

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

EVE NEWTON



HIS
GOOD
GIRL

His Good Girl

Praise Them

Eve Newton

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Preface

Dear Reader,

This is a dark romance with multiple trigger warnings and content preferences.

These include, but are not limited to: very dubious dub-con, self harm, violence, SA, to name a few.

If you are easily triggered or have reading preferences that include any of the above, or more, please back away. You can always contact me at eve@evenewton.com with any queries.

Set in the fictional town of Grove City.

For those of you sticking it out...enjoy!

Love

Eve

Also by Eve Newton

<https://evenewton.com/dark-romance-links>

Chapter 1

Logan



Staring at the swirls and loops of the tattoo etched into her back, I grip her wrists tighter, pulling her arms back and pump harder. The dim glow from the city lights outside and the rain splattering against the window give the darkened apartment an eerie glow.

I don't want to see her face. I'm not here for that. And this will be my last time with her.

She cries out, her back arching. I grunt softly and come into the condom covering my cock. Draining my balls, I let go of her wrists, and she slumps to the bed, panting harshly. I've barely worked up a sweat. I needed a release, and she provided one. Holding the condom at the base of my cock, I slip from the bed and drag it off as I make my way to the en-suite bathroom. Dumping it in the basin, I run the hot tap, rinsing away my semen and watching it swirl down the drain like a mini whirlpool.

Can't be too careful.

Shelley isn't above using it for her own gain. But it isn't me she wants. No, she wants what I can give her.

Turning the tap off, I tie the condom into a knot, wrap it in toilet paper and dump it in the bin.

Sauntering back into the bedroom, aiming straight for my clothes, laid neatly over the chair in the corner, she watches me dress.

"Tomorrow?" she asks.

Pulling on my Hugo Boss suit pants before buttoning up my crisp white shirt, I sit in the chair to put my socks and shoes on.

Silently rising, I pull my suit jacket on, feeling the heavy phone in my inner pocket thump against my chest.

Making my way over to the bedroom door, I pause, looking back over my shoulder. “This is over, Shelley.”

I take a step forward, ignoring her hiss of anger. “Logan, wait.”

“We’re done.”

“Tell me what I need to know.”

Turning around to see her naked and kneeling on the bed, her tiny tits, skinny waist, and the gap between her thighs actually doesn’t do it for me. I like curves.

“You know it doesn’t work that way.”

“Logan, please. I want in, and you know how to get me noticed.”

“You’re already in the door, Shelley. Solitaire knows who you are.”

“I’m low-level,” she spits out. “I want power.”

“I can’t tell you how to get that.”

“Give me something, Logan, please.”

I shake my head. “The only thing I can tell you is that whatever act you commit that will get their attention has to matter. And it has to cost you.”

“Fuck!” she roars. “That’s nothing.”

I shrug. “It’s all you get. Bye, Shelley.”

Turning to leave, I hear the vase hit the wall next to the door I’ve just passed through. I don’t think she will cause me problems. All she wants is for Quentin to notice her so she can move up the ranks of the Secret Society that operates below the shimmering surface of the city. I can’t give her what she wants, so she will find someone who can.

Leaving her opulent apartment, I head downstairs, making my way out into the dark, rainy night, pulling the collar up slightly on my jacket to stop the rain from trickling down the back of my neck. Grimacing when I realize I’ve left my tie at Shelley’s, I’m not going back for it, so it will have to be a sacrifice I’m willing to make.

The walk to my own building, nestled in the heart of the city, overlooking the river in the most exclusive part of town, takes only five minutes. Bobbing my head to the doorman, I flash my card to the private elevator and ascend to my penthouse. As the doors slide open, directly opposite from the double front doors, I step forward, noticing a square package on the doormat.

My heart pounds in my chest as I bend down to retrieve the simply wrapped box. It is slightly lighter than it looks, so easy enough to balance on one hand as I open the door with the other. Kicking it closed behind me, I stride quickly over to the open-plan kitchen, where I place it on the counter.

My hands shake when I reach for the fold in the wrapping to tear it off with a crunch of brown paper, which sounds too loud in the silence of the dark penthouse.

Filled with trepidation and even a tinge of fear, I open the box and choke back the noise that escapes my throat. Pressing my lips together, leaning heavily on the counter, and bowing my head, I take a steadying breath and slam the lid closed. Picking it up, I make my way quickly up the stairs to the left side of the apartment to the second floor, which consists of my bedroom and bathroom. Sliding open the closet door, I carefully place the box on the top shelf and shut it again, feeling the buzz from my phone in my pocket. I take it out and answer immediately.

“Quentin.”

“Logan. Did you receive the package?”

“Yes.”

“Was it to your satisfaction?”

“It was. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, Logan.” He hangs up, but I know that’s not the end of it. The favor owed will come. It might be later tonight, or it might be in a year’s time, but it will come.

Chucking my phone onto the bed, I strip off and head for the shower to wash away the day at the office and the night with Shelley. I wet my dark hair and run my fingers through it before I step out and dry off with a pure white towel from the rail. I barely notice my surroundings, needing only to slip into bed at this late hour, well past midnight, to grab as many minutes of sleep as I can before I need to rise at 4 AM.

Slipping between the gray silk sheets, I wonder briefly what Quentin will call upon me to do. He is the Head of the Society. He says jump; we say how high—even me.

I close my eyes, surprised to find that sleep drags me under quickly and efficiently into a dreamless slumber.

Chapter 2

Logan



I wake up to the alarm beeping. Groaning, I know it's time to get up. I don't often feel the need to lie around all day, but something about last night has left me feeling a bit off-color.

I pick up the phone to shut the alarm off, and immediately a text comes through.

It's from Quentin.

Get rid of your assistant today.

That's it. Whatever favor he wants, it has to do with me removing Dolores from my employ. I sigh and rub my hand over my face, climbing out of bed. My semi bounces in front of me, eager for a release, but I ignore it in favor of grabbing a shower and getting ready.

Choosing my clothes carefully, I pick up a navy-blue suit and a white shirt. I go commando as always and choose a tie. Checking my reflection in the mirror, I straighten my hair after my shower and clip diamond-encrusted cufflinks to my shirt.

I hear the door click open downstairs and check my Rolex—time to go.

Slipping my jacket on as I make my way down the stairs, I smile when I see Rose.

“Morning, gorgeous.”

She looks up and giggles. “Mr. Carter. Such a tease.”

“Never, you are a goddess.”

“So smooth. Be gone with you.” She flaps her hands, thrilled with the compliments. She is about fifteen years older than me, in her mid-fifties, but has the Irish complexion of a woman much younger than her years.

She reaches into the hall closet for my black cashmere, three-quarter-length coat and shakes it out. "It's chilly out there this morning."

"You know you don't have to be here at this time," I point out. "It's way too early for normal people."

"No, you're up at this time; I am as well. Someone needs to remind you to eat."

"Pass, but I appreciate it."

She tuts as she helps me on with the coat. She brushes off the shoulders and turns me around, giving me a critical eye. "You've lost weight, Logan. I'm going to make you a nice hearty stew tonight, and you will eat it. I'll leave it in the oven."

"Promise," I lie. I'll probably forget. It's not that I don't want to eat; it's just that I'm usually too busy. Running Carter & Jeffers Attorneys at Law is more than a full-time job, not to mention the Solitaire business that keeps me busy. Quentin is the Head of our Sector, but I'm not that far down the pecking order, which is why Shelley targeted me. I curse my cock that got me into that mess, but being forty and alone, whether it's by choice or not, isn't good for my sex drive, which is markedly higher than most.

"You're a liar," she singsongs, that beautiful lilt flowing over me, soothing me. If she weren't already happily married, I'd probably ask her to move in with me. Not for sex or marriage, just to be here constantly to look after me and talk to me in that voice. The women who surround me all want something from me. They are sexy, husky, seductive creatures, who purr and pant, and it's boring as fuck. I want something different. Just once, I want a woman not to have an ulterior motive for being with me. Somedays, it makes me consider paying for someone.

"I'll be calling you, Logan, to make sure you're eating."

"If you run out on Paddy, you could be here to make sure." I give her a slow smile.

It makes her peal of laughter ring through the otherwise quiet apartment. "Oh, you," she says, slapping me lightly. "I'll tell him, you know."

"I know how to fight."

She splutters into her hand. Her husband is a renowned bare-knuckle fighter from the back streets of Dublin. Even fifteen years my senior, he would still knock me on my ass with one swipe of his southpaw. "He'll get a kick out of that."

"You're a good woman, Rose. Too good for me."

“Don’t be saying that, Logan. You’ll find someone who loves ya for who you are.”

“I’m not looking.”

“You say that, but that’s when it happens.”

“Hmm.”

“I’ll be calling. 7 PM sharp.”

“Make it six. I’m coming straight home tonight.”

She raises an eyebrow. “Things not work out with that hussy?”

Now it’s my turn to snicker. “That was never serious, but no, it’s over.”

“Good. I didn’t like her,” she says primly. “Was only after your money, if you ask me.”

“Wasn’t my money she wanted.”

Her eyes narrow. “A baby? I hope you covered up.”

I let out a loud laugh. Only Rose has this effect on me. “No, thank God. She is after power.”

“Hmm. That’s as bad as using someone for their money. You are well rid. Don’t go back there because you are lonely.”

“Who says I’m lonely?”

She searches my eyes for a moment before she purses her lips. She knows when to back off. “6 PM, and if you aren’t sitting at that table with a bowl in front of you, I will send Paddy round to sort you out. I bought you a coffee and a bagel.” She shoves a bag at me from where she’d left it on the large glass dining table.

“You’re a treasure,” I murmur, and taking it with a soft smile, I head for the door. I need to be in early to arrange for Dolores to be removed from my employ. I regret this action, but everyone is a pawn when it comes to Solitaire—even me.

Pushing the box to the back of my mind, I head out into the cold early morning, the darkness all-encompassing at this time.

I walk to work. It’s only fifteen minutes away. One of the perks of living in the city, everything is at my fingertips. Biting into the bagel, suddenly feeling ravenous, I devour it within a matter of moments, discarding the bag in a nearby trash can while I sip the hot coffee made just how I like it. Strong, with a splash of milk.

By the time I’ve finished the coffee, I’ve reached my office building. Founding and Senior Partner, I’m proud of everything I accomplished *prior* to becoming a member of Solitaire. Getting the scholarship to college after a

tough time at school was the best thing that could've happened to me. Sometimes I wonder if this was Solitaire all along. They came to me about ten years ago and asked if I wanted in. I didn't hesitate. My entry was contingent on one action, and I didn't even think twice. It was long before then that I realized something was different about the way I see the world. I fit in perfectly with the murky gray morals on which the Society is run. My conscience is paper-thin. It's there, but I have an apathy toward most people and things. It's one reason why I don't have relationships. I know this about myself. It's no mystery to unwrap. I'm always upfront about it with the women I sleep with. They know the score from day one. It doesn't stop them from trying to change me, but I'm past being able to alter my conceptions for someone else. I don't want to, so I won't. I like my space, my life. I want for nothing, except maybe Rose full-time, but that is something that is tantalizingly out of my reach. I could find someone else to be there at my beck and call. Very easily, I'm sure. But Rose is...Rose. She gets me. She knows me. She's worked for me for years. I trust her with most aspects of my life. She'll see the box in the closet when she puts away my laundry, and I know she won't snoop. Trust is difficult for me, but I trust her to an extent. I know I'm capable of it, but again, I just don't care to get that close to anyone where secrets become pillow talk, and in my world, that gets you killed.

Or worse.

Entering the office a few minutes later, it's bright and stark, contrasting with the early morning black sky outside. I squint as I wave my ID card at the Security Guard on duty.

"Morning, sir," he says.

"Morning."

I don't stop for conversation. I have no interest in his wife and children and where he went on vacation.

Ascending to the top floor of this mid-level building, amongst a dozen others in this sector of the city, I breathe in deeply and step off at my floor. Reception is closed at this hour, so I walk past without the further need for conversation.

Allison is in; I can see her from here. She is the office manager and runs this ship like Nelson.

I give her a half-wave, which she returns and goes back to her work. I don't expect her to be here at 6 AM. No one should be. Except me.

Pausing at Dolores's desk, I reach over and flick the computer on. I use

her log-in, which is updated at regular intervals, and where the IT guy, also a member of Solitaire due to his hacking skills, keeps me in the loop. You never know. And look, today, I need to know.

Glancing up at Allison, she can't see Dolores's station from where she is sitting.

I leave the computer to whirr into action and then walk past to my office. It's gross misconduct to leave your computer unlocked and unattended. Due to the privacy issues that surround the law and the clients within this firm, it's a necessity to keep everything as secure as we can.

Dolores has two choices. She can either come clean about leaving it unlocked, and I can fire her. Or she will pretend it never happened, and then I will have to confront her about it. The latter makes me sigh. The less interaction I have with her, the better.

Now, I just need to sit back and wait.

Chapter 3

Serena



Groaning as the sound of my phone ringing interrupts the peaceful morning, it's not a noise that I particularly want to hear at this moment in time, but I feel obligated to answer regardless. Working for the temp agency gives me steady-ish work, but I wasn't supposed to be in today. I was looking forward to a morning in bed, with food and movies. The rain is a soft pitter-patter against the window, which makes this even more of a duvet day.

"Guess you found me something. Fuckers."

Pausing, I seriously consider not answering, but I live hand-to-mouth as it is, probably working on average three days a week, sometimes less. Here, there and everywhere. If the agency has something for me, I need to drag my ass out of bed and go earn some money.

Turning over in my soft double bed, my long blonde hair flicking into my face, the soft blankets wrap around me and keep me warm despite the cold and rainy weather outside. Allowing my eyes to adjust to the light, and when I'm able to focus on my phone, I see that it's my uncle calling.

My parents.

Sitting upright, I grip the phone tightly, my heart pounding at the impending bad news I fear is about to be imparted upon me.

"Uncle Q. What's wrong?"

He chuckles. "Nothing, Reenie. Everyone is fine."

Scrunching up my nose, relieved but curious, I ask, "Why are you calling me at this godforsaken hour then?"

"It's eight-thirty," he points out as if it's lunchtime.

"Yeah, and?"

"I have a job for you."

“Oh? Where? When? I’m free next week.” I cringe at the lie. I’m free now; I just quite like it in my bed.

“No, this is a permanent position, Reenie. Your mother is concerned about this temping situation. She wants you to settle down and have a proper job.”

Grimacing, I clench my jaw. This is a bone of contention between my mother and me. She expects that at twenty-five, I should be settled into a career and thinking about finding a husband who accepts that I won’t give up my job to look after babies and shit. I mean, why bother with all that when I’m happy on my own with no one to tell me what I can and can’t do? Isn’t all that are what my thirties are for?

“I’m good, but thanks.”

“Reenie, I’ve sorted out a position for you at Carter & Jeffers. It’s admin for the founding partner, Logan Carter. It’s full time, has benefits, and you can use it as a launching pad for a legal career further down the line.”

His offer is met with a stony silence.

“Reenie?”

“Yeah, I’m here, but I didn’t ask for this.”

“I know, but your mother was bending my ear, love. Just go, hmm? You start tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow?” I frown. Tomorrow is Friday.

“Yes, tomorrow. Eight-thirty sharp. Cannon street in the city. You can’t miss it.”

“Eight-thirty?” Most of my temp jobs start at nine. Ugh. This is going from bad to worse. “Look, Uncle Q. I seriously appreciate this, but I’m not ‘founding partner’ material. He probably wants me to do all sorts of things that I can’t. I can do basic admin, file a bit and get coffee, maybe do some payroll if there are like three employees.” This is some high-level admin job he’s put me forward for, and I’m certain I’m not up for it. I know my limitations. My resumé doesn’t lie.

“Logan won’t expect you to do anything fancy, like payroll. Just do what he tells you and be a bit proactive. It’s like any other job you’ve been on.”

His cajoling tone doesn’t convince me.

Chewing the inside of my lip, I deliberate, knowing I *should* take it, but I wasn’t looking for a full-time job. This has been thrust at me without any time to think about it.

“Fine,” I huff eventually, knowing I sound like an ungrateful brat. “Thank

you for doing this,” I add stiffly to compensate for the mood.

He chuckles again. “Eighty-thirty sharp. Have fun!”

“Yeah, yeah.”

We hang up, and I throw the phone onto my bed. “Well, old friend, I guess I won’t be seeing you as much as we’re both used to.”

I’m warm and cozy, and I don’t want to leave the comfort of my bed. Flopping back, I close my eyes, relishing the peace and quiet. Not moving for several minutes, I eventually force myself to get out of bed and face the day. Taking a deep breath, I open the curtains, watching as the rain spills down outside, the morning light gloomy and drab.

Staring out my window, the outskirts of the city stretches out before me, a vast expanse of gray and silver mixed with a bright and colorful blur of life. It looks so different in the rain, the soft drumbeat of droplets against the glass adding a layer of tranquility to the hustle and bustle outside.

The rain is heavy, cascading down onto the street below with a satisfying rhythm, the sound of life being watered into the concrete streets. The occasional car passes by, buses trundling along as they crawl through the wet roads.

Turning away from the window, I stroll through the apartment I’ve called home for the past few months. It’s not much to look at. It’s in the low-rent, back end of the city, away from the luxurious penthouses by the river, but I’ve made it as comfortable and cozy as I can with its one-bedroom and small bathroom, a sitting area, and an open-plan kitchen. The hallway is short and narrow, leading to the front door, jumbled with coats and shoes, but it’s all I need. Deciding to get some breakfast first, I head to the kitchen, determined to do a spot of research before this fancy job tomorrow. I want to know exactly who this Logan Carter guy is, so I can try to figure out who I will be dealing with. Obnoxious, rich, and an asshole who thinks he has a giant dick and does, or an obnoxious, rich asshole who thinks he has a giant dick and doesn’t.

In my limited experience, the one with the giant dick is less of a jerk.

But I guess time will tell.

Chapter 4

Logan



Time moves quickly when my head is buried in cases that intrigue me. I don't have to, but I always take the most difficult, impossible-to-defend cases. It's a challenge, and I very rarely lose. It's why my name is prominent in the Corporate Law game. But as 8.30 AM rolls around, I look up with narrowed eyes to see Dolores making her way to her desk, stopping to chat with the other workers just setting up for the day. I put my head back down, madly curious as to what she will do with the mess I've left for her. I don't really give a fuck, to be honest. Allison will have another assistant at my desk by nine, just as Dolores turned up a few months ago when Lucy up and quit on me suddenly to get married and move away. That gutted me. She was the perfect assistant. She knew my quirks, made a killer cup of coffee, and stayed the fuck out of my way. Dolores always asks how I am and expects me to ask back. It's irritating as fuck.

