale yourself on my dick.”

She backed herself onto me, taking inch by inch. When her cheeks were flush with my body, I held her there, revelling in the feel of her surrounding me.

“Good girl.”

Scarlett looked back at me, her hazel-green eyes full of emotion. I grabbed a wipe to clean my hand off before reaching forward and gripping her braid.

“Now fuck yourself on my cock. Show me you deserve to come again. Be my slut.”

She moved, sliding my cock from her and taking me back inside her again. The tight sensation of her made me groan. This woman had my fucking heart in a chokehold. She gave me so much pleasure. So much happiness. So much fucking joy.

My lips parted on the words wanting out of my head, but they wouldn't come. Instead, I watched her fuck herself on me. The way she sighed with her pleasure. How she took me without resistance or complaint. She worked herself against my dick, increasing the pace with each thrust. I could not be more awed than I was by her.

I tugged on her braid, pulling her up to me and wrapping my arm around her waist to hold her body against mine. Then I took over, thrusting up into her. She moaned and curled her arm behind us, wrapping her hand behind my head. Her fingers speared into my hair as her head fell back against my shoulder.

“Good little slut,” I murmured. “My good girl taking me so well.”

I thrust harder, wanting to dive off the edge of the fucking cliff with my woman.

“Stroke that needy clit, little Scar. Come with me.”

Her free hand curled between her legs. She panted as she touched herself and met my eyes. There it was. Our bond filling the space between us. Our eyes reflecting our feelings of love for each other. It was the only thing I needed in this world. Us. Me and her.

“Give it to me. Give me everything.”

Before she could say a word, I caught her mouth with mine, kissing her like my life depended on it. Because it did. It depended on her. She was my air. My sustenance. The very fucking essence of me. I couldn't do anything but give in and let her carry me under.

We came together in a fucking crescendo of passion and pleasure. Our bodies trembled together. They became one. I didn't fucking know where I ended and she began. There was nothing but us. Just fucking us. We mattered. We were here. And we were fucking alive.

When our lips parted, our eyes fixed on each other, our breath mingling together with our exertion. I wrapped my hand around her throat, unable to help myself from doing so.

“I love you, little Scar.”

She brushed her mouth against mine.

“I love you too.”

The words settled between us, reminding me this was our moment. Our time together.

It started with us. We had been the catalyst for the events of our lives. Our desire to be with one another had cemented the path we'd all trodden along. It had dragged us all down to the very depths of hell. We'd had to pull ourselves out.

This proved it was all worth it. It showed me no matter what shit I'd gone through, I'd never given up on her. I never would.

We pulled apart to clean up with the supplies I'd brought. Scarlett rearranged her clothes and smiled at me as she stood. I wrapped an arm around her, drawing her against my side as we both turned to the lightening sky. It was streaked with oranges and yellows, signalling the dawn. A whole new chapter of our lives began today.

“It's beautiful,” she whispered as if she didn't want to break the peaceful silence of this moment.

“Not as beautiful as you.”

She nuzzled her face into my chest as she wrapped both arms around my waist.

“You're still a little obsessed with me.”

“I’ll never stop being obsessed with you, little Scar. You’re my entire world and so much more.”

“You’re mine too.”

I wrapped my other arm around her, cuddling her closer as the sun peeked over the horizon. The two of us had created a new memory here. One to replace the old. We’d taken our pain, broken it apart and filled it with love. Our love. The unbreakable kind. The one that would never shatter.

Scarlett looked up at me, her eyes shining with the purest happiness. It made my heart expand to encompass every part of her.

“My perfect little warrior.”

She reached up and placed her hand on my cheek. I could feel her ring digging into my skin. The one I’d placed on her finger, making her my partner for life.

“My War.”

I leant down, resting my forehead against hers and breathed in her cinnamon scent. I was content. I was happy. I was home. Because wherever Scarlett was, that was home.

The story of our life had begun with me and Scarlett. It ended with us too. It ended right here, where everything had gone wrong.

We weren’t just Scarlett and West any longer. We were Nyx and War. And we belonged with the rest of our family. Pestilence, Famine and Death.

The Four Horsemen and their goddess, Nyx. Etched on each other’s hearts forever as one. Fate had woven the strings of our lives and brought us together. And it would never tear us apart again.

EPILOGUE

SCARLETT

The breeze was cool against my skin. The sound of it rustled through the leaves of the tree above me as the sun dappled across the blanket below me. My eyes were closed as I lay back against West, who was propped up against the tree behind us. In between my crossed legs was Prescott. His head rested in my lap as he was currently using me as a pillow. On my right, Francis was laid out on his side, checking his phone. My fingers were tangled in his hair, stroking the soft strands as I often did. To my left sat Drake, reading a book on his tablet.