I peer up, pretending to be absorbed in my work, eyeing her closely through the glass-fronted office. She places her bag on the desk and sits down, reaching out to turn the computer on, and then freezes.

She licks her lips and glances over her shoulder at me. I'm still seemingly immersed in my work, so I pretend not to notice her.

Then she does something unprecedented.

She rises, picks up her bag, and scurries off.

I frown and look up, craning my neck to see her in the distance, stabbing the elevator button impatiently, looking frantically around as she climbs on when everyone else gets off.

"Huh. Well, I didn't expect a lunchtime quit, and it's not even lunchtime."

I lean back in my chair, the back inclining under the weight. Twirling my pen around, I narrow my eyes as Allison comes rushing over.

“What happened?” she barks.

Thankful for her brusque attitude, I sit up straight again and sigh. “You tell me. She ran out of here like her ass was on fire.”

She narrows her eyes suspiciously. “What did you do, Logan?”

Snorting with mirth, I shake my head. “Nothing! I swear, this time, it wasn’t me.”

Allison purses her lips. “Hmm. Fine. I’ll call down to the admin pool and have them send someone up. I’ll get an advert up online. They know us by now.” Her accusatory glare amuses me, but I try to remain serious.

“Thank you, Ally. You’re the best.”

Her face uncreases, and she preens slightly as I shorten her name and praise her. I may not enjoy being around people, but I know how to work them.

“Aww, you’re sweet,” she says, pretending to brush it off. She bustles off to find me a new assistant. Something tells me that Quentin will be messaging me any second now to fill me in on why I had to dump Dolores.

As if on cue, my phone beeps.

Picking it up, I glance at the screen.

Your new assistant will be there tomorrow.

“Great.”

He did all of this to lumber me with someone of his choosing. I don’t claim to know much about Quentin’s family. Nobody does, so this could be anyone from his son or daughter to an old family friend.

I’m pretty sure I’m not going to like it.

Nepotism usually doesn’t work out so well for everyone who has to work around the favored one. Tomorrow is going to be...fun.

Sighing, I get back to work, ignoring three calls from Shelley until lunchtime, when she calls again, I block her number.

Without a shadow of a doubt, she is going to cause trouble for me further down the line. It is something that I anticipated and will deal with when I’m not so preoccupied with Quentin’s maneuvering and my own past coming back to haunt me in a package the size of a shoebox.

* * *

At 5.30 PM, after a day of constant nagging by the temp, until I told her to get fucked and made her cry, pissing Allison off on a scale of a million when ten was the max, I head out into the cool night air, the slight drizzle cooling down my temper. I can only hope that tomorrow's offering will be slightly more inclined to be proactive and take charge. It's really a big turn-off when people are needy and unfocused, unable to perform the most straightforward task without guidance and handholding.

When I push open the door to my apartment fifteen minutes later, the smell of gorgeous food hits my nose. My stomach growls in protest of being ignored since the bagel at the asscrack of dawn.

Removing my coat and hanging it up to dry off the slight dampness from the rain, I head straight for the kitchen and see a post-it on the counter.

EAT!

The demand is in Rose's handwriting and placed next to a bowl, a spoon, and a pair of oven gloves.

I chuckle, opening the oven door to pull the stew in the ceramic pot out with the gloves. Dishing up an ample portion, I pluck up the note and carry it to the dining table, where a glass and a bottle of neat single malt are waiting for me.

Grinning, I sit down to my feast, pouring some scotch into the glass and taking a small, savoring sip.

Sticking the post-it to the front of my shirt, I prop my phone up against the glass and dig in. A few seconds later, it rings for a video call.

Leaning over, I answer. "Hey, Rose."

Her face swims onto the screen. "You eating there?"

"I am, and it's delicious." I make a point of bringing the spoon laden with food to my mouth so she can watch me take a bite.

Her approving nod is met with a smug one from me. "See."

"Hmm. I'm going to sit here and watch you eat the lot, young man."

A man's face looms into view. "Logan," Paddy's gruff voice rings through the apartment. "You eating there?"

I waggle my spoon at him.

He nods. “Good, good. Rose tells me you looking for a fight. I don’t beat on scrawny fucks, so you better get that food into you and bulk up.” He lets out a loud guffaw and ambles off as Rose shakes her head.

“You heard it here first.” She jabs her finger at the screen.

Snorting into my stew, I’m entertained, to say the least. This is better than spending the night alone.

That thought rears its head out of the blue. I narrow my eyes and shove it aside, shoveling food into my mouth until it’s all gone as Rose watches me, nodding appreciatively and making approving noises.

“This is like some sort of kink,” I chuckle, picking up the bowl and showing her it’s empty.

She blushes and giggles at the word *kink*. “You’re a good boy,” she says.

I press my lips together, enjoying the praise in a way that I can’t express to my housekeeper.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Rose.”

“Night, Logan.”

We hang up, and the apartment falls back into an eerie silence, which does little to settle my concerns over tomorrow’s surprise assistant. I’m sure Quentin has his reasons, but that’s all well and good for *him*. I’m the one who’s got to put up with whomever it is.

It also requires me to be on my best behavior, which is something that is harder for me than it looks.

Cursing him as I make my way back to the kitchen to clear up and maybe grab a bit more stew while I’m already eating anyway. Making short work of it, I disappear upstairs, pulling out the box from the closet and placing it reverently on the bed to stare into, resisting the urge to touch the contents.

Chapter 5

Serena



My research into Logan Carter is ongoing. To say the man is mysterious yet an extremely accomplished human is not doing him justice.

I hunch my shoulders against the drizzle that has just started. Holding my phone up, I squint at it to follow the walking directions to Cannon Street. I had a vague idea but wasn't sure of its exact location. I'm bright and early; it's only 8 AM, so I'm feeling rather proud of myself when the Maps app tells me I'm nearly there. Wiping the raindrops off the screen, I look up at the tall buildings surrounding me. They're all fancy, with shining glass and smart people rushing inside. I'm down on the wharf, which is the opposite side of the city from where I live. It's taken me about forty-five minutes to walk here, through the busy streets, the vibrancy of the city coming to life at this early hour. Having had the foresight to wear my sneakers instead of my heels on the walk in, I pick up my pace to get out of the growing downpour.

You have reached your destination.

"Well, thank fuck."

I glance up to make sure and see the Carter & Jeffers signage outside, along with a few others, which tells me this is a building full of attorneys, accountants, and architects.

Rushing forward into the revolving door, I discover it is automatic, and it slowly sweeps around, letting me into the magnificent lobby. Dripping rain onto the black tiled floor, I hurry to the desk manned by a severely professional-looking woman in her forties.

"Good morning," I state, adopting my poshest tone. "I am here for Carter & Jeffers."

“Floors eight to ten,” she says without missing a beat.

“Eight to ten.” I chew my lip. Not particularly wanting to ask her, upon which floor I will find the legendary Logan Carter, I practically wither under her steely gaze as I dither, forming a small puddle from my wet coat. There are few people who can intimidate me, but this dragon is one of them.

“Yes?”

With my tone going from posh to downright pathetic, I mutter, “Uhm. Which floor is Logan Carter on?”

“Ten.”

“Oh, okay, thank you.”

She gives me a swift nod and then answers the phone from a snug headset. “Marshall Building, how may I direct your call?”

Blinking a few times, I glance around for the elevator, smoothing back my damp hair. I’ve left it loose, but seriously, this place is so distinguished that I feel totally out of place. Rooting around in my oversized handbag for a hair band, I eventually find one and scoop my hair up in as neat a bun as I can with my limited equipment. Stabbing the button for the elevator, I pull my heels out of my bag and, toeing off one shoe, I slip one on. Of course, the elevator decides now is the time to slide open, scooping up my sneaker, I hobble with one heel, one flat into the empty box, only to find myself suddenly surrounded by people going up. There is no room to put on my other heel, so I stand there all lopsided, calling out, “Number ten, please!” to the person nearest the panel, seeing as I was unceremoniously shoved to the back of the now overcrowded compartment.

I start to sweat.

My heartbeat speeds up.

My breathing becomes labored.

No, no, no. Calm down, Reens. This isn’t the time for a panic attack.

Looking around frantically, panting and about to lose my shit, I’m relieved when the doors slide open at our first stop, and one person gets off. Everyone does the reshuffle, trying not to make it obvious that they’re moving away from the closeness of the body next to them; I breathe out.

Only nine more floors to go.

As luck would have it, everyone else in the elevator is going beyond the tenth floor, so when the doors ding open for me, I’m forced to shove my way forward.

“Excuse me. Sorry. Excuse me. This is me. Sorry. Sorry.”

Stumbling out into the sophisticated reception on the tenth floor, I allow myself a small respite by leaning up against the wall so my heartbeat can return to normal levels. I swap my other shoe and push off from the wall, feeling the beady eye on the gorgeous, raven-haired Receptionist on me.

“Can I help you?” she asks coldly.

I amble forward, trying to get my act together. “I’m here for Logan Carter.”

She gives me a scathing once-over, starting with my wet bun and ending at my waist, the rest of me not visible below the counter. That one look tries, yet fails, to dismantle my confidence worse than the trip in the elevator.

I didn’t grow up poor—quite the opposite. But I moved out on my own after differing opinions with my parents about my lifestyle choices, and they cut me off. Not in a nasty, disowned way, but an ‘If you move out from under our roof, you can hand back those credit cards, young lady’ way. Which was fair enough.

I was happy to oblige.

Sadly, that means my wardrobe is less than immaculate and definitely not designer like the snob giving me an arrogant sneer.

“Mr. Carter doesn’t see the pro bono cases personally. I’ll direct you to Allison. Sit.”

It takes me a second, but I’m not the pushover I appear to be. “I’m not a fucking dog,” I spit, startling the shit out of this bitch. “I’m Mr. Carter’s new assistant, so if you would be so kind as to direct me to the man himself, that would be *sooo* helpful.”

Her astonished and slightly fearful expression gives me great joy.

As I said, I grew up rich. I knew how to *mean girl* with the best of the elite at my upper crust boarding school.

Not to say that all rich people are mean, but there are definitely a few. I used to be one of them. Until I became a have-not, and my attitude changed on a dime.

Still, if this bitch wants to throw down, I’ve got it in me.

Sometimes.

With someone I know can take it, anyway.

As expected, she brushes it off, her rancid attitude deepening with each passing second. “Corner office on the left,” she hisses, then ignores me, going back to her whatever the fuck, who cares business.

Not bothering to thank her, I lift my chin higher and stride with more

purpose now through the bullpen, edging to the left where I see the corner office. I pause.

Logan Carter is forty. He is fifteen years older than me, but man, if the pictures are anything to go by, he is gorgeous. With dark hair and blue eyes like sapphires, I'm betting he falls into the *has a giant dick* category. I'd be disappointed if he didn't. Not that I intend to make a play for him, he's too old for a start and my boss for another. And it's not like he would notice me even if I did.

But still—a girl can wonder.

Moving closer, I see him sitting in his office and pull a face. If he's already here, and it's only eight fifteen, does that mean he expects me to be here even earlier every single day? Am I setting a precedent for him to *expect* me to be here at this time every morning if I go over there now and introduce myself?

Figuring it better to be safe than sorry, for Monday morning onwards, I steer myself to the ladies' room to try and tidy up my appearance, as according to the Receptionist bitch, I look like something the cat dragged in.

Chapter 6

Logan



“**M**r. Carter?”

I look up at the lullaby voice, soft and gentle but with an underlying force that makes me desperately curious about whom it belongs to.

Pulling my glasses down and then removing them completely, I lean back in my chair and appraise the young woman with the damp blonde hair wrapped up in a neat bun, sparkling green eyes, sweet curves I could take in for days, dressed in a black skirt suit with a white blouse, open just slightly lower than would usually be appropriate in the workplace.

“Yes?”

Her gaze takes in my face. It’s apparent that she likes what she sees, which causes me to narrow my eyes in query.

Who is she?

“I’m Serena Wakefield. Your new assistant?”

The question in her voice has me intrigued. She seems unsure about that.

“Oh?”

She swallows and then licks her lips. “Uhm...my uncle...he...” She presses her lips together and exhales through her nose. “I’m sorry to have wasted your time.”

Serena turns to leave, but there is no way on God’s green earth, I’m allowing that to happen. I want to look at her some more.

“Your uncle?” I ask sharply enough to stop her in her tracks.

Serena turns. “Quentin Livingston.”

“I see.” I chew the end of my glasses and straighten up in my chair. “Well, you are in the right place. Find Allison and get to work.”

Replacing my glasses, I turn back to the case file, deftly ignoring her before I ravage her. If I considered banging my assistant unprofessional prior to this moment, the rampant thoughts of tying up this delicate, curvy blonde creature with the bewitching eyes to rail her until she begs me for mercy, are downright forbidden. Quentin would crush my balls, and I quite like them intact.

Distancing myself from her is in both of our best interests. I would corrupt her, destroy her. She appears too young and innocent for that.

Trying to ignore the thought I had yesterday morning about needing someone different in my life than the purring, panting seductresses that I always seem to cross paths with, I hunch down, getting pissed off when she doesn't move.

"Who?" she asks, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Allison. Go out there. You can't miss her."

"Uhm, okay."

In my peripheral vision, I see her turn and never let it be said that I didn't have excellent hearing.

"Asshole," she mutters under her breath as she marches off.

Muffling my snicker, I'm rendered speechless by the audacity of this woman. It's surprising, refreshing when I'm used to everyone bowing down to me, and so hot, I feel my cock grow stiff.

The need to hear her call me that while I'm fucking her is clawing at me, but I shove it aside.

Forbidden.

Absolutely and irrefutably.

Grimacing at my case file, I glance up when Allison brings Serena back over to the desk outside. With a glare, Allison reaches in and closes my door, almost as if she were shutting it in my face. Clearly, Serena has been telling tales of what a dick I am.

Well, better she knows now, so she gets used to it. If she lasts the day, I'll be surprised. It's tough shit if she can't hack it. Quentin should know me better by now. However, Quentin's favor does come before my own need to drive people away, so they steer clear of me and my quirks. It's best for everyone that way.

It seems like only moments pass, but it could possibly be longer when there is a firm knock on the door.

"What?" I'm in no mood to pretend to be nice.

The door opens, and Serena strides in with much more confidence than she appeared to have earlier. She practically slams a mug of hot coffee on my desk with such a fake smile that I bite back a laugh.

“Strong with a splash of milk. Just the way you like it.” She flicks her head before turning her body in the same direction, an act that entertains me more than I’d like. She stalks back out as I hide my smile behind my hand, slamming the door behind her.

Oh, she’s a firecracker.

Maybe her working here won’t be such a bad thing after all. The worse I treat her, the more entertaining this will become, and I’m all for amusing myself. It’s arousing, but thoughts of taking care of my hard dick in the usual way, aren’t really hitting the spot today. I want Serena’s smart mouth wrapped around it while I shoot cum down her throat. Seeing as that action is neither wise nor an option, I can entertain myself at her expense. There is a need to see how far I can push her before she either cries, leaves, or goes to her uncle about me. Whichever way, it will be worth it.

Secretly, I’m hoping she’s tougher than she looks and sticks it out. It just means I can push her even harder and find her breaking point.

Thrilled with my plan, albeit with only a slight trepidation as to what Quentin might do if he finds out – and I’m sure he will, I reach for my coffee and take a testing sip.

Startled, I find it is precisely the way I like it. It’s like Rose made it.

Leaning back in my chair, watching Serena through the half-glass wall do what Allison instructs her as she jabs at the computer screen and shoves files towards her, I memorize every inch of her profile, far more intrigued than I have a right to be.

Serena feels my gaze on her and turns her head slightly to lock eyes with me. It’s electric in its intensity. She licks her lips and turns away, lifting her chin marginally higher, dismissing me.

Dismissing *me*.

“You don’t know what you’ve started here, beautiful. You’re playing with fire, and I will burn you.”

Placing the mug back down, I get back to work, pushing Serena Wakefield aside, where she lingers, taunting me, playing with me, begging me to destroy her.

Chapter 7

Serena



Feeling a slight sense of power in turning away from him first, I bite back my smile as Allison continues to fill me in on what appears to be a massively complicated job.

“So Logan doesn’t see the pro bono cases. He is the lead attorney and will show up in court if it gets that far, but Jenny is the one who deals with them. We need to have a five percent pro bono, and Logan takes one percent of those, so you won’t see many, but don’t bother him with it. Go to Jenny.”

“Who’s Jenny?” I ask boldly. Allison is a straight shooter and won’t give me the run around, which I appreciate.

“Blonde paralegal over there.” She points to a desk a bit further away where a stunningly beautiful, immaculately turned-out woman sits, talking on the phone.

Ugh. Jenny. Bet Logan has stuck his giant dick in her.

Almost fuming at the thought, I turn back to glare at him, but he isn’t looking at me this time. Asshole. I refuse to place him in the bigger jerk category of thinks he has a giant dick and doesn’t. There is no way that guy is packing a teeny wiener under that Hugo Boss suit.

“Be proactive; look for something to do if you don’t have anything. Don’t go to Logan; come to me. If you have a hundred questions—ask them. I would rather you ask than screw up. Logan needs stability in this role, and I think you can give it to him with the right attitude. Don’t let him bully you. He’s a curmudgeon. Get used to it. Don’t let it affect you. He will be worse if he makes you cry.”

My eyes widen at that. This sounds terrible.

“And do me a favor, love. Will you make up with Rue? She is the guard

dog, and she does it well. Swearing at her, while I get it, was a bad move. You need her on your side. You'll see how many creeps we get up here demanding to speak to the senior partners." She leans forward to whisper conspiratorially. "She's only had to call security once in four years."

Allison straightens up with a 'there you go' expression.

"Okay, I'm sorry for swearing at her. She was just being..."

"Rue?"

"I guess so. I'll apologize."

"Good girl." She pats my hand, and I beam at her, enjoying the small amount of praise, even though it's just a saying.

Allison stands. "Remember to ask. Don't fumble through, okay?"

"Got it."

"Go make a weak, tepid green tea and take it to Rue as a peace offering."

Nodding, I try not to be insulted that she is defending Rue the guard dog over me. She barely knows me, and clearly, Rue is a valued member of the team. Well, never let it be said that Serena Wakefield couldn't take the high road when necessary. I really don't want to make enemies on my first day. It's not a good look.

Standing up, I bend over to lock the computer, taking Allison's advice very seriously about leaving it open for anyone to look at. Glancing at the stack of files I need to sort out, I figure making up with Rue is probably in everyone's best interest, so the files can wait five minutes.

Logan is still immersed in his work, his glasses perched on his nose. Biting the inside of my lip, I look away. Staring too long at him hurts my eyes. He is gorgeous, but what an asshole. There is no way he will make *me* cry. If that's what he's hoping for, then he has another thing coming.

Making my way to the small kitchenette, I grab a nice, clean white mug and root around for the green tea bags. Finding them, I pop one in the mug and hold it under the hot water dispenser, whipping the tea bag out as soon as the mug is full. I glare at the watery contents and shrug. Not my first choice, but it definitely seems to be Rue's.

I leave it on the counter to cool down and decide to make a coffee while I'm in here. As I reach for another mug, someone joins me in the small room. I glance over my shoulder and give a curt smile to the middle-aged man in an expensive suit, but that doesn't do much for him. He is a slightly overweight, average looking man with thinning hair.

"New girl," he says, trying for a purr, I think, but failing.

I instantly tense up and grab the nearest mug, yanking it off the shelf so I can move away when he steps in closer.

“I’m John Jeffers, Senior Partner. You’re Logan’s latest assistant?”

I nod. “Serena Wakefield.”

“Lovely name.”

Cringing, I turn away to make my coffee, jumping when his hand rests on my ass as I pour hot water.

“Oww,” I exclaim as the scorching water splashes on my hand at my sudden movement.

“Let me help you with that.”

“No! It’s okay; I’ve got it, thank you.” I shuffle away, but he closes in on me, wedging me between the corner of the counter and his considerable bulk. He’s not huge, but he’s a lot bigger than me and practically breathing down my neck, his eyes on my cleavage.

Eww.

“Excuse me,” I mutter, edging past him, needing to get away from the cloistered air suddenly all around me.

Luckily, he lets me go, his creepy gaze following me as I pick up Rue’s tea and race from the room.

“Pervert,” I mutter, glad to be back in the busy office, safe from further unwanted advances.

Note to self. Go out for coffee in future.

Making my way over to the Reception Desk, I remember that Allison said tepid, and this is hot. I can’t go over to Rue with a peace offering that is all wrong. In her shoes, that would just rub me up the wrong way, so I divert back to my desk to find Logan standing in his office doorway, a fierce frown etched into his handsome face.

Gulping, I place the two mugs down on my desk. “Sorry, I was getting coffee,” I mutter.

“Was he bothering you?” he snaps.

“Uhm...who?” I look over my shoulder and see creepy John ambling out of the kitchenette, looking sketchily innocent.

“John,” Logan growls.

Hesitating, I can’t decide what to do. Rat out the named partner and have this be a thing when I really need it to *not* be a thing, or brush it off and hope it doesn’t happen again.

“Hmm, no, I’m all good,” I murmur and flustered at the bald-faced lie, I

snatch up the tea and march off, not even bothering to tell him where I'm going.

This day is going from bad to worse.

I'll have my ass canned before he can even make me cry.

Startled, I find myself a bit upset by that thought.

Chapter 8

Logan



Serena rushes off after the complete lie she just told me. Furious doesn't even cover what I'm feeling right now. I've had my suspicions about John but nothing concrete and was keeping an eye out, okay, *Allison* was keeping an eye out, for anything suspicious. She came here and told me he'd deliberately followed Serena into the kitchenette, but Serena rushed out before I could intervene and maybe get something solid to confront him with. Gritting my teeth, I march over to his office and, without knocking, barge in, kicking it closed behind me.

"John."

"Logan, is everything all right?" he asks, shiftily looking busy.

My move was rash. I have nothing to go on here, so I play it the opposite way around to see what he'll say. "Did you just have a run-in with the new assistant?"

He slowly meets my gaze. "Why? What did she say?"

"Nothing. I'm asking you."

"Well, she was a bit forward," he says, full of self-importance.

Taking a step closer, I ask, "What do you mean forward?"

"She was flirting with me, brushed up against me. It caught me off-guard. I introduced myself, and she obviously figured I was her step up the ladder, you know what I mean?" He laughs nervously.

"Hmm."

"You should watch her," he says forcefully. "She's trouble, that one."

"Noted." Turning, I stride out of the office, livid. He could've gone any which way with a lie, but he took the truth and spun it around. I *know* it. I just can't prove it unless Serena comes clean. The thought of his pudgy hands

splayed out on her delicate skin makes me want to rip his fucking head off. It's this anger which suddenly makes me curious as to whether she has a man in her life. I need to know. I need to know so I can remove them permanently from her sphere. I want her isolated, fearful, *mine*, as I shatter her into a million pieces and walk away, satisfied that she will never be the same again.

Slamming my office door harder than I should have, I return to my desk and sit, angry at this woman who has suddenly dropped into my life without warning, forcing me to notice her. She is as off-limits as they come, but my thoughts are crowded with her.

I need to forget her. I need to make her leave. It's the only way I will get her out of my head.

Standing up again, I yank open the office door. Glancing around, I see her hovering on this side of the big glass screen behind the Reception Desk, waving her hand over the mug as if to cool it.

She looks up and sees me watching her. Narrowing my eyes, I scowl and disappear back into my office. I can't even go over there and shout at her, humiliating her in front of everyone about how useless she is so that she will quit. What is wrong with me?

Groaning, I slide down into my chair, leaning my face in my hands. I'm going to fucking kill Quentin for sending me his gorgeous, innocent niece. She has no idea what she has crashed into by getting my attention. I can't even remember the last time a woman had this effect on me.

Reaching for my phone, I speed-dial the private investigator I use for my cases when the need arises.

He answers after one ring. "Yeah?"

"Serena Wakefield. Works here from today. Get me every last detail you can on her. I don't care how minuscule; I want *everything*."

"On it."

My curiosity is piqued. I want to know who she is deep down, and I want to know now if she is involved with anyone, who her parents are, where she lives, who her friends are, what she does on her weekends, everything. No stone left unturned.

"What in the blazes is wrong with you today?" Allison asks, shoving open the door and barging in. "You're storming around like a bull in a china shop."

"That girl," I growl, jabbing my finger at her. "Get her out of my sight."

Allison inhales deeply before exhaling slowly. "What do you think she's

done?”

“Nothing. I don’t like her. Get rid of her.”

“I can’t just get rid of her. She’s Quentin’s niece.”

I clench my jaw until my head aches. “I’m aware.”

“Then you see, I can’t just remove her.”

“Dammit, Allison. She’s distracting me. I need her gone.”

Silence.

We lock gazes. I realize I’ve dealt her a hand that she has absolutely no idea what to do with. I’ve given her something far deeper than this business relationship was ever meant to be about.

“If you touch her, he will kill you,” she says quietly. “Get your head off your dick and back on your work. We won’t be having this conversation again.”

She closes the door quietly behind her, leaving me spiraling down a whirlpool of utter, gut-wrenching misery.

“Forbidden. Fucking forbidden. The one woman in the whole world I can’t touch, just happens to be the one I want more than anything.”

Sinking further into my chair, I shift my anger to Allison. Before now, we were professional, cool acquaintances. That has leaped over the boundary into very dodgy territory. Her loyalties lie with Quentin. Wholly and completely. She will throw me under the bus if she gets even a whiff of betrayal.

As much as I want my hands on Serena, there is no way it can ever happen. Clenching my fist, I close off, knowing this is the only way or find myself on Quentin’s shit list, and that is no place anyone wants to be.

Not even me.

Chapter 9

Serena



This is getting ridiculous.

Deciding it's cool enough for Rue; I slip around the frosted glass screen that separates her desk from the rest of the office. There are walkways on either side, but knowing what I know, I wouldn't want to try and get past her.

"Heeey," I say casually, placing the tea down on the high counter.

Rue regards me with a cool expression, her arms folded. "Finally decided to stop stalking, I see."

Biting back the snort of amusement, I reply, "I was trying to wait for the tea to cool, but I seem to have been run out of both the kitchen and my own desk."

She raises an eyebrow and looks at the mug. "That for me?"

"Yeah, it's probably hotter than you'd like, which I know is crap."

Unfolding her arms, she reaches for the mug and picks it up, blowing on it slightly before taking a small sip. "It's fine."

"Good. Listen, I'm sorry about earlier. I was a bit stressed, and I shouldn't have taken it out on you."

"Thanks, I appreciate that. I'm sorry too. I judged you, and that was wrong. I see a lot of people coming up here trying to see the senior partners...I'm very defensive."

"I know, and that's good. So are we?"

"Good?"

"Yeah."

She smiles. "Yeah, we're good." She leans forward. "Can I give you a couple of pieces of advice?"

I nod, figuring what can it hurt.

“Steer clear of John Jeffers, the other named partner. You are exactly his type.” She counts them off on her fingers. “Young. Blonde. Gorgeous.”

Blinking, I must look slightly shifty because she leans in closer. “What did he do?”

“It’s nothing,” I brush it off, but she gives me a foreboding glare.

“What did he do?” she hisses.

“Seriously, it’s nothing. He tried to intimidate me, that’s all.” I tell the lie with a straight face. I really need this to not become a thing.

Rue purses her lips. “Hmm. Well, if he tries *anything*, tell Allison. He’s icky.” She shudders. “Luckily, I’m not his type.”

“What, he doesn’t like gorgeous young brunettes?” I joke.

She snickers softly. “Nope. And I’m not young enough if you get my meaning.”

“Eww. But I’m twenty-five.”

Her eyes go wide. “Seriously? You look about twenty.”

I’m not sure if that’s a compliment or an insult.

“It’s a compliment,” she giggles. “I’m twenty-nine, so way too old for his perverted tastes.”

“He sounds like a delight.”

“Hmm.”

“What else?”

“Oh!” It seems she forgot that she had other advice to give me. “Yeah, don’t let Logan get to you. He’s not a people person.”

“You don’t say,” I comment.

She snickers again. “Seriously, though. He can be mean. He made the other one cry yesterday after he made Dolores leave like her ass was on fire. Fuck knows what happened, but she just up and left seconds after she arrived.”

“He is definitely an asshole,” I say blithely. “Anyway, I’d better get back to my desk.”

She nods and takes another sip of her tea.

Wandering back to my desk, mindful of trying to look older than the twenty years I apparently look, I sit back down and get to work on the files, ignoring Logan completely. If I don’t *have* to interact with him, I won’t.

Answering the phone, sorting through the files, and figuring out the admin system takes up the morning, and before I know it, someone is

looming over my desk as I'm bent over in my chair to place a file in the bottom drawer.

Straightening up instantly, I breathe out when I see it's only Rue, her white skirt and jacket immaculate, not a rumple in sight, standing in front of me, scrolling through her phone.

"You wanna grab lunch?" she asks, looking up from her screen.

"Sure," I reply, grabbing my bag. "How long do we get?"

"Half an hour, so chop-chop."

"I'll just tell Logan I'm going."

She presses her lips together. "Good luck, hun."

I roll my eyes and rise, smoothing down my decidedly crumpled skirt and easing into my jacket.

Striding over to the half-open door of Logan's office, I rap loudly and stick my head around. "I'm going to lunch."

He doesn't even look up from his legal pad; he just waves his hand, almost as if he is shooing me away.

Not saying anything else, I back away and try not to let Rue's laugh distract me.

"Honestly, this is going to be fun watching you two."

"How so?"

"He's grumpy, you're sunshine. Always makes for a good pairing, if you ask me."

"Humph." I don't want to think of us as a pair. He's a dick. Unfortunately, I can't seem to shove the expression he had on his face away when I returned to my desk from my run-in with John Jeffers. It will haunt me, taunt me, *tempt* me.

It was fierce and protective; even if it was for a fleeting second, I saw it. I'm trying to deny it, I haven't thought about it really until now when Rue mentioned us being a pair.

"Well, I'm sure he probably has some seductress as his girlfriend, and I'm a mere annoyance to his day," I add.

"Oh, that's his type. My friends and I see him out sometimes, always with a different woman. Last time, a few nights ago, he was with this one. She was all over him. He didn't seem that into her, but she was fawning all over him."

"Naturally."

"Right? So I'm pretty sure you have to be something extra special to grab his attention. She was hot, sexy, and all the things you'd imagine he'd want."

I look back over my shoulder as we get to the elevators, and Rue stabs the button, giving a quick two-finger wave to the Security guard who seems to have taken her place.

If hot and sexy are the things he looks for, and even that's not enough, then I'm out. Not that I want to be *in*. He is my boss, an asshole, and fifteen years older than me. If those three things weren't enough to put me off him in a sexual sense, then the air of danger that seems to waft off him definitely does. He might be the city's most eligible bachelor, according to the Grove City Times, but to me, he is as ineligible as they come.

Chapter 10

Logan



Thanking whatever deity is out there that Serena has left for lunch, I let out a low growl and throw my pen down.

“This is fucking pointless.” I can’t concentrate. I can’t focus. She is consuming every thought.

Deciding to call it quits, I rise and put my jacket on. Clearing off my desk and locking away the case files in the safe, I reach for my coat as I stride past the hook, slinging it over my arm. Shutting the office door behind me and locking it, I make tracks back to my penthouse as quickly as I can.

As I push open the door, I hear singing coming from the kitchen and smile.

“Rose?”

She peers around the separating wall, scowling at me as I close the door. “What are you doing here? It’s lunchtime.”

“I’m aware. Needed to get out of the office.”

“Problems?”

“Nope.”

“Tired?”

“How did you guess?” I lie.

“I can see it on your face. You look worn.”

“Thanks.”

She chuckles. “That was left for you about ten minutes ago.” She points to a large brown envelope lying on the dining table.

“Oh?” I murmur.

“Posted through. I didn’t see who it was.”

Nodding, I pick it up and consider its contents carefully. I vowed to get

her out of my head, but that was after I asked the P.I. to dig into her life.

“I’ll make you some lunch while you’re here,” Rose shouts from the kitchen.

“I’m going to work out.”

“It’ll be waiting when you finish.”

“Okay.” There is no point arguing with her. I won’t win. It’s probably her best day ever, getting me home at lunchtime to stuff my face with glorious food while she has the chance.

Clutching the envelope, I run up the stairs, two at a time, throwing it on the bed before I take my coat off and hang it up. Stripping off my work clothes, I change into a pair of black sweats and a tight black tee, sitting on the edge of the bed to tie up my running shoes.

Picking up the envelope again, marveling at my own willpower for not having ripped it open and devoured every word yet, I head back downstairs and out to the enclosed terrace where the treadmill is. Stepping on and standing with my feet on the sides, I place the envelope under my arm and set it to a moderate jogging pace, feeling the chill of the cold winter day hits my bare arms. Bracing myself, I step on and start to jog, taking the envelope and sliding my finger under the flap. Pulling out a set of papers, there is a post-it stuck to the front.

Basic info. More to follow.

I start reading.

Serena Jane Wakefield was born to Clive and Cilla Wakefield twenty-five years ago. Just. Her birthday was two months ago today. She is an only child and grew up as part of the elite. Went to the best schools, but failed to finish university, choosing to start work as an admin temp two years into her degree to be a, I’m intrigued to say, lawyer. She has been doing that ever since through the Blue Cloud agency, picking up the odd job here and there for the last several years. She lives on the other side of the city in the lower rent area, which makes me madly curious. Did her parents disown her, or did she choose not to accept their money? Either way, she is making it on her own, so good for her. She doesn’t have a driver’s license but does have a passport. No other official documentation so far. Her credit history is lacking. She has no credit cards. Lives day to day, it seems, from her debit purchases. I don’t

even stop to ask how he obtained that information. No boyfriend found. Last known man in her life, according to her social media, was a month ago, but it lasted a couple of weeks, and that's it.

There is no mention of her association with Quentin, which isn't surprising, and while I now know many things about her, I still don't know her. Stuffing the papers back into the envelope, I throw it onto the terrace table set up near the treadmill.

"Logan?" I look up at Rose's voice. "Your phone has been ringing off the hook." She hands it to me.

I take it with a smile of thanks and glance at the screen.

Answering it with a suppressed sigh, I keep jogging, not breaking stride. "Quentin."

"We are outside your door. Open up."

He hangs up, and I roll my eyes. I seriously need to sweep this place for bugs again. Wondering why he didn't bother to knock, or perhaps he didn't want to encounter Rose, I stop the treadmill and jump off, crossing through the apartment to open the front door.

"You don't knock?" I ask sarcastically before I turn and head back out to the terrace.

Hearing them follow me, and sliding the door closed, Quentin and the Society Enforcer, Isaac, join me outside. Leaning up against the railing of the balcony, my arms folded, I realize my positioning may not be the safest, but not giving a fuck, I regard Quentin closely. He doesn't seem pissed, so I doubt this is about Serena going crying to him about what a dick I am. Also, he probably wouldn't have brought Isaac on personal business.

"What's up?" I ask, keeping a watchful eye on the bloodthirsty Enforcer. Standing twice as wide as me and three inches taller than my six-two, he could throw me over the side of this building without breaking a sweat.

"We have a problem, and we need you to fix it," Quentin says, his gaze wandering over the brown envelope, but disregarding it as his green eyes, just like hers, land on me.

"What's that then?"

"Shelley Thorpe."

"Ah." This all makes sense now.

Quentin nods, taking my one syllable as acquiescence. "Well, we shall leave you to your running, and whatever delicious meal Rose is making for you in there."

Nodding, I don't bother to ask what they want me to do. It's obvious, and to be honest, I'm not cut up about it. Shelley was a bad mistake on my part and one that I have no problem cleaning up.

Isaac silently opens the terrace door again and waits for Quentin to sweep through before following him after a vicious glare at me.

Seeing them out, I close the front door quietly and lean my forehead against it.

That was close. Too close. I can't have information on Serena lying around where he can pick it up and see it. I need to shred it, then shred it again and ask the P.I. to stand down. I don't need to know anything else about her. I don't want to know. She needs to be forgotten, and the best way to do that is to find someone to take out my frustrations on. It's not like there aren't a dozen or more takers who would be happy to end up in my bed, even if that means them getting hurt in the process.