I opened my eyes, staring down at my left hand resting on Drake's thigh. The sun reflected slightly off the platinum ring. It was strange to think a year had passed since the day on the roof when we'd vowed to stay together forever. A year of learning each other all over again, settling into our lives, finding peace, contentment and, most important of all, happiness.

Our existence had perhaps become more mundane, but only in that we didn't get our kicks from death and destruction. Instead, we threw ourselves into building a life we all wanted. Fortuity was as successful as ever, if not more so. We worked hard and played even harder.

Our playroom had become our sanctuary. A safe space away from the outside world where the five of us could explore our sexual and non-sexual forms of kink to our heart's content. It was our outlet for the darkness we all craved since we'd left the underworld behind.

It was a perfect day to celebrate our twenty-eighth birthday together. There were no pressing matters for us to attend. Nothing for us to do but lie here in the sun and watch the world go by.

We were in Rosie's garden. Her three dogs were chasing each other on the

lawn next to the table the boys had dragged out earlier for our birthday lunch. One of the cats was curled up on the end of the blanket near Drake's feet, enjoying the sun on his black fur. Ares had taken a liking to Drake. I was highly amused by the whole thing, especially the way Drake grumbled about the cat sitting on him when we visited Rosie and yet he'd quite happily pet Ares the whole time. I swear he liked the cat more than he was letting on.

Francis shifted next to me, drawing my attention to him. He rubbed his face on his t-shirt and set his phone down, letting out a sigh. His eyes darted over to Prescott, who had fallen asleep with his hand curled around my thigh.

"I see someone couldn't stay awake."

I grinned and continued stroking Francis' hair.

"Rosie made him get up early to take the dogs out so she could start cooking. He was grumpy as fuck about it," I replied, keeping my voice low so I didn't wake him.

We'd arrived here two days ago to spend the weekend with Prescott's mum. Drake and Francis slept in the twin room while West had shared with me and Prescott. It wasn't unusual for us to be three to a bed. Drake's, Prescott's and Francis' parents had got used to our relationship and the way we worked. Thankfully, Drake's mother had come around to the whole thing. The thought of Drake walking out of her life had given May an incentive to accept the way things were. Besides, she'd seen how happy we all made each other. No one could deny we belonged together.

"I suppose that one took advantage of having you alone."

Francis nodded his head towards West. I tried not to smile.

"Can you blame me?" West said, stroking his tattooed fingers down my bare arm. "You have a naked woman in your bed looking all sleep-rumpled and cute, you take advantage of the fact."

I rolled my eyes. Yes, I had enjoyed a morning quickie with West and I wasn't ashamed of it. He'd shoved his hand over my mouth to stop me from making too much noise. When Prescott came back, he'd found us in a post-coital haze and told us we should have waited for him. No doubt he would have enjoyed watching.

"Don't worry, you get me later," I said before Francis could reply.

We were going home after lunch. The five of us wanted to celebrate in our

own way. The playroom would be involved, along with his ropes and chains.

He gave me a smile. I stroked my fingers down the side of his head and cupped his face, rubbing my thumb over his mouth. He poked his tongue out and licked me with a deviant look in his beautiful silver-grey eyes.

“Francis!”

He turned to look at the house, finding his mother standing by the table.

“Yes?” he called back.

“Your father wants to discuss the wedding anniversary arrangements with you.”

“Okay, I’m coming.”

Francis rolled his eyes and slumped back on the blanket. His parent’s thirtieth wedding anniversary was next week. They were having a big party for it. Francis had paid for everything because we weren’t exactly short on funds. He hadn’t wanted to get too involved otherwise but had been roped into it by Eliza.

“I thought our birthday was supposed to be about us, not their fucking party,” he muttered.

“It is about us and besides, you haven’t had to lift a finger today so far.”

He smiled at me, then sat up. The next thing I knew, he’d leant over and planted a kiss on my lips.

“Always keeping us in line.”

“Someone has to.”

“And you do it so well, little whore. Happy birthday, my stunning girl.”

“Happy birthday, my fallen god.”

He kissed me again and then hauled himself up. I watched him trudge off in the direction of the house, my fingers going to Prescott’s head and stroking his hair instead.

“Is it lunchtime?” Prescott asked a minute later, turning his head to look up at me.

“Almost, sleepyhead.”