"You ready to eat?" Rose asks, breaking my thoughts.

"Yeah," I croak, knowing this isn't going to be as easy as I'd hoped. My first priority is to find someone who looks like Serena Wakefield and then unleash the debauched soul that resides within me to ease the craving I have for her. One slice of the blade at a time.

Chapter 11

Serena



Walking out of the building at 4.30 PM, deciding that since Logan fucked off early, I would as well; I felt oddly disappointed that he wasn't there when I arrived back at my desk. My lunch with Rue was amazing, though, and I think I've found my new bestie. She went to the same school as me, but four years ahead, and also dropped out of college after deciding studying wasn't for her any longer. It's a kinship that I feel deep down. Pretty sure she does, too, because she offered to exchange numbers for out-of-work chatting.

Crossing over the busy street in my white running shoes, alone with my thoughts, I stop dead suddenly, my heart racing and my lungs squeezing tight.

The panic attack from this morning is closing in, even though I'm out in the open. Placing one hand on my chest and the other on a building, I lean closer to it for support. Shaking my head to clear the reason why this is happening *now*, I swallow and focus on my breathing.

I don't do enclosed spaces.

This is why I panicked in the elevator this morning, and this is a delayed reaction to John Jeffers blocking me in the kitchen earlier. I was too focused on Rue and the tea and Logan, and with the root cause buried as far down in my soul as I could get it, it's suddenly popped up even though I'm outside.

"Fuck," I gasp, going lightheaded, but then I feel my lungs ease slightly, and I calm down, taking a gulp of air, ignoring the looks people are giving me. I'm glad no one has stopped to help me. It's one of the reasons why I love the city. No one gives a shit. They're too bothered about their time, their business, their demons.

Having said that, I feel eyes on me and look up, but I don't see anyone

offering their useless help, so I push off from the building and stumble through the pedestrians, gripping the handle of my bag tightly as a lifeline.

I haven't thought about that day for a while—months, maybe even a year. I've never spoken about it, and nor will I. But having John that close to me, blocking my escape route, has unearthed the terror I felt as a thirteen-year-old girl who was molested by one of her school teachers.

He didn't rape me, but his fingers went everywhere. I had no idea what was going on. I just stood there and let it happen, scared and alone. I have no doubt it would've gone further if he hadn't been interrupted by the janitor. Telling no one, I ran from that room and buried it deep down, the shame of facing him every day for the rest of the year weighing on me so severely, I withdrew. Years passed, and I started to forget and became myself again, but very caged when it came to sex. I've had one sexual partner, and it was a man I'd been seeing for a while. Giving myself to him was the right thing to do, and I don't regret it, but I haven't found another man that is willing to wait the time it takes for me to be comfortable.

Almost as if he knew I was thinking about this, my phone rings, and I grab it, checking the screen to see that it is Paul. I dumped the guy two weeks ago when he decided he'd waited long enough to dip his wick and found someone who wasn't me, who was willing. Granted, we'd only be seeing each other for two weeks anyway, but still. That's not enough time for me.

"What do you want?" I ask, answering it as a distraction from the darkness that is closing in. Needing the focus to shift, needing the conversation to forget and rebury my past where it belongs.

"Don't hang up!" he exclaims, sounding almost shocked that I answered.

"I'm not hanging up. I told you, I'm not pissed with you. We barely know each other, and we weren't exclusive. I just don't want to be with you if you aren't willing to wait for me. It's not an unusual concept, and nor is it unreasonable."

"No, I know, and I'm so sorry."

"You keep apologizing, but if you felt so bad about it, why do it in the first place?"

"Because I'm weak and pathetic."

Blinking and huffing out a breath, picking up my pace a bit now that the attack has receded, I look over my shoulder, still feeling a bit creeped out. Is Paul watching me? Is he going to appear next to me suddenly?

"Look, I get that you feel bad, and thanks for that. But really, we're

good.”

“But I want you back. I lost you too soon, I feel. We had something fun. We get on. You’re not like other girls.”

Rolling my eyes at the lamest line ever, I bite out, “Why? Because I don’t jump into bed with everyone who asks?”

“Well, yeah,” he replies immediately as if I’m being dense for asking.

“If that’s what you think, you are dating the wrong women, Paul. Find a nice girl and wait for her to be ready. But that girl isn’t me. I’ll see you around.”

“Serena, wait—”

Hanging up, not needing to speak to him anymore, I drop my phone back in my bag and keep walking as fast as my battered lungs will let me. When I get home, I need a cold glass of wine, my bed, and some movies. This day has been...strange.

And not in a good way.

Well, except for Rue. She’s cool, but Logan is an asshole, John is a creep, and Paul is a jerk.

Forty minutes later, I’m shoving open the door to my apartment, relieved and grateful for my personal space. Locking the door behind me, bolt and chain in place, I drop my bag and toe off my shoes.

Shuddering in the cool apartment, I flick on the heating and then break down in the middle of the sitting room, dropping to my knees as the past catches up with me, ripping its way through my soul, breaking me that bit more. Sobbing until my ribs hurt, I curl up on the floor and stare at the same spot on the wall, not wanting to close my eyes, fearful of what I might see.

Chapter 12

Logan



My curiosity is even more piqued. What made her stop and panic? And who called her right afterward?

Hunching further into my coat on this dark, cold night, staring at Serena's building from across the street, I wonder which apartment is hers. I know the number but not where it's situated. Would she see me if she looked out the window, or is she on the other side? This game I'm playing is dangerous and could end up with me at the bottom of the river, but I can't seem to move past this woman.

I had been on my way to find someone to take my frustrations out on but found myself stalking my own fucking office, waiting for Serena to leave. Standing there in the freezing cold, I pull my phone out and unblock Shelley's number before dialing it. It rings and rings with no voicemail or no answer, so I hang up.

Deciding to go over there instead, I give one last lingering glance at Serena's building and then turn away to make my way back across the city to Shelley's building.

Putting a pair of leather gloves on, I press the buzzer and wait. When there is no answer, I punch in the code to the door that I obtained illegally and shove it open. I'd rather she let me in, but needs must when the devil drives.

Ascending in the elevator to the top floor, I step out when the doors slide open and knock firmly on her apartment door before I pull out the lock picking set. She isn't at home; that much is clear, or she would've answered by now. Bending down, I set to work on the lock, slightly above the standard security, but not by much.

A few seconds later, the door clicks open, and I step into the dark apartment, shutting the door quietly behind me.

Moving forward, I hear the click next to my head and stop with a smile on my face, holding my hands halfway up to show her I'm unarmed.

"Knew you'd try something," she hisses. "I'm not that easy to get rid of, lover."

"Not my choice. You're making waves, Shel. If I were you, I'd back away from Solitaire and forget about their existence."

"Not going to happen," she growls. "You want an action that costs me?" She shoves the gun barrel against the side of my head. "How about I kill you, the golden boy, and take your fucking place."

If I were in any position to laugh, I would. There is no doubt in my mind that she wouldn't hesitate to pull the trigger. She's crazy enough. She's desperate enough to be noticed by Solitaire, but I also know she doesn't *want* to. This is a knee-jerk reaction for her.

"Lower the gun, and we'll talk."

"I'm not that stupid, Logan."

"I know you're not, which is why you won't kill me. It will achieve nothing but Isaac coming for you."

It gives her pause. Isaac tends to do that.

"You think very highly of yourself that they'll even care," she scoffs after a few seconds.

"Oh, they'll care. You don't know who I am to them."

"Why don't you fill me in?" She rams the gun harder into my head.

I drop my hands, having had enough of this game. As quick as lightning, I bring my hand up to clamp around her skinny wrist, drawing it down as I turn to her and take the gun with my other hand.

"Oww," she exclaims when I tighten my grip and drag her over to the bedroom. "You're hurting me."

"Good." I keep my hold on her while she struggles, but she is weak and slightly drunk. The fumes of alcohol on her breath are a dead giveaway as her erratic behavior was more in line with her crazy side. "You're in way over your head, Shel. You have no idea who you're messing with."

"Fuck you," she hisses.

Ignoring her as I root through her drawers for the tie I left here the other night. I find it mixed in with her underwear and pull it out.

Letting go of her, I shove the gun into the back of my jeans and grip the

tie with both hands. She bolts, as I expected her to, but she stumbles in her inebriated state, falling over the edge of the bed to the soft carpet covering the floor. Looming over her, I wrap the tie around her neck and pull it tight.

She gags, her hands going up in survival mode. Her eyes wide, she begs, “Please, Logan, please.”

It soothes the darkness inside me.

Squeezing tighter, staring into her dark eyes, I let go of the tie as she gasps for breath, thinking she’s got away with her death today. She doesn’t know that this isn’t enough for me. She doesn’t know I need to feel her blood on my hands. Reaching into the inner jacket pocket of my coat, I draw out the small, sharp blade, seeing the cold steel glint in the lights from the city outside. Placing my hand on her chest to hold her down, she screams, scrabbling underneath me to get away.

“No! Please, Logan. I’ll back off, I swear, please.”

“Begging won’t save you now,” I murmur, taking the blade and swiftly slicing her throat open just above the loosened tie.

She makes a gurgling sound, her eyes nearly popping out of their sockets in shock. Her hands go to her neck, covered in her blood within moments. Rising, I lean down, yank the tie from around her neck, and wipe the blade before stuffing them both into my pocket.

Shelley writhes as she bleeds out all over the pure white carpet. Smiling, I turn from her and swipe everything from the nightstand onto the floor—the lamp thuds on the carpet, her books, the empty glass. Turning to the dresser, I ram my gloved fist into the mirror and knock it over, clearing all her perfumes and makeup onto the floor with one sweep. I pull all her clothes out of the dresser onto the floor as she gurgles and chokes on her blood behind me, and finding some pieces of jewelry, I pocket them before turning to the walk-in closet where I know she keeps more in the hidden drawers. Popping them open, I grab handfuls of the expensive diamonds and gold watches before I turn to leave, stepping over her body which has now gone still over the pool of blood surrounding her.

Striding purposefully through the apartment, I quietly open the door and close it, and press the elevator button to go down. It dings immediately, so I step in and descend to the ground floor, leaving the building before removing my gloves and shoving them in the pocket with the knife and jewels.

Crossing over the road, I head back to Serena’s building on the opposite side of the city, needing the air to clear my head and the stench of blood from

my senses, only to stare up at the windows, my craving for her heightened by the kill. Dragging my phone out of my back pocket, I dial Quentin. He answers after one ring.

“It’s taken care of.”

He hangs up without a word, so I put the phone away, and with every ounce of willpower I have, I turn from Serena’s building to cross the city one last time tonight to go home and contemplate how to deal with her on Monday. At least I have the weekend to remove whatever feelings I have for her so that I’m devoid of this craving the next time I have to see her.

Chapter 13

Serena



The groan that escapes me hurts my head. It's pounding, my mouth is dry, my back aches, and I'm freezing. My eyes are gritty when I open them, and my ribs hurt from crying. But I'm okay.

Having spent the night on the floor, I'm stiff as a board, but I had my mini-breakdown, and now I'm...okay.

Hauling my sore body up by using the sofa as leverage, the first thing I do is head to the shower. It's hot, soothing, and makes me feel like I wasn't run over by the past truck full of horrible memories and something resembling normal.

Whatever that is.

Dried and dressed in my comfiest pjs, intending to do what I wanted to do last night and watch movies in bed with food and lots of drink—hey, it's five o'clock somewhere, right?—I head to the kitchen to prep, noticing it is 10 AM. My phone ringing pulls my attention away from the busy work of making enough snacks to keep me fed all day. Rooting around in my bag, I pull it out and answer when I see it's my mom.

"Hi."

"Hi, baby. Everything okay?"

"Yep, all good." I say the lie with a straight face. I mean, I *am* good. Now. I wasn't a few hours ago. It seems I have become the master of compartmentalizing my shit, but I've been doing it for twelve years, so it makes sense.

"About the job, how did it go?"

Her casual tone makes me hold onto my snicker. She is so obvious. "It was fine."

“Fine?”

“Yeah, good. I made a new friend. She’s nice.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful,” she says, sounding relieved. “Are you happy with it?”

“If you mean, am I going back on Monday, then the answer is yes. It’s a good job, and maybe you’re right. It’s time I got my head on straight and thought about my future.” I can’t help the ‘yapping’ my hand does as I spin her this tale, just to keep her happy and off my case. Although, in all fairness, it probably isn’t a lie. Sure, Logan sucks, but everyone else seems nice. Except for the other asshole with his name on the door, but hopefully, I won’t have many interactions with him.

“Fantastic. I know Quen was glad you accepted his offer.”

Again, I try not to laugh. She is the world’s best spinner. She can turn anything around to suit her purposes. I love her to bits, but she missed her calling as a politician.

“So if you’re staying there, I’ve popped something into your account to see you through to the end of the month. It’s a loan!” she exclaims loudly before I can tell her to fuck off. “I expect every cent back. But you’re going from weekly pay to waiting to be paid monthly, and that’s a difficult transition, so please don’t argue with me.”

I can almost see her with her fingers crossed, chewing her lip as she waits for my answer.

“Thanks,” I say, knowing she’s right. “And I’ll pay you back as soon as I can.” I leave it at that. There’s no need for fanfare.

“Okay, good. I’ll speak to you again soon, baby. Be good.”

“You too, Mom.”

She hangs up, and I immediately go to my banking app to see what she deposited.

“Huh, that’s a lot.” If I’d been expecting anything less, I would be a fool. Straight away, I move half of it to my empty savings account so that I actually have money to pay her back at the end of the month, thus clearing half the balance I owe her in one fell swoop. The rest, I desperately need. I like a roof over my head and food in my kitchen.

Speaking of which, I have some to get back to.

Before I can reach the smorgasbord of treats and snacks, my phone goes again. I haven’t been this popular in a while.

“Rue,” I say, answering it. “What’s up?” I didn’t expect a phone call so

soon—or at all. A text, maybe when she had nothing better to do, was my expectation.

“Are you free tonight?”

Contemplating her question, I feel like a bit of a loser. Yeah, I do. And most other nights. It’s not that I don’t have friends, I do, but they all stayed in college and got great jobs and moved away. The last time I saw any of them was about six weeks ago when Mary came home for the weekend. We partied hard and promised to do it again soon, but these things don’t happen. With being a temp, I don’t stay anywhere long enough to make new friends, and maybe that’s part of the reason why I like it. Trust is hard for me, but Rue is different.

“Yep. You have something in mind?”

“My friends and I are heading out for drinks. I want you to come too and meet them.”

Hesitating, that’s a whole different ball game. If it had been her and me, I’d have snatched her hand off. “How many are going?”

“There’s Tiff, Suz, and Macy, plus me and you.”

Okay, three new people. Surely that won’t be so bad. “Sure, sounds fun. What time and where?” Shoving my anxiety aside, I know I need to do this. It’ll be good for me to get out of my head for a couple of hours after last night. Movies and food are a good plan, but being out with people is better, having a drink and hopefully a laugh.

“Belmont’s. Seven o’clock. You’ll love the girls. They’re a riot.”

“I’m more concerned they won’t like me,” I blurt out, and then feel like a huge douche.

She snorts. “Don’t be an idiot. They’ll love you. They’re easy-going and a lot of fun.”

“Okay,” I reply lamely. “I’ll hold you to that.”

“See you later.”

“Yep.”

We hang up, and I take a few moments for that phone call to sink in. Out with new people. Shit. Fuck. What did I just agree to?

Sighing and wishing I could back out but knowing I will never live it down with Rue, I cross quickly over to my closet and yank it open, staring at the pitiful offerings. Rooting through the entire cupboard twice, I finally land on a pair of tight blue jeans, low rise that will show off the angel wings tattoo I have on my lower back, and a black bustier that shows off the girls nicely.

Belmont's is a nice place, but not too fancy that they won't accept me in jeans. I haul out my black stilettos from the back of the closet floor and hold them up for inspection.

They pass muster, so I head back to the shower to wash my hair, wanting to make an effort for my new friend and her friends.

* * *

Having spent way more time than I expected prettying myself up, I fluff out my hair, pleased with the end result. My blonde locks are in waves down my back, I look good, and most importantly, I feel great. Last night was a blip in my journey, and while I won't say it'll never happen again, it was a thing, and now it's over for a while. I'll make sure of it. I don't want that shit descending on me again anytime soon. Not when I have a new job, a new friend, and some kind of verve that I haven't felt in a while.

Stuffing my phone, keys, and bank card into my small black clutch, I head out the door, pulling it shut behind me and then checking that the lock has snapped into place before I leave to jump into the waiting cab outside. I'm no fool. This will cost me a stupid amount of money to head a short way into the hub of the city's bar district, but I'm not walking it in these heels, and I'm too pretty for the bus tonight.

A few minutes later, and an eye watering amount spent, I climb out of the cab outside Belmont's Bar & Grill. It's more bar than grill, which is what most people go for, but I hear the food is excellent in the small restaurant, which is half the size of the bar area. Shoving the door open, grateful to be getting in from the cold winter night, my stomach clenches into a knot when I see it is already buzzing. Still, it's not packed, so I easily spot Rue, absolutely gorgeous in a tight white dress with her hair loose around her shoulders. How she gets away with wearing so much white is a mystery, but it works for her big time. She sees me and waves. Pointing to the bar, I make my way over to grab a vodka tonic first before walking steadily to her table. Two of her friends are already there, Tiff and Suz, and I'm told that Macy will be along shortly because she is always late.

Shy but determined, I fall happily into their conversation, parking my ass on a high stool and giggling at Tiff's dramatic recount of her breakup with her latest beau.

Chapter 14

Logan



Spending the day at the office on a Saturday isn't out of the ordinary for me, but after yesterday's early exit, I had to get back in today to catch up. It's been good for me. I needed the distraction.

I still do. It's nearing dark, and I shake my head against the cool dusk settling over the city. The overhead streetlights are on, and a light rain has begun to fall. Rose doesn't work weekends, so I can't even expect any food. The empty apartment leaves me with too much time to think about things and getting back there after the day I had is not going to be good for my head.

As soon as I get home, letting the front door close behind me, I hurry toward the kitchen to root around in the fridge. I find nothing that takes my fancy, so I give up and decide to go out for something to eat instead. It'll do me good being somewhere crowded, and perhaps I can find someone to bring home and work out a few frustrations on. In fact, that becomes my priority as I shower and change, picking up my coat from last night, still slung haphazardly over the chair in the corner of my dimly lit bedroom. Making my way downstairs, I shove the coat into the washing machine and set it to run on a delicate wash, something that I should've done before now. Opening the dishwasher a few seconds later, I pull out the knife and tie I shoved in there last night to wash away Shelley's blood. Examining the silk fabric, I decide it's ruined from the lack of care and shove it in a drawer to deal with later. I will probably have to burn it. Grabbing another black coat from the hall closet, I slip it on over my tight black shirt, sliding the knife into the inner pocket, just in case. The three-quarter-length coat swishes around me as I head out of the front door, dressed smartly but casually in black pants and a shirt.

Walking the short distance to the city's food and beverage district, I spot Belmont's and decide a steak is in good order.

Pushing open the door to the restaurant side, I discover it is packed already. Glancing at my watch, I see it's past seven.

"No tables free for about an hour," the front of house says when she spots me.

"Logan Carter, I'll wait."

She rakes her gaze over me, taking in every inch of my appearance and looking like she wants more. A small voice in my head is telling me to be careful. She shows no sign of shifting her gaze towards someone else, which is not a good thing because my mood is foul after dealing with the Serena issue for the past two days, and I am ready to vent some frustration right now. I don't want to talk to anyone, but I need a distraction. She is not what I'm looking for, though.

"You can wait in the bar if you like?"

"Sure." I nod before walking away from her and making my way through the walkway that leads to the crowded bar area. Scanning the people standing around in groups, chatting and laughing, drinks flowing freely, I spot a blonde on a stool near the bar to the far side of where I'm standing. Facing away from me, her long, blonde waves falling down her back, she is precisely what I'm looking for.

"Perfect," I murmur, taking a few steps closer, dinner completely forgotten as I spot my target and aim for her. As I sidle closer, I see the tattoo at the base of her spine, a pair of angel wings that is sexy as hell above the top of her low-rise jeans. She is talking to her friends, a bottle of Champagne set out in front of them.

She gathers her hair up and drags it over her left shoulder. Turning her head to speak to the woman on her right, I freeze.

There is absolutely no mistaking her.

"Serena," I breathe out, cursing my own damn luck that I came looking for anyone but her, and she's the one I was drawn to out of all the women in here. "Fuck's sake." Turning, I rub my face with my hands, and head straight for the bar. Sitting on the end, where there is a small gap with a waiting stool, I know I should leave because staying will only lead to trouble. Ordering a triple Scotch—neat—I prepare to get drunk enough to forget that I can't even go on the prowl for a woman anymore without falling upon the one I need to get out of my head.

Chapter 15

Serena



When Rue leans over, she whispers, “Logan’s here.” Her smirk makes me giggle.

“Where?” I ask, my curiosity about who he is with clawing at me. I want to see these hot, sexy seductresses he hangs around with.

She points to the bar, where it takes me a second to find him. It surprises me that he’s alone. He is perched on a stool at the end of the bar where it meets the wall, his elbow propped up on the bar, his glass dangling from his hand as he stares contemplatively at it. I’m not sure if he’s drunk, but he looks a bit morose. My head is spinning nicely. The Champagne I decided to splurge on – not in any way to make friends, of course – has fizzed my brain into a nice lull of bubbles, extravagance, and sophistication.

“He is gorgeous,” Tiff says, looking over to where we are. “And older too. Shit, get in there, girl.”

I snort. “Uhm, he’s my boss.”

“So?” Her frank, blue-eyed gaze is serious.

“And fifteen years older than me.”

“I’m not seeing the problem here.”

Giggling, I shake my head. “No, I’m definitely not his type.”

“What, he doesn’t like shit-hot, nubile blondes?” She lets out a loud guffaw which brings a blush to my cheeks.

“I wouldn’t call myself nubile,” I mutter.

“Have you seen you?” Macy asks. “I’d give anything for your hair and rack.”

Glaring down at my cleavage, I have to admit, my curves have always been a draw for men, but there’s that thing that I’m not thinking about that

stops me from being pleased with the compliments. I know it's what girls, *friends* do, but it thickens my throat with an emotion I can't quite place.

"He'd be a fool if he didn't want to hit that," Suz adds.

"You guys are so sweet," I murmur, looking to Rue for help. Surely, she gets it?

Her dark-eyed gaze is curious and interested. She doesn't back me up, nor does she push me on him. I'm not really sure what she's thinking, not being the best at reading people.

"But?" Tiff presses.

"He's my boss. I literally started yesterday."

"Ah, okay, I hear you. That doesn't look good. But still, don't count it out for later down the line."

"And he's a bit of an asshole," I blurt out.

Rue snickers into her hand. "That's putting it mildly. But like I said, grumpy and sunshine are hot." She leans closer, apparently now into this, after assessing the situation. Smart. "I bet if he were yours, no one would be able to come near you. Jealous and possessive."

"Fuck me," Macy moans, throwing her head back. "He can be possessive over me any day."

The thought makes my blood tingle slightly, but I need to back out of this conversation. "I'm going to the ladies."

Rue grins, knowing she's pushed my buttons, and I smile back, so she knows I'm not pissed off with her.

As I make my way through the crowded bar to the door that leads down the long corridor to the ladies' room, I shove it open and feel the cooler air hit my arms and face. Realizing how warm it is in the bar, I lift my hair off the back of my neck, wishing I could tie it up out of my way. Ambling down the dimly lit, dark green wallpapered corridor, my heels clacking on the tile, I ignore the door opening and the sounds of the bar filtering through before it closes again.

"Serena."

Biting my lip at the familiar voice, I turn. "Paul."

"Fancy meeting you here," he says with a nervous laugh that does nothing to set me at ease. If anything, it alights my anxiety, and I fold my arms, wishing he'd collared me out there.

"What do you want?" I ask, needing to get this over with so I can pee and get back to the safety of my friends and the crowded space. The irony of that

is not lost on me.

“I want to try again,” he says, his tone much more cajoling than it was on the phone yesterday. “What do you say we give it another shot?” He moves in a bit closer. He’s not sober, but I don’t think he’s drunk, either.

“No, I told you I don’t want to. Please just leave me alone.”

He reaches out and grabs my upper arm, hurting me with his tight grip.

“Oww,” I murmur. “Get off me.”

“Look, I know I was a dick, but we had something good. Why can’t you just forget about it, and we can move forward?” He shuffles in even closer to me.

I have nowhere to go. My back is to the wall, and he is blocking my way out with his firm grip. Dropping my arms in the hope he will step back, he doesn’t, his hold tightens.

“Paul, please. I don’t want to do this. Please just get off me.”

The noise from the bar grows louder for a moment before being cut off again. Someone else has entered the corridor.

“Come on, Serena,” Paul says. “We had a good thing. Let’s try again.”

“I said no!” I exclaim loudly, trying to drag my arm out of his grip. “Get off me!”

“You’re such a bitch,” he hisses, turning on me suddenly. “Fucking frigid bitch.”

“She said to get off her.”

The new voice is gruff, hoarse from alcohol but so recognizable, I nearly faint.

“Mind your own damn business,” Paul snaps.

Turning my head, I see Logan standing a few feet away. He is dressed all in black, his hands in his coat pockets as he glares at Paul with that same expression he had for a fleeting moment yesterday.

“She is my business, so get your hands off her.”

“Fuck off.”

Gasping when Logan takes three strides forward, slams his hand against Paul’s chest, and shoves him against the opposite wall of the corridor, yanking my arm painfully out of his grip. Rubbing my arm, my eyes wide, I remain motionless as Logan practically growls at Paul.

“Touch her again, and you and me are going to have a problem. Do I make myself clear?”

Paul’s bravado vanishes as he glares at Logan. Something has clicked

inside him, and he's afraid. "Fine," he says, huffing as if it's no big deal. "Have her. She's yours. Don't know why you want her anyway if she won't fuck."

Choking back my utter humiliation that he brought that up in front of my boss, in front of this man who has defended me and is exuding a dangerous vibe that scares the shit out of me, my hand goes to my mouth in mortification.

Logan steps back and lets Paul scurry down the corridor to head back into the bar. The silence is deafening when the door swings shut again, blocking out the noise.

Logan glances at me, barely even taking a second before he walks away.

"Wait!" I say, leaping into motion and grasping his arm lightly.

He stops but doesn't turn around.

"Thank you," I whisper.

Logan turns his head to the side, looking down. "Don't thank me, Serena. I'm nobody's hero."

You are mine.

I open my mouth, not knowing what to say, but no words come out. Dropping my hand heavily to my side, my other one going up around my throat, I think frantically of something to say.

"Do me a favor, Serena," he rasps, still not looking at me. "Don't settle for losers like that. You're better than them."

Blinking, not knowing what to do or say to those words that have shot me in the heart and ripped my soul wide open. "Oh-okay."

"Good girl," he murmurs.

He turns to stride back out to the bar, leaving me in shock, my mouth open as those two words resonate through my gaping soul, wrapping themselves around my darkest place, warming the coldest part of me. Staring after him, I'm frozen in place, my lust for this dangerous, hot, older man shooting up a few more notches to a place where it is impossible to deny.

Jealous and possessive.

And I'm not even his.

"Fucking hell," I moan. The man exudes sex. It's impossible to walk away from that now. He flicked a switch in me that I didn't even know was there until now. "Good girl. Fuck. Fuck." Falling down the well into a pool of arousal that I wish he would come back and take care of, startles me. I've never had a feeling of lust so intense before. It's like his actions, and his

words have patched over all my anxieties over this particular aspect of being a human.

Launching forward, just tipsy enough to make a complete fool of myself by going after him, I yank the door open, scanning the bar for my tall, dark-haired savior with the stormy blue eyes and scary temperament.

But he's gone.

Vanished from my sight.

Chapter 16

Logan



Walking away is like leaving a part of my soul behind. There is no choice in the matter, though. She is untouchable. Every cell in my body wanted to take her right there in the corridor, where everyone could see us and know that she is mine, but it's not going to happen. Needing to shake off the rage that is bubbling up at seeing that asshole's hands on her, is tearing through me. It's dangerous. I wanted to kill him.

I know that no matter what I do, she has worked her way under my skin, and this craving I have for her isn't going anywhere. Knowing what seeing her with another man does to me is dangerous.

Seconds.

I was mere seconds away from stabbing him in the gut and thus exposing myself and the Society to Serena, an outsider. It would've sealed both our fates. I'd have ended up on a date with Isaac, which would've seen me thrown from my sixteenth-floor balcony, and Serena would've been cleaned up. Despite who her uncle is, the global Society would've taken care of it.

Drawing her into my darkness places her in danger, and that is now the thing that is driving me away. She will live forever in my head, but I can't touch her or be near her—which poses a problem at work. One I will have to figure out before Monday.

Cutting through an alley on my way home, I hunch my shoulders against the pouring rain, stalking into the night, only to be stopped by an asshole who doesn't know any better.

"You need to mind your own business, fucker," he snarls behind me.

"Go away, kid. You don't want to push me. Not now."

"I could've got her back, but you had to stick your fucking nose in."

“She would never be with a dick like you.”

“Are you fucking her?”

“Now, that’s none of *your* business.” Stopping, I turn around and take in this dipshit with a death wish.

“I doubt it,” he taunts. “She’s tied up tight, that one. Won’t open her legs for anyone. Frigid bitch.”

Hearing him say that about her drops the red haze of fury that is so easily accessible to me. Launching forward, I bunch my hand into his cheap shirt and plant my other fist in his face.

“Don’t speak about her that way,” I growl, punching him again. I’ve already broken his nose, he’s spluttering on his blood, but I’ve gone past the point in teaching him not to fuck with me. I want to hurt him. I want to kill him.

“She’s a fucking cunt,” he chokes. “A cock-tease.”

Does he not know when to give up?

My fist connects with his face a third time, and he goes down. Kicking him in the ribs, enjoying the sound of my shoe connecting with his ribs, he grunts and groans, curling up against the second kick.

I should stop.

I *need* to stop before I kill him.

But no one hurts Serena and gets away with it. Not anymore.

Bending over him, I haul him up by his shirt again and slam my fist into his face. Again and again, until I’m so lost in the blood, in the pain, that I barely feel it when my knuckles split open.

* * *

My eyes snap open.

Staring at the ceiling of my bedroom, I turn my head slightly to glance at the clock.

“Jesus,” I mutter.

It’s nine o’clock.

Thinking back, I don’t remember what time I went to bed. I don’t even remember going to bed. Shoving the covers back from my naked body, I wince when my left hand aches. Bringing it up to stare at it, last night floods back on an unwelcome tide. Scotch, Serena, and leaving that fucker who

touched her for dead.

With a pounding head, I stand up, reaching for the bottle of water on the bedside table. Uncapping it, I gulp it all down, quenching my thirst caused by the hangover that is lingering on the edges of my consciousness.

Crossing over to the bathroom, my semi distracting me, I step into the shower and turn the jets on, relishing the freezing cold blast before it warms up almost instantly, sending shockwaves of pain slicing through my busted hand.

I groan softly, closing my eyes, and picture Serena's hands on my hips, her fingers gripping them almost lovingly. Grabbing my cock, I almost feel her breath on my neck as I sink deeper into the fantasy. My fingers stroke faster and harder as my mind spins out more and more images of what I imagine her perfect body looks like naked. Her magnificent tits, her long blonde hair draping across her shoulders, her soft curves inviting my exploration. Groaning louder, my breath quickens as I imagine burying my face in her neck, inhaling her sweet scent, relishing how her skin would feel on my tongue, her taste lingering on my lips.

Thrusting my hips forward, I push my arousal into my palm as I grasp myself tightly. Faster and faster, pleasure building in my core. Sweat begins to dot my forehead, mingling with the hot shower water pounding down around me as I imagine Serena's lips trailing down my body, her hands exploring, before she plunges her hot mouth over the tip of my cock.

My breath comes in ragged pants as I grip my dick tighter, pumping my hips, feeling the warm water rush over my body. Serena's face swims before my eyes, her beautiful eyes gazing into mine. Climaxing with a loud grunt, pleasure flooding my whole body, I revel in the feeling of my balls expelling my cum over my hand, to be washed away, taking the evidence of my weakness for this delicate woman, whose cracks run deep and reflect in her eyes with it. Slumping against the shower wall, I regain my breath; shaking my head, I clean up, ignoring my injured hand. A faint smile plays on my lips as I turn the jets off and step out, wrapping a towel around my hips. The release has cleared my head, eased my tension, but with a crack of the memory whip, I recall what I said to Serena last night.

Two words uttered on instinct, without any thought going into them through my alcohol-infused mind.

"You dick," I mutter and then turn my head sharply to the stairs when I hear the sounds of the coffee maker whirring away downstairs.

Without a second thought to my lack of clothing, I run down the stairs, stopping at the bottom when I see Quentin sitting at the dining table, a fresh mug of coffee in front of him. His gray suit and coat are spotless despite the rain still falling outside. His leg is crossed at the knee as he regards me with a cool, level stare that unnerves me, knowing I'm guilty of lusting after his niece.

"Quen."

"Sit."

"Can I get dressed first?"

"No."

A quick glance around shows no signs of Isaac.

"I'm alone. This is a sensitive matter."

"Okay. What's up?" I sit, leaning my elbows on my knees, my hands dangling between my legs, my right hand covering up the injured left hand, but he's already seen it.

"You know what this is about?"

I nod. "Is he dead?"

"No."

"Is he going to press charges?"

"Probably. Want to tell me what that was about?"

"Not really."

"Wasn't a question."

Sighing, I know I have no choice. My actions will always and forever be known to the Society. That's how it is. I accept it and own it.

"I was protecting your niece."

Letting that hang there like a noxious gas, our gaze meets, his going hard and as furious as I've ever seen it.

"Meaning?" he growls.

"Serena was accosted by some dickhead who figured he could coerce her into being with him. I disagreed and told him to stay away from her. He came looking for a fight. I gave him one."

He rubs his hand over his face. "Jesus. Is she okay?"

"Far as I know."

"What were you doing with her?" The warning in his tone is a level red alert.

"I was drinking in the same bar she was in with her friends. I saw it and stopped it."

He remains silent, contemplating his reply. "Thank you," he says eventually.

"I don't need thanks." It's the last fucking thing I want. What I really want is her. There are no two ways about it. I did what I did for me because I can't stand the thought of another man touching her. Plain and simple.

"The Society will make this go away."

I nod my gratitude. It's not something I was looking forward to dealing with, although most of me hoped he was dead.

Rising, I make my way to the coffee maker, expecting this to be over.

It's not.

"The cleaner said her apartment was empty."

My blood runs colder than the Arctic ice.

And that's why Isaac isn't here.

"Do you know where she's gone?" I ask carefully, pouring coffee into a mug before I face him again, leaning up against the counter nonchalantly.

"You're an asset to the Society, Logan. You always have been, and you are on the path to taking my place when I move up. This is...not good."

"Admittedly, no, but surely, we can find her. She had her throat sliced open, that doesn't go unnoticed or untreated."

"Of course. And we both know some people are born survivors. You, me, and now her."

"She'll be in a bad way. I can't see her resurfacing anytime soon."

"Find her and deal with it. For good this time. Yes?"

"Of course."

He nods and stands up. "This is between you and me, Logan. I don't want anything getting in the way of you taking my place. If you get canceled, then I'm back to square one, and they won't move me up if I have to find someone else to take my place. Are we on the same page here?"

"Always."

There is no threat here. I should've made sure Shelley was dead before I left. I'm no stranger to a sliced throat and have a one hundred percent death record, up until now, that is. Fucking bitch. I should've known she'd cause me grief. But my head was up my ass with thoughts of Serena, and I failed in my mission. This is all on me, and I'll make it right or throw myself on the proverbial sword. Isaac won't have to come for me; I'll hand myself over.

"Good. Enjoy your coffee, and thanks again for protecting my niece."

The reminder of it tells me all I need to know. He is letting me off the

hook from a severe punishment over the Shelley thing because of Serena.

He already knew.

He played me to see if I'd tell him.

I seriously need to sweep this place for bugs and be more vigilant for covert tails when I leave here. Quentin has always made it clear that he recruited me to take over from him when the higher-ups in the global Society promote him. It's why I'm more untouchable than most. But he's right. Without a proper candidate to take his place, he will be left behind. I've been given two reprieves today, and I won't take either of them for granted.

Some people are born survivors.

Well, he's not wrong there.