“Mum will want me to help bring stuff out.”

I leant down and pressed a kiss to his forehead.

“Then you should go offer your services.”

“And leave you? Never.”

I laughed and nuzzled his face with my nose.

“You’re just going in the house and I’m still right here, silly.”

He grabbed hold of my head and kissed me. I sat back when he released me, and he got to his feet.

“You three better make your way over before Mum hassles you.”

“I’ll make sure they take their seats.”

He stroked my cheek and gave me a smile.

“Where would we be without you, sweetness?”

“Worse off.”

He laughed.

“Happy birthday, little lamb, my goddess of the night.”

“Happy birthday, my king.”

I grinned as he walked off towards the house to help Rosie with lunch. He gave me a wink over his shoulder. I blew him a kiss. He caught it and tucked it in his pocket before he disappeared inside. I settled against West again, closing my eyes and savouring the warmth of the sun on my face.

“Drake, Scarlett, West, lunch is ready!” came May’s voice a moment later.

Drake let out a little huff, setting his tablet down and stretching. I looked over at him, watching the way the sunlight caught his dark hair. The furrow between his brow had me reaching out and smoothing it away. His indigo eyes caught mine, and he smiled.

“Drake!”

“We’re coming, Mum,” he called but kept his attention on me.

“She’ll be herding us like cattle if we don’t get a move on,” I said.

“Don’t I know it.”

I leant closer and pressed a kiss to his mouth. His fingers were in my hair, stroking my scalp and making me sigh. Letting me go, he picked up his tablet and rose to his feet.

“Have I told you how beautiful you look today, little wisp?”

I shook my head. He stroked my cheek with the back of his hand.

“You grow more beautiful every single day in my eyes. Happy birthday, my love.”

“Happy birthday, sir.”

He gave me one last longing look, then he walked away towards the table where May was busy telling Prescott and Francis where the dishes should go.

Absolutely no surprises there. May always liked to take control of a situation, no matter what was happening.

West curled both of his arms around me and leant his chin on my shoulder.

“Look at our family,” he murmured, watching Drake join the others as Rosie and Jasper came out of the house, followed by her three dogs, all wagging their tails.

“They’re quite something. The best family we could have chosen.”

“They kind of chose us.”

I laughed. Eliza, Jasper, Rosie and May were like parents to me and West since neither of us had our own any longer. Our found family was all we needed.

“I don’t think May would let us get away with not paying her regular visits. Drake would get lectured for hours.”

“He might be a pain in the arse, he doesn’t deserve that.”

“No one deserves a May Ackley lecture.”

He nudged me with his chin, letting go of my waist so I could get to my feet. I put my hand out and pulled him up with me. West looked down at me with a grin and his amber eyes full of affection.

“Especially not you. All you deserve is the world.”

I reached up and touched his cheek.

“I have the world right here with you and the others.”

He leant down and kissed me, making me melt against him. I’d loved this man since I was five. There was no question he made me feel like I had the world when he was by my side.

“Happy birthday, my little warrior,” he whispered when he pulled back. “Owner of my heart.”

His fingers traced a line across the scars on my chest. I sighed and reached up, touching the scars I’d given him over his t-shirt.

“Happy birthday, soulmate and love of my life. Now, come on, let’s go celebrate with the others, hey?”

I took his hand and pulled him towards the table. Right then is when I knew nothing in this world would ever tear me away from the people I loved. We’d stuck together through thick and thin, fought so many battles, and now, life was peaceful. Just how we’d wanted it to be all along.

I looked back at West, taking in each and every one of his beautiful features.

He smiled and made my heart swell at the sight of it.
“As my little Scar wishes.”

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah writes dark, contemporary, erotic and paranormal romances. They adore all forms of steamy romance and can always be found with a book or ten on their Kindle. They love anti-heroes, alpha males and flawed characters with a little bit of darkness lurking within. Their writing buddies nicknamed Sarah: 'Queen of Steam' for their pulse racing sex scenes which will leave you a little hot under the collar.

Born and raised in Sussex, UK near the Ashdown Forest, they grew up climbing trees and building Lego towns with their younger brother. Sarah fell in love with novels as a teenager reading their aunt's historical regency romances. They have always loved the supernatural and exploring the darker side of romance and fantasy novels.

Sarah currently resides in the Scottish Highlands with their husband. Music is one of their biggest inspirations and they always have something on in the background whilst writing. They are an avid gamer and are often found hogging their husband's Xbox.

You can find more about Sarah Bailey in the following ways:

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