Fuck knows why he places himself into that category, I may never know, but me...he knows.

Shoving the towel a bit further down my hips, I run my finger over the old scar on my lower abdomen. Before I had a cosmetic surgeon fix it, it was a nasty scar. A deep, jagged wound that healed badly and kept me in the hospital far longer than it should've. But I was grateful for the shelter as a young boy who'd just witnessed his entire family be slaughtered and was supposed to be dead alongside them. It hurt more than words can say to have to be forced into the foster system and moved around every few months. Never settling, never loved, never wanted. It's no wonder the light never came back.

Gritting my teeth and ignoring my coffee, I race back up the stairs and haul out the box from the top shelf of the closet. When this appeared the other day, I was overwhelmed. Unable to focus on the severity of what was inside.

Placing it on the bed, I carefully lift the lid and glare at the contents. Visible through the evidence bag is a decades-old bloody knife, left to gather dust on a cold case that has been forgotten. Forgotten by everyone but not by me.

Witnessing the death of my parents and my sister and experiencing the pain of my own death and rebirth, has shaped my view of the world. In the hospital, I shut down. I blocked out any feelings, any warmth or light, only sinking deeper into the murky gray where I still reside thirty years later. It could be worse. I could've fallen deeper into the darkness, but I didn't really want to. Needing to remember the agony, the loss, the sheer weight of what was thrust upon me to guide me, to help me see that the world is an ugly

place and the people in it are vile to their core. It's why I became a lawyer. To try to figure out where I fit into it. Good or evil, none of it really matters. Replacing the lid and moving the box back to the closet, I search for my phone, finding it in my coat pocket. Quentin gave me the evidence I needed to find my family's killer and assert my own justice against them. It can be reanalyzed using top-of-the-range equipment not available three decades ago or even two decades ago when the case was dug up and looked at again, only to be replaced in the box weeks later when they hit another dead end.

I could've pushed and shoved and, by the brute force of the law, demanded they keep looking, but I'm a patient man, and already settled on solving it myself. I just needed the knife and no connection whatsoever to my name procuring it.

Now I have it.

In exchange, Quentin has given me a temptation that is as dangerous as the path I'm following to my past, but I've waited a long time for this.

A really, really long time.

After making a short call with my heart pounding, I put the phone down carefully and then compartmentalize the past, back in the box where the demons lie.

Chapter 17

Serena



When I first open my eyes, I'm not sure where I am. I blink a few times and recognize the faint sound of cars honking in the distance. Buried beneath a pile of crumpled sheets, I remember I'm in my bed, hungover from my night out with Rue and her friends.

Groaning, I sit up, feeling the thumping of the alcohol aftermath in my head. My mouth tastes like sour wine and sweat sticks to my skin. Trying to remember what happened, it hits me like a wave.

Closing my eyes again, I see Logan's gorgeous, almost haunted face. I can't seem to push him out of my mind. He filled my boozed-up dreams last night in a way that no one ever has. The way he said those two words will stay with me for eternity: Good girl.

"Fucking hell, Logan. What are you doing to me?"

At that moment, I felt like I was a part of something bigger than myself.

Shaking my head, trying to clear the fog of my hangover and the memories of Logan shoving Paul away from me, protecting me, I climb out of bed and stumble to the bathroom. The cold tile feels good against my feet as I turn on the shower. I let the hot water run over my skin and let it wash away the night before.

Wondering what Logan is doing right now makes me moan with longing. Wherever he is, whatever he's doing, I want to be a part of it. I want to be with him. He was my savior, and while he doesn't see himself that way, I know. It's such a shame he's my boss. He is forbidden, unless I quit, but then how would I see him? How would I be in his presence, reminding him that I exist? It's not an option. It changes my entire outlook on this new job. Tomorrow morning, I have to be at my desk even earlier than him. I need to

be there waiting for him when he arrives, ready to do whatever he asks.

Dried and dressed in my pjs, ready for a day in bed, I climb back in with a cup of coffee and my phone. Bringing up the company website, I stare at his photo. He looks so distinguished. His blue eyes are brought alive by the navy-blue suit. In this photo, he is wearing a waistcoat under his jacket, nearly making me drool all over my phone. I know this is a recent picture because of the gray flecks at his temples, reminding me that he is so much older than me. He's more sophisticated, more worldly, and has had experiences that I have yet to dream about. He has *lived*, whereas I feel like I'm just starting to become alive. He's brought that out in me. Logan Carter has made me feel like I'm worth something. Paul blurting out that I'm not easy, was humiliating at first, but I think it sparked a feeling of protection in him.

Making a frustrated noise, I realize I'm living in a fantasy world. He doesn't give a shit about me. He was there, and he did what he would have done for anyone in the same situation.

It doesn't stop me from pouring over his picture, stroking the screen, imagining what it would be like to kiss him and have him whisper those words to me in the dark as our bodies move together in complete harmony. It sparks a shot of lust in me that I haven't had for any man since my ex, who took my virginity. My pussy twitches as I close my eyes and fantasize about his hands on me.

"Fuck, Logan," I pant, opening my eyes as I run my hand under the waistband of my pjs. I've tried masturbating a few times to try and light the fire of desire in me, but it never really worked. This time, with the right eye candy, I know it will.

Hesitantly touching my clit, focusing on his blue eyes, I rub in circles, feeling myself get wet.

"Oh," I moan as I feel something stirring deep inside.

Closing my eyes is a mistake.

My eyes snap open and I freeze before dragging my hand out of my pants. All I can see now is the teacher's face, swimming in my mind, blurring with Logan's and ruining this moment. I can't even fucking touch myself without his memory destroying my movement forward.

"Logan isn't him," I murmur, bringing the phone up to my face. "Logan isn't even in the same hemisphere as him."

But Logan isn't here. He isn't touching me, so the moment is gone.

Curling up, holding my phone close, my coffee goes cold as I lay under the covers, hoping I get over this feeling before I have to get up tomorrow and show Logan, I can be the woman he wants if he would just give me a chance.

* * *

Rushing to work in the dark the next day, I wonder what made me think this was a good idea. It's before seven, so I'll probably arrive a little after half past. I'm sticking to the main roads, so I'm not inviting trouble by ducking down any alleyways or quiet streets to shorten the journey.

It just starts to rain when I see the lights of the building, so I race forward, my running shoes ready for the job. Smiling at Security, I flash the ID badge Allison had made for me on Friday and slip past the main reception desk. This time waiting for the elevator doors to ding open before I swap my shoes, I step in and enjoy a peaceful, solitary ride up to the tenth floor.

Rue isn't on duty at this hour, but the same Security guard from Friday lunchtime. He glowers at me, but I flash him my badge, and he nods me through, a glimmer of recognition in his eyes as I pass by. Smoothing down my suit, I pull a couple of hair bands out of my pocket and scoop my hair up into a high ponytail, which I then braid neatly on the way to my desk.

My heart plummets to my feet when I see the light on in Logan's office, and him sitting at his desk, already engrossed in his work.

"Jesus. What the fuck time do you get here?"

Sighing, I steadily cross over to my desk and place my bag down, removing my coat and hanging it on the rack nearby.

Gathering every ounce of courage, I knock lightly on the half-open door and poke my head around.

"Morning," I murmur.

He looks up, frowns, looks at his watch, and then back at me. "It's early. You don't get overtime."

"I know. I figured if you're here, I'm here."

"Mmph."

His muffled noise of annoyance sets me back a bit, and my confidence cracks.

"Do you need anything?"

He shakes his head.

His left hand is bandaged up, even though he's still using it to scrawl on his legal pad; I wonder what happened. Wanting to ask but not daring, I swallow some of my fear and say what I've wanted to since Saturday night. "Thanks again for what you did."

Going still for a second, he breaks it by looking up at me. "It's nothing."

"It's something. To me. It's something to me."

Our gaze locks. The heat simmering between us is there, ready to reach out and grab. He must see it. He has to know it's there. It's not just me. Is it?

"I did what anyone would've."

It crushes me. Deep down, I know he's right. I tried to convince myself yesterday that he did it because it was me, but I know now he didn't. He feels nothing.

"I'll get you a coffee," I murmur and back out, needing to get away from him before I prostrate myself in front of him, begging him to notice me.

Feeling his gaze on me as I flee his office, glad that no one else is in right now so I can blink back my tears of frustration as I make us both coffees how he likes it. It's a bit too strong for me, but I want what he wants. Maybe if he realizes I take my coffee the same as he does, he will think it's quirky and cute.

Shaking my head at my idiotic thoughts, I place my mug on my desk as I pass and enter his office without knocking.

With a shaking hand, I move in closer, smelling his subtle aftershave as I carefully put the mug just out of his immediate reach.

"What did you do to your hand?" I ask, not moving back as he probably expected me to do.

The scowl he aims at me makes my insides wither. "Nothing. It's fine. If there's nothing else, I'm busy."

"Sorry," I murmur, and knowing when to cut my losses, I turn to leave, my braid flicking around as I whip my head too quickly, needing to get away before I cry in front of him.

Knowing I imagined the sharp inhalation behind me, disregarding it as wishful thinking. Striding out of his office, and closing the door behind me, I seat myself miserably in my chair. Tears prick my eyes again as I turn on the computer, prepared to get to work.

* * *

Sometime much later, after Rue has stopped by to say hello and the rest of the staff has arrived and are busy with their own jobs, I scan the document and click send. Then, with trepidation in my very soul, I rap lightly on Logan's door and wait for an answer this time.

"Yeah?"

His gruff voice sends a shiver through my body that thrills me.

Shoving the door open, I step inside and hover, biting my lip as he is still not looking at me. Dammit. What does it take to get this guy to notice me? Well, apart from being accosted in a bar by a loser ex?

"What is it, Serena?"

"Ohh," I practically pant. The way he says my name has the hairs on the back of my neck standing on end. "Can you—can you check the document I just sent."

"Why?"

"It's the Vandercliff case. I want to make sure that I've got it right so that next time I don't have to bother you."

"Ask Allison."

"She's not in today."

That gets his attention. Fuck's sake.

"Oh?" he growls.

I shrug, trying not to wince at the dark expression adorning his too-handsome face.

With a sigh, he turns from his legal pad and clicks on the email, his eyes scanning the document quickly. Moving closer, I need to hear him say how well I've done. That I rocked this document like a star, and I'm his good girl. Anything. Even a 'way to go, Champ,' will suffice for now, in my desperate need for him to validate me.

He leans back in his chair and removes his glasses. "You don't put your name at the bottom. Put Allison's as your manager. You don't want to be held liable for anything on this document."

I knew that. She told me on Friday.

"Oops," I murmur, trying to keep the satisfactory smile from my face. "I'll just change that here."

Leaning in close as I bend over the desk, I reach for his mouse to highlight the text and click delete, so I can quickly type Allison's name in. I'm so close to him that I can hear him breathing. I want him to touch me. I want him to murmur words to me that will make me feel good.

Turning to face him before I straighten up, I've definitely got his attention now. His eyes are hooded, and the storm in them is a tempest of desire.

Until it's gone with one blink.

"Perfect," he mutters.

Expelling a soft pant, I straighten up, my lungs struggling to take my next breath. "Thank you."

This time when he watches me leave, a thrill goes down my spine, and I sit back at my desk, floating on a cloud of praise from this man that I suddenly need to take my next breath.

"Perfect."

Chapter 18

Logan



It takes me a moment to gather my wits about me. Her braid has completely undone me. I want to wrap it around my hand and hold her in place while I fuck her mouth roughly until I shoot my load down her throat.

She played me like a pro, which surprises me, but two can play at that game. I knew she made that mistake on purpose to get closer to me. I'm older and wiser than she is, and she has absolutely no idea how much her close proximity affects me. The scent of that expensive perfume that she uses sparingly. Her curves are so delectable, I want to strip her naked and just look at her for a while before I do anything to her.

Turning back to the computer, I save the document in the wrong place and then delete the email, also removing it from the Bin.

With a slow smile, I lean forward and press the buzzer. "Serena, can you come in here for a moment?"

"Uhm, oh-okay," she says.

She wasn't expecting that, so it's knocked her back a step.

Pushing open the door, she looks at me with those green eyes that have captivated me. She thinks she hides her demons, but she isn't as skilled in that as she thinks.

"I've lost the document," I state.

"What?" she asks, confused, but then shakes her head. "I'll email it to you again."

Before she turns, I stop her. "No, I saved it, but it's gone, and so has the email. I need you to find it on here in case it went into the public folder."

"Oh." Her puzzled expression is a joy as she comes closer, bending down

to click the mouse in all the obvious places. “If you saved it, it should have gone to Documents,” she murmurs.

Leaning back in my chair, my gaze scans over her ass, her hips, the curve of her back. It’s a pity I can’t see her cleavage from here. Her tits are magnificent. Seeing them all plumped up in that sexy bustier the other night was a treat and one I hope to unwrap soon. I’ve given up trying to stay away from her. I can’t. It’s impossible.

She will be my downfall, but I don’t give a fuck. I want to take one sip of her before Quentin comes for me personally to remove me from this earth, but it will be worth it just to have one night with her.

Admiring her face, noting the less-is-more aspect of her make-up, it drives it home how much younger she is than me. I’ve never been one to dip into the previous age bracket. It wasn’t my style, and I like a mature, experienced partner. Serena has changed all of that. With three encounters, she has changed how my brain works and what my body wants.

Both want her.

It’s undeniable.

“Here,” she says triumphantly a moment later. “It was in the Anderson Shoemakers folder.”

“How odd.”

She faces me, her eyes narrowed, a small smile on her lips. “Yes, how strange.”

She’s busted me, and she knows it. It brings a pretty blush to her cheeks that I find endearing and stiffens my cock further in my pants. I’ve been sporting a semi since she came in here the first time.

It takes every ounce of willpower I have not to run my hand under her skirt, up her inner thigh, to delve into her core and bring her to the brink of pleasure before dismissing her from my office, leaving her panting and on the edge, craving my touch. I know she wants it. I can see it in her gaze. My actions on Saturday night have triggered her. She is looking for a savior, someone to protect her and keep her safe. She needs the validation because someone hurt her badly in the past, and she doesn’t feel worth it. I inadvertently stumbled onto the one thing that she so desperately requires, but I also know that not anyone could give it to her. Certainly not some asshole whelp like Paul, who didn’t know the best thing when he had her. No, she’s looking for someone who can shelter her from the bad things in this world, and she’s found him in me. Little does she know how far I will go to

prevent her from coming to any harm.

My phone rings, and I reach for it, answering it while she stands in front of me, almost awkwardly now.

“Rose,” I say quietly.

Serena’s eyes narrow further, and her lips purse slightly. Her jealousy is gorgeous.

“There’s a fella here. Says he’s on a collection.”

“What does he look like?” I hold Serena’s gaze, wishing I knew her thoughts.

“Brown hair and a neck tattoo.”

“That’s Guy, you can let him in. He knows what to collect.”

“I’ll get it for him.”

“No, it’s okay. He knows where to go. He’s also going to do some electronic work while he’s there.”

“Fine. As long as he doesn’t get in my way, he can do what the fuck he likes.”

“Thank you, Rose. You know you’re my best girl.”

“Feck off.”

Hanging up, a soft smirk playing on my lips, I murmur, “Dismissed.”

It draws Serena’s gaze to my mouth, her gaze full of fire. She is so envious of Rose, and I’m such a dick for making her that way, but I wanted to see it.

“As you wish,” she mutters and leaves me alone with a longing that I have never had for a woman before and will probably never have again.

* * *

Having played with enough fire today, I leave Serena alone, ignoring her until she knocks to tell me she’s leaving. I wave her off, not looking at her, or I will follow her and make her do things for me that she isn’t ready to experience.

An hour after she left, I secure my office and go as well, pulling out my phone when it dings for a text.

3 bugs. Standard set. Flushed. Coast clear. Package on route to destination.

Thanks.

Left you a surprise.

Gulping, my hand shakes when I hastily put the phone away. Surprises are gifts from the devil and come in the form of masked men invading your home, killing your family, and leaving you for dead.

I *don't* like them.

But the thing is, Guy wouldn't betray me. He is *mine*. I don't trust him because I don't trust anyone, but I have enough shit on him to bury him alive, so he is faithful to me. It's enough. I've handed off the evidence to him because I can't be associated with any of it. He will sort it from here on out, and I have to let him. The fact that he found three bugs that the Society planted is worrisome. Usually, he only finds one. Quentin must've planted two more on Sunday morning while I was in the shower. Not having to wonder why, I mean, it's not fucking rocket science after I saved his niece, and he knew about it; it makes this game I'm playing with her even more dangerous.

Arriving home in the darkness, I spot the surprise gift on the doormat outside the front door. Picking it up, it's heavier than I expected the brown envelope to be.

Entering the apartment, I kick the door closed behind me and cross over to the sofa. Placing the envelope down on the coffee table, I remove my coat and sit, opening it with caution.

Curiously, I see a laptop inside and drag it out, opening the lid slowly. A post-it note is stuck to the dark screen with two words and an arrow pointing to the top left corner.

Play me

Hitting Enter, I type in *playme* as the password, and the screen lights up. The arrow points to a single folder, which I double-click to open, removing the note and sticking it to the coffee table.

A live feed flickers onto the screen of an unmade double bed.

Leaning forward, wondering what the fuck I'm looking at, my heart pounds when I see Serena appear on the screen with a glass of wine and her phone. She places the glass on the nightstand and crawls into bed, staring at

her phone.

“Fuck me, Guy. You fucking dick.” He’s bugged Serena’s apartment. From the information I asked him to dig up on her, he knew I was interested in her. Peering into the envelope, I see more pages but ignore them as I drag my gaze back to the screen.

She shoves the covers aside, and still staring at her phone, she slips her hand into her sweats.

I’m aching to know what her porn is, what gets her off.

Clenching my jaw, my hands itching to be on her, she starts to masturbate, her eyes never leaving the phone.

Spotting the mute icon on the screen, I click it to reveal that Guy also included audio. Turning it up fully so that I can catch every pant, every moan, my dick goes hard. Unzipping my fly, I pull my cock out and stroke it gently as I watch Serena pleasuring herself.

Frowning when I take in her expression, I wonder what the problem is. Her face is scrunched up, almost as if she is enduring this act and doesn’t really want to do it.

But then why is she?

“*Logan.*”

She brings the phone closer to her face, opening her eyes again.

My cock twitches when I realize her porn is me. She is looking at me while she rubs one out. “Oh, dirty girl, you like what you see.”

“*Ah!*”

Her cry of elation makes my cock spurt out cum all over my hand. I’ve barely even touched myself, but seeing her using me to bring her to an orgasm has shoved me over the cliff.

“Fuck, Serena,” I groan.

Closing my eyes as the pleasure of my climax rips through my veins, I know now there is no going back.

Chapter 19

Logan



The last few days have been unbearable. I've been in court since Tuesday, and I have to go back there this morning. But I've waited long enough to see Serena again. The feed in her apartment isn't enough. I need to see her in person, breathe in that perfume, touch her. It's the ass crack of dawn as usual when I stroll into the office. Not needing to be at court until a bit later today, I've taken this opportunity.

Checking my watch, I see it's a little after seven, so I'm surprised to see Serena already sitting at her desk. Her hair is neatly braided, causing me to groan out loud. She is spectacular.

Striding over to her, she looks up when she senses another being in this empty office. Her smile is bright, beautiful, and it warms up my insides.

"Logan," she says. "Nice to see you again."

"And you, Serena. Come with me a minute, would you?"

Leading her into my office, I let her walk forward while I shut the door, leaning against it momentarily as I take in the gorgeous creature whose nerves have just shot up into the red zone.

"What can I do for you?" Her tone is soft, panic creeping into it. She knows danger when she sees it, but she has no idea.

"So many things," I reply, pushing off from the door to stalk her. Removing my coat, I throw it over the desk and grasp her arm gently, pulling her to me.

Her lips part in shock, her head going back so she can look up at me from her shorter stature.

"I'm tired of playing this game, Serena," I murmur. "Aren't you?"

She doesn't reply, her lower lip trembling.

“I know you want me, and I’m desperate to drive my cock into your wet pussy. Do you want that, Serena?”

“Ah,” she exclaims softly, her eyes wide, the panic in them evident now. “Logan...”

Without waiting for a reply, I spin her around and bend her over my desk.

She gasps and struggles, but my hand on her lower back keeps her down. I can’t stop. I don’t want to stop. I’ve been all week without my dick inside her, and now I’m taking her, whether she wants me to or not.

“Logan, please,” she whimpers, writhing on the desk, trying to get away.

“I want you, Serena. I’m taking you right here, right now.”

She stops moving and lies still.

“Good girl,” I purr softly.

Her moan of longing is all I need to proceed. Pulling her blouse out of the waistband of her skirt, I yank it down roughly so I can see that tattoo at the base of her spine.

“Oh, angel. You’re going to be a good girl for me, aren’t you?”

It’s a question that doesn’t require an answer.

Running my finger lightly over the ink etched into her skin, my cock aches to be inside her. Releasing my hold on her back, I bunch her skirt around her hips before I release my cock from my pants. Her black cotton panties are in my way, so I shove them aside, driving my fingers deep into her pussy.

She tenses up, a soft sob escaping her lips. “Please don’t, Logan, please.”

Thrusting my fingers gently, I whisper, “Your words say one thing, Serena, but your wet pussy says another. Do you want me?”

“Logan...”

Her plea falls on deaf ears. I’m not backing away from her now. Positioning my cock at her entrance, I ram inside her, feeling her wet pussy encase my length as I bury myself balls deep inside her.

“No,” she cries softly. “Logan, please.”

“Too late,” I murmur as I pull back and slam into her again. “Fuck, you feel good. Fuck, Serena. Your pussy feels so good around my cock.”

Her whimper is terrified, but the longing is there. She wants the words. She *needs* to hear them.

Gripping her hip with one hand and pulling her skirt down with the other so I can see her tattoo again, I grind against her. It’s been so long since I rode bareback, since I felt the juices of a woman on my cock. I knew I would with

her the second I saw her come with my name on her lips. I pant, losing myself even further into this woman who has fallen into my life out of nowhere and knocked me on my ass.

“Fuck, angel. Fuck, you feel so good,” I groan.

She soaks me even more, which makes her protests pointless.

“Logan, please, no...”

“Sweet angel, I’m not going to hurt you. I need you, fuck, I need you. I need your hot pussy around my cock. It feels so good. Fuck. My dick looks so good sliding into you. Oh, you’re taking my fat cock like such a good girl, aren’t you, angel.”

“Logan...” Her cry as I pound into her, giving the praise she needs to hear, is raw and real. Her pussy clenches around my cock as she climaxes, drenching me with her cum.

“Fuck, angel. That’s it, baby girl. Soak my cock like a good girl. That’s it. Fuck, that feels perfect. You look so hot bent over my desk with my dick inside you. Do you want me to come?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want me to come in your pussy, angel?”

“Yes.”

Slamming into her, rocking the desk forward, I drive as deep as I can into her, and then my climax hits me with such force that it nearly knocks me off my feet. Knowing she’s protected from her confidential doctor’s records, procured by Guy, I know I’m free to come inside her.

“Fuuuuuck,” I groan, unloading into her, my cock pumping out my cum to fill her pussy. “Serena,” I rasp, my eyes closed. “Oh, you’re such a good girl letting me fuck you.”

“Logan.”

Not giving her a chance to say anything else, with my cock still twitching inside her, I lean over her, pressing my mouth to her ear so I can whisper those words I know she is desperate to hear.

Chapter 20

Serena



Trembling underneath him with his body pressed against mine, his cock still inside me, his breath hot in my ear.

“I’m so proud of you, Serena. You took my cock inside you like a perfect angel, and you’re such a good girl for taking my load in your pussy like you did.”

My whimper of both terror and longing rips through my dry throat as I gulp back as much air as I can. My lungs are closing, and I’m going lightheaded when he lifts off me, sliding his cock out and gently replacing my panties which he shoved to the side in his need to get to me.

Swallowing and choking on my saliva, my throat tickling, I straighten up, and with the tears that pooled in my eyes when he took me seeping out, I shove past him.

“I’m sorry,” I ramble. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t ready for this. I wasn’t ready.”

Scrambling to get the door open, I yank it back, wrenching my arm as I lunge through it, hobbling in my heels to get to the ladies' room while shoving my skirt back down. Grateful that no one else was here to witness my degradation at being fucked like a bitch over Logan’s desk while I did nothing, I stumble into the ladies’ room, covering my eyes from the garish light.

Logan bursts in behind me, his face frantic and his hair sticking up from running his hand through it.

“Serena.”

“Don’t!” I say, putting my hand up. “I wasn’t ready for that. I needed time. I *need* time, and I wasn’t ready. You pushed me too quickly, and I let you down. I’m sorry I was so useless. I’m sorry that I didn’t do anything. It

was jarring and a bit scary. My past. Fuck. Nothing.”

“What?” he practically shouts at me. “What are you talking about? You didn’t let me down. Fuck, Serena…”

We stare at each other for a few seconds, but it’s too much for me.

“Please, go.”

“Serena.”

“Don’t,” I whisper, closing my eyes. “Please, don’t.”

“Shit. Fuck. Serena.”

“You’ve got court. Just go.”

“No.”

“Dammit, Logan!” I turn from him, twisting my braid around my hand, shaking like a leaf.

“Who hurt you, angel?” he asks, his voice deathly quiet. “Who destroyed your light?”

“I can’t do this right now. I’m sorry I was such a shit fuck, but just go. I don’t want to talk about it anymore. Please forget it and me. I’ll have my desk cleaned out in an hour.”

He grabs my arm, turning me to face him as I open my eyes. His expression is dark, scary and makes my soul wither up to hide from the intensity of the storm raging in his eyes. “Don’t you fucking dare leave.”

“Logan. I’m humiliated. Please just let me go.”

His grip tightens as he drags me closer to him. “No! You aren’t going anywhere.”

“But you are. You have court.”

It hangs there between us. He knows he has to go. He has no choice, or the trial he’s been working so hard on for months will be shot to hell. This is closing. He *has* to be there.

“Please don’t leave. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

I nod just to get him to back off and let me wallow in how pathetic I am. God, he must think I’m so unworldly and inexperienced. I’m the worst sex he’s ever engaged in, and he won’t leave so I can be embarrassed in private.

He huffs out a breath and lets me go, running his hand through his hair again in agitation. “Don’t. Leave.” He jabs his finger at me.

Turning from him, I don’t answer, relieved when he finally storms out of the ladies’ room at the precise moment when everyone seems to be arriving at work. Glaring at my reflection, I’m a mess. Tears have stained my cheeks, my bottom lip is swollen from biting it while he was fucking me, my clothes

are creased, and my shirt is hanging out of the top of my skirt.

“What happened?” Rue asks, barreling into the ladies’ like a pit bull.
“Was it John? I’ll fucking kill him.”

“It wasn’t John. And hi, by the way.”

She glares at me. “You’re a mess. Tell me what happened.”

“How do you know anything happened?”

She purses her lips before blowing out a breath. “Logan asked me to check on you.”

I freeze. “Has he gone?”

She nods slowly. “Logan?”

Nodding back, I don’t even know what to say.

“Fuck, Serena,” she breathes.

“It’s not what you think...”

“Then what? Did you consent?” Her question raises a lot of apprehension in my already painfully anxious body. She folds her arms over her chest as she stares at me.

“No, I mean, no...”

“No?” she roars. “Jesus, Serena. Tell Allison. Go to the police, you can’t...”

“No, it’s not like that. My heart said yes, but my head was saying no.”

We lock gazes. “You actually said no.”

Tears pool in my eyes again as I nod. “But I didn’t mean it. It wasn’t that I didn’t want to do it, it was more that I wasn’t ready for it that way.”

“Same fucking difference!”

“No, it’s not. Listen to me!” I push my fingers against my eyes, trying to get my thoughts in a concise order so I can tell her it wasn’t non-consensual. At least, not in the way she thinks it was.

“I wanted it,” I say calmly. “I did. But I’m inexperienced and scared. I need time to work up to that. He didn’t give me the time I needed, even though I wanted to want it. Fuck. This still isn’t coming out right.”

“I’m going to ask you this once. Did he rape you?”

“No.”

She inhales and exhales. “So your mouth said no, but your body said yes?”

“Yes.”

“Did you O?”

“Oh, yes,” I admit with a soft moan at remembering my pussy clench

around his long, thick cock.

“Okay, I think I’m starting to understand this a little bit.”

“I’m glad you are because I’m still confused.” Giving her a shaky smile, she returns it.

“You want him, he definitely wants you, but he pushed you too far, too fast. It’s okay, Serena. And it’s okay to tell him that.”

“I did.”

“What did he say?”

“Not a lot. I think I scared him off. He’s used to dealing with women with far more poise than me. To him, I’m a child who he regrets getting involved with.”

“No,” she says, shaking her head. “He was torn up just now.”

“Then why did you think he’d hurt me?”

She shrugs. “I was confused. You were all over the place, I didn’t know what to think.”

“Sorry.”

“Don’t you fucking dare apologize. You’re allowed to be scattered. This is huge. What are you going to do?”

“I want to quit, but he said not to.”

“Then he definitely doesn’t regret getting involved with you. Don’t you think he’d want to ship you out immediately if he was on that bus? Do you want him? I mean, in the larger sense?”

“That’s the million-dollar question,” I murmur. “There was this thing between us on Saturday night. He saved me from my stupid ex, who was being a bit handsy.”

“Wait? What? When?”

“When I went to the toilet. But he was drunk, and I was tipsy, and he left after he said some things. Ever since then, I haven’t been able to get him out of my head.”

Rue sighs and wraps her arms around me. “You’ve got it bad.”

“No kidding. He’s...everything.”

“Fuck.”

“Yeah.”

“Come, let’s get you cleaned up and back to your desk.”

I let her sort my clothes out and dab my eyes. She’s like a mother hen, and I think she quite enjoys the role.

“Thank you, Rue. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“I’ve got you, boo. Do you want to come to mine later? Spend the night?”
Warily, I consider her offer.

“Look, I’m not asking you to stay up all night and chit-chat, you can go to bed and just not be alone.”

“You’re sweet, but I think I’ll be okay.” To be honest, I want to go home in case Logan wants me. I want to be ready if he wants to talk or whatever. I’m so fucking lost in him; it makes me feel even worse about our encounter. My fantasy was us being together and me being perfect and active during the sex. Instead, I was useless and probably turned him off me for life. I blew it, all because I can’t forget what happened to me.

“If you change your mind, you know where to find me.”

I nod and let her walk me out of the ladies and back to my desk in the now busy office.

“So if we’re done with your drama, can I tell you about my night?” she asks with a smirk.

“Please,” I say, sitting down, feeling his cum in my panties with a thrilling spike in my blood. I wonder if he knows I’m sitting here covered in his cum, or if he thinks I cleaned up. Would he want me to have his cum pooling in my panties? Would it turn him on?

“Okay, so I was at this sex club not far from Belmont’s, right, and I was in a back room with Lola. She was eating me out like a starving woman...”

“Wait, is Lola your girlfriend?” I don’t know anything about her sex life, yet she seems to know everything about mine now. Fair’s fair that I ask.

She shakes her head, perching on the edge of the desk. “Nah, she’s a sweet treat. Anyway, there I am, with my dress up my waist, panties on the floor with Lola’s tongue up my cunt, when this guy walks in...”

“He just walked in?” I ask, horrified. “Isn’t that, like, I dunno, not allowed?” I have no clue what I’m talking about.

“We weren’t in a private room. It was a public one, just empty except for us,” she dismisses with a wave. “Stop interrupting.”

“Sorry.”

“Anyway, he was ginormous. I mean, like a proper fucking giant, with this black hair and built like a fucking tree.”

“Oh, yum.”

“Right? So he just stands there, watching us, and then he casually pulls an apple out of his coat pocket with this big ass hunting knife, which I don’t even know how he smuggled that in and starts slicing pieces of the apple off

and eating them! It was so fucking weird.”

Eye wide, I ask, “Weren’t you scared he’d try something?”

“Are you kidding? I wish he had. It was weird he was just standing there eating his apple.”

“You wanted him to try something?”

“I wouldn’t have said no. I can only imagine the size of his cock.”

“I wish I was more like you.”

She smiles and pats my hand. “One day, maybe, boo. You aren’t ready for that kind of sexual liberation.”

“You’re so cool,” I groan, feeling like a complete idiot.

She giggles. “I love my life, I love my body, I love sex. I’m not going to deny myself anything. Why should I?” She shrugs and stands up. “I’ll catch you at lunch.”

Waving her off, I watch her leave, knowing her words are solid. Why should anyone deny themselves what they want? I want Logan. I know I do. He just took what he wanted before I knew what was happening. But that doesn’t mean I didn’t want it. Chewing my bottom lip, wishing he was here so I could tell him all of this, I struggle to get my head into my work, knowing that he has twisted my soul around and ensured that I can’t live without him. He is dark, haunted, dangerous.

He is my poison, but I don’t give a fuck.

Chapter 21

Serena



Frowning, I pick up the phone. It's an internal ring, which I don't usually get, so I assume it's Allison when I answer.

"Mr. Carter's office, Serena speaking."

"You've got a very distinguished, older man here looking for you and *that* guy!"

"What guy?" I ask Rue.

"The apple guy," she murmurs and hangs up.

Blinking, I murmur, "Apple guy." The penny drops, and my frown deepens.

The phone rings again, and I pick it up. "Rue?"

"He said to bring all your stuff."

She hangs up.

Gathering up my belongings, I glance at my watch. It's four thirty, so I might as well call it a day. It doesn't look like Logan is coming back any time soon, so this day has been a nightmare of a slow-moving clock waiting for him. Cutting my losses, with a heavy sigh, I slip on my coat and head out to the reception. I can only imagine it's Uncle Quentin. He's the only distinguished older man I know. Apart from Logan, but then she'd have said. The apple guy is a mystery, though.

"Serena," Quentin says as I approach.

"Hi, Uncle Quen."

He bends to kiss me on the top of my head. I wouldn't say we are close, but we aren't strangers either. Flicking my glance to the giant tree man next to him, I raise my gaze up and up and across his broad chest and then press my lips together to stop the smile. Not being able to resist looking at Rue, I

try to give her my absolute approval with my eyes, but she is too busy staring at him, and it's not for me to wonder why. He is gorgeous. Pitch black hair and blue eyes that are so clear, they are practically luminous. Now, I'm a sucker for tall, dark, and blue-eyed, obviously, given my feelings for Logan, but this guy is...wow.

He is utterly oblivious to Rue, me, Quentin, and pretty much everyone and everything, and I wonder who he is.

"Come, I'll give you a lift home," Quen murmurs.

I wave to Rue and follow Quen into the elevator. We are quiet on the ride down, and when we head outside, there is an expensive black car waiting at the curb. Quentin opens the back door for me and gestures me inside before he slips in next to me.

"Serena!"

Glancing up at the voice, it's cut off when Quentin closes the door, and I see Apple slam his hand into Logan's chest.

The driver shoots away from the curb as I turn in my seat to stare at Logan, arguing with the ginormous man on the sidewalk. "Wait!" I exclaim. "I need to speak to him."

"I need to speak to you first. It's important."

Turning back around, I glare at Quen. "What is this about?"

"This is about you and him."

"Him? Him who?"

"Logan Carter."

Quentin hasn't looked at me yet, instead speaking to the back of the headrest in front of him.

Feeling that we've entered some dangerous territory, I sit back, almost defensively, pulling my bag onto my lap. "What about him and me?"

He sighs and faces me. "Cilla was worried about you, so I set you up with this job, thinking you'd be safe from a man like Logan Carter. He has a general dislike for the human race, and I thought he would leave you alone to just get on with your work in a place where you could further your own career." He pauses and purses his lips before continuing. "But I realize now that I made a grave error sending you to him."

"What do you mean?"

"He is a dangerous man, Rena. He is older than you and not the type of man that you should be associated with on a personal level."

"I'm still not getting it," I murmur. "He's my boss."

“He has been looking into your life,” he states crisply. “He has dug up things about you to use to worm his way into your life. You are a conquest to him. Sweet and innocent in his morally gray world. He sees you as a challenge. He will get under your skin with the things he knows about you, use you, and discard you. I will not allow that to happen.”

“Uhm...” That stings. Not so much the fact that Logan has been learning about me through insidious means, I actually find that almost flattering in my fucked-up mind, but Quen’s words are harsh. A conquest. Use. Discard. These are not words a woman wants to hear about the man she’s just had sex with only a few hours ago.

“I don’t think it’s any of your business,” I say, my temper rising.

“Actually, it is, and I absolutely forbid you to see this man again.”

“What?” I thunder. “*Forbid?* Who the hell do you think you are? You are not my parent, you cannot forbid me anything, least of all a man that, to be honest, has no interest in me whatsoever.”

“Oh, but he does. And I am well within my rights to forbid this.”

“I’m an adult,” I hiss. “This is ridiculous.”

“That you may be, but you are too innocent to be involved in any way with Logan Carter. He will corrupt you. Destroy you, and I will not allow that to happen while there is breath left in my body.”

“What? What the hell is this?” I look frantically around, but there is no escaping this car. Not yet. We are headed towards my apartment, still moving through the busy street. I could open the door and jump out but risk breaking my limbs in the process. It seems counter-productive, but my mind is reeling, and irrational thoughts are leaping out at me from all over the place.

“This is me looking out for you and fixing the error that I made. You will not be returning to work at Carter & Jeffers on Monday. Your replacement has already been notified and will be there in your stead. Security knows not to let you in the building. If you try to contact Logan Carter in any form, I will know about it, and I will not take the rebellion against my order lightly. I will be having the same conversation with him, so don’t think you can get around this by having him call you or stop by.”

“What?” Flustered, I’m floundering in a sea of utter confusion. “I don’t understand any of this.”

“And that is why I am keeping you safe. We are at your apartment now, Rena. Go upstairs and forget about Logan Carter. You will return to your temporary job until I can find suitable employment for you.”

“This is outrageous!” I spit out, not moving an inch, even though the car has stopped outside my building. “You can’t treat me like a child. I won’t do as you demand!”

“Oh, but you will, Rena. There are things in the world that are terrifying, and Logan is one of them. His influence over you will see you destroyed, and I won’t allow it.”

“You. You, you, you! You don’t get to say any of this!” The adrenaline is coursing through me. I feel sick.

“He doesn’t want you, Rena. He wants to conquer you. He has no feelings for you one way or the other. He has a complete disregard for you and everyone around him. Do you understand me?”

We lock gazes.

My bottom lip quivers as his words sink in.

Deep down, I know he’s right. I’m not even on the same planet as Logan. He is so out of my league; it’s absurd that I thought I even had a chance with him.

“I hate you,” I spit out, turning and shoving the car door open.

“You’ll understand one day, Serena.”

“Fuck you!” Slamming the door, I stand on the pavement, watching the car drift off, taking my sanity with it.

With my crushed heart, I slump my shoulders and slope into my apartment, dropping my bag and coat on the floor before kicking my shoes off.

In a daze, my mind almost shutting down, I stumble to the bathroom and strip off all my clothes, throwing them into the hamper.

Quentin has no business being in mine the way he was tonight. But his words are sticking with me, and they hurt.

It makes what Logan did to me worse. Staring at my reflection in the mirror, I pull my hair out of the braid, letting it tumble around my shoulders and down my back as I walk into the kitchen, only vaguely aware of my actions.

He touched me, knowing that he was playing with me. He fucked me, knowing he was never going to do it again. I gave it up to him so easily, and now he can’t stand the sight of me. It’s why he didn’t come back to the office all day. I’m better off not going back there. I wanted to quit. I should’ve left on my own terms.

Opening the fridge, the pain in my heart is too much to bear. Stupidity

doesn't cover my actions. Falling for him was the biggest mistake I've ever made, and now I'm paying for it. Snatching up the nearly full bottle of wine I opened yesterday, I remove the cork and press the bottle to my lips. Gulping back a mouthful of wine, the fumes burning my nostrils, as I swallow half the bottle, I tilt it to drink more, draining it quickly. This will get me drunk fast on an empty stomach, and that's what I need. I need to forget. Dropping it in the sink, I lean down to grab another from the wine rack, fumbling with the corkscrew as I open it.

Placing it to my lips, I drink again, gulping back half the bottle before I stop, feeling sick. My head is already swimming as I stumble backward. Pulling open the kitchen drawer, I grab the sharpest knife I can find before staggering to my bag. Rooting around, I find my phone and call Rue.

"Serena, what's up?"

Moving over to the bathroom, I don't answer right away. I'm not sure what to say.

"Serena? You there?"

"Yeah," I croak, my voice sounding drunk to my own ears.

"What's wrong?" she asks instantly.

"Everything," I slur, slumping down on the bathroom floor and leaning against the bath. "Everything."

"Talk to me, boo. What's going on?"

"Don't want to talk."

"Do you want me to come over?"

"No. Don't want you to have to clean up the mess."

"What mess?" Her voice is scared. I can hear it. I don't want to cause her that fear, but it's too late now. I've dragged her into my shitshow because I didn't want to be alone.

"I'm sorry, Rue. You've been so nice to me. I'm sorry and tell your friends I'm sorry too."

"Serena!"

"Bye, Rue."

"Serena—"

Hanging up, knowing I'm a coward with my cry for help, I bring the knife up to my arm, dragging the blade across my wrist, just shy of where it would kill me.

I don't even have the guts to kill myself.

I never did.

The old scars are still there—all of them.

Slicing over them, the burn of the knife cutting open my skin makes me choke on the air struggling out of my lungs. The crimson liquid wells up and seeps out, staining my arm, the knife, the floor.

Sticky and warm, it drips over my skin until four cuts show deep and dark red on my lower arm. Lightheaded, I swap hands, the handle of the knife viscous with my blood, I repeat the gashes, another four, eight in total.

“Logan.” I pass out with his name on my lips, from the gory sight, the wine, and the sheer desperation of being such a failure, of being so unlovable, that men just want to use me as a pawn in their games.

Chapter 22

Logan



“Oh, you seriously need to get the fuck out of my way.”

But it’s like talking to a brick wall. Isaac is built like one, so it’s a fair assumption that it would be like hitting one. Not that I’m letting that put me off. If he doesn’t move, he’s going down.

“Get in the car, Logan,” Quentin says, almost exasperated.

“You’ve held me up on the sidewalk for fifteen minutes, and you expect me to just do as you say?” To say that I’m fuming would be an understatement. I’ve been stuck in court all damn day, needing to get back to Serena. I couldn’t even call her to make sure she was okay.

“It’s about Serena. Get in.” He slides across, and I climb in next to him without much of a choice. Isaac joins us in the passenger seat, and the car sets off.

“Where is Serena?”

“At home. She won’t be coming back to work for you next week.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me. No more conversation until we are in your apartment.”

Knowing better than to argue, as it will be ultimately fruitless, it also gives me a chance to prepare what I’m going to say. Right now, I’m acting purely on instinct, and that will never fly with Quentin. He is as controlled and calm as they come. Anger only annoys him and makes him shut down further.

Minutes later, Isaac is shoving me into my own fucking apartment as Quentin closes the door behind us all.

“You’re a fucking dick,” I snarl.

“Listen up, Logan,” he says, that calm tone never wavering for one

moment. “You stay the fuck away from my niece, and we don’t have a problem.”

“What? This is about Serena? I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t lie to me, Logan. I know you’ve looked into her as deeply as her doctor’s records. She isn’t a toy for you to play with to get your kicks. Whatever sick fantasy you think you want with her, get it off your mind right now. She is fifteen years younger than you. She is forbidden. Do I make myself quite clear?”

“You are the one who sent her to me,” I reply, quiet calm entering my ragged soul. I should’ve known he’d find out.

“Yes, because I thought you were someone who could help her get a step up without wanting anything in return. Seems I was wrong about you. I won’t make that mistake again. You’re a predator.”

“Fuck you,” I spit. “You don’t know the first thing about me.”

He shakes his head as there is a loud knock on the door.

“Logan! Logan!”

Frowning, I glance at Quentin.

He shakes his head again.

“Logan! If you’re in there, please open the door. It’s Rue Di’Castello.”

Quentin’s eyes narrow. “Di’Castello?”

“As in Viktor and Francesca, yeah. Their daughter is my downstairs neighbor.”

He nods, impressed enough to be marginally sidetracked, but I’m no fool.

“Logan, please.” Her voice is tinged with panic. “It’s about Serena. Please, open up.” She bangs so loudly that I think she’s trying to kick it in.

Giving Quentin a death stare, I march over to the door and yank it open. “Rue, what is it?”

Isaac is at my back in an instant, glaring at Rue over the top of my head. She gives him a cursory glare before her gaze returns to mine. “Serena is in trouble. I don’t know what happened, or how, or anything. I feel like shit. I don’t know where she lives, and she’s not answering my calls. Can you find her address for me? Please? I know it’s a lot to ask, but I’m worried—”

“Worried?” My heart leaps into my throat.

“I think she’s going to do something really stupid. You!” Her hiss has me looking where she is.

Her furious stare is on Quentin.

“What did you do to her?”

“She’s my niece,” he croaks, shoving me out of the way. “What do you mean she’s in trouble? I just dropped her off not half an hour ago.”

“Well, something’s happened. Quit yapping and take me to her.”

He nods swiftly, indicating that Isaac and I remain where we are.

“Wait!” My blood is pounding through my veins in panic. “What did you say to her?”

If he spoke to her before he spoke to me, I dread thinking about what he told her about me. Is this even about me? The timing adds up, but am I so vain to believe she’s reacting to something Quentin said or did because of me?

As expected, he ignores me, taking Rue and disappearing into the elevator.

Isaac reaches over the top of me and slams the door shut, nearly catching me with it.

“What the fuck?” I growl, spinning to him.

“Sit.”

He stalks off to pull a dining chair out for me.

I have no choice but to plant my ass down and wait for whatever outcome is headed my way that was interrupted, hoping that Rue is being overly cautious, and that Serena is fine.

But my gut tells me that things are about to get severely worse before they get better.

Chapter 23

Serena



When I open my eyes, I'm in bed. The curtains are open, showing me the rain-speckled window with the city lights gleaming in the background.

"You fucking shit me up so bad."

Groaning as I turn my head to the left, I see Rue standing in the corner of my bedroom in the dark, her arms folded. She's wearing white cropped pants with dark stains all over them and her white t-shirt.

Bringing my hand to my head, I wince at the pain in my arm, and it all comes crashing back down. I close my eyes briefly before opening them again and inhale deeply, noticing the white bandage wrapped tight around my arm from my inner elbow to my wrist.

"Sorry," I murmur.

"Don't," she says, her voice cracking. "This is messed up, Serena."

"I wasn't trying to kill myself."

"Great consolation there, boo. Thank you for that." Her gut-wrenching sarcasm makes me giggle inappropriately, hurting my stomach.

"Did I throw up?"

"Yes."

"Sorry."

"Your uncle is here."

Snapping my head to the side in panic, I shake my head. "I don't want to see him."

"He's talking with the medic who came. I don't think he's from the hospital. Looks kind of shady. What the fuck is going on here?"

"I know it looks horrible, and I'm sorry. I didn't mean for you to come

and save me. It wasn't a cry for help."

Liar. You're a coward, and that's why you called her.

The crushing voice in my head lays it all bare, and tears prick my eyes.

"You don't have to tell me what's going on, but know that I'm here if you want to, okay?"

"You can leave and never look back, Rue. In fact, if I were you, that's what I would do. Forget about me and my drama, yeah? I'm not coming back to work on Monday, so you don't ever have to see me again."

"Fuck you," she hisses. "I'm not some delicate flower who can't handle a suicide attempt."

"That's not what this was. I can't...I've never been able to..."

"You've done this before?"

I nod and look away, not being able to face her sorrow.

"Serena, look at me."

I don't.

"Look. At. Me," she grits out.

I turn my head and stare at her.

"I'm covered in your blood and vomit. Do you think I would have messed up my clothes if I didn't fucking care about you? I'm not going anywhere, fucker, so you can't either. Got it?"

"I'm not going anywhere, but you should. You should run as far away from me as you can get."

"Not a chance, boo. You and me, there's a kinship here. I don't understand it, but I feel closer to you than the friends I've had since I was a child. Don't fucking leave me."

Tears spill out of her eyes, and I choke back the ugly sob, sinking further into my bed.

"I feel it, too," I mumble.

"Is this about Logan?"

Throwing the covers back and sitting upright, ignoring my spinning head, I shake it vehemently, bringing my aching arm up to place my finger on my lips.

She frowns and looks over her shoulder.

"When he's gone, we'll talk," I whisper.

"I'll tell him you're still asleep, see if he'll go away if that's what you want."

I nod and sink back into the soft pillows.

She disappears and returns shortly. “He’s going, but he said he’d be back to check on you in an hour. He’s pissed.”

Ignoring her comment about Quen, I ask, instead, “How did you know where I live?”

She chews her lip. “Don’t kill me...err, bad choice of words,” she mutters. “I went to Logan.”

“Went to? You know where he lives?” The jealousy that slices through me is more painful than the knife was through my flesh.

“I live underneath him by three floors.”

“You’re his neighbor?”

“Of sorts. It’s my parents’ apartment, they pay for it. I like it; I’m not leaving it, so fuck it, if they want to keep paying, I’ll keep living there.”

“I’m starting to wish I’d stayed at my parent’s house,” I moan more to myself than her.

“Do you think you can drink some water?”

My stomach churns at the thought, but my disgusting mouth wins out, so I nod. She comes closer. The sight of her clothes in the light from the window is too much for me. I curl up in a ball under the covers and cry my heart out, wishing for the one man in the world I want to comfort me but who never wanted me in the first place.

It just makes me sob harder.

Chapter 24

Logan



Watching Isaac slicing a green apple with a big-ass hunting knife is cathartic. He's meticulous. Each slice is the same width and perfectly executed. He could gut you without getting a single drop of blood on him.

Since the one word he spoke when he told me to sit, he has been silent.

"How do you know Rue?" I ask to break it and see if I can engage him in a conversation that will distract me from worrying about Serena. I don't know anything, and panicking when I need to keep my head straight is of no use to her or me.

"Who?"

"The firecracker who took Quentin away."

"Ah. Rue. Suits her. Don't know her."

"Could've fooled me. She's seen you before."

He shrugs.

I guess that's all I'm getting out of him for now.

My heart leaps into my throat as the door bursts open, and Quentin storms in with a face of thunder. Slamming it so forcefully behind him that the wall shakes, he strides over to me, and before I can move, he grabs my shirt. The crack of the first punch shakes my skull. His knuckles catch me in the jaw, and there is a burst of fireworks behind my eyes as everything goes hazy white. His fist pounds down, blow after blow into my ribs and face. My own blood splatters onto my clothes and skin. The pain radiates out from my broken nose, blossoming over my entire body.

But the pain of him breaking my nose with one punch is erased by the shock of him getting his hands dirty.

“What the fuck,” I snarl, but he’s not listening.

He hauls me to my feet and slams his fist into my face again. On the next punch, my left eye swells shut, and my lip bursts open, forcing me to taste the coppery tang of my own blood.

“Quen,” I slur.

“You fucking did this. You fucking played with her, and you fucking hurt her. I will fucking kill you if you go anywhere near her again,” he hisses in my face.

Smashing me again, once in the face and then in the stomach, I double over, and he lets me go. He shoves me to the floor and kicks me. Curling up into a fetal position, wrapping my arms around myself, the beating continues for what seems like hours. Feeling each wound separately, my ribs cracking and splintering underneath his hard boot. The taste of blood fills my mouth and burns down my throat. Quen eventually steps away from me, his work done.

His breathing is ragged when he crouches down next to me, limp and beaten on the floor.

“I found the camera in her bedroom. If you go near her again, if you even *think* about her, I will know, and I will string you up by your balls, cover you in honey and let the insects eat your flesh while the crows peck your eyeballs out. Are we on the same page?”

“Fuck. You.” I spit out a mouthful of blood that splashes his face before sliding down to join the spatters of my blood on his once immaculate suit.

Standing up, through the haze of my swollen eyes, I see him straighten his cuffs and step away. I know this isn’t over.

As Isaac looms over me, I hear the front door slam shut and brace myself, for if I live to tell the tale, it will be a miracle.

Enduring this to make it back to Serena, to take her away and be free from these restrictions, is worth every second.

She is worth every second.

Chapter 25

Logan



Throwing up into the strategically placed bucket by the side of the sofa, I wipe my mouth with the handy cloth and make a noise that sounds a bit like a wounded animal.

Which I suppose I am.

“Here.” Isaac sits his massive self on the coffee table in front of me and shoves an ice pack on my face.

Pain shoots through my entire body, wrenching my broken ribs. Wrapping my arm around myself, I notice I’m strapped up, for which I’m grateful.

“Thanks,” I mutter from behind the freezing cold pack, the irony not lost on me. Leaning back, I rest my head on the back of the sofa and adjust the ice pack to sit over my swollen eyes.

“Can I give you a piece of advice?” Isaac says.

“Sure.”

“Forget about the girl; keep your head down and go back to the way things were.”

“She’s not a girl.”

“She is to Q. So if I were you, I’d forget about her.”

“You’re not me.”

“I went easy on you, Logan. I won’t next time.”

I want to point out that I would, in fact, die for ‘the girl,’ but right now, that isn’t the best strategy.

“How do you forget about someone who has wormed their way into your soul?”

“Find someone else.”

I snort. “Yeah, I tried that. Do you know where it led me?”

“Let me guess....”

“Straight back to her.”

“Figured. I get it. But unless you want to spend the rest of eternity at the bottom of the Grove City River, I’d forget her and move on.”

“Yeah.”

What else can I say?

Fuck all.

“Take some painkillers when your stomach can keep them down, and get to bed, Logan.”

Removing the ice pack, I see him stand up through my less swollen right eye and wave him off. As soon as I hear the door close, I haul myself to my feet, my head spinning, and the bile rises in my throat. Forcing it back down, I stagger to the wall above the living-flame fireplace. Swinging open the painting to reveal the safe behind it, I curse when I hold my face up to the optical scanner.

“No dice, you fucker.”

Grimacing, I drop the ice pack and spread the swollen skin around my eye, the nausea welling up at the pain, but it works. The safe clicks open, and with a labored breath, as I release my battered eye, I lean heavily on the wall with one hand while the other pulls out a brand-new burner phone. Lifting the stack of papers underneath the gun Shelley tried to off me with, I pull them out carefully and, having over-exerted myself, I turn and lean against the wall as I search through the records for Serena’s cell phone number.

Using my right hand to dial, it’s the only part of my body that doesn’t look like it got run over by a train, which then reversed and did the conga over my body, then jumped up and down a bit before driving off.

After two rings, she picks up.

“Serena’s phone.”

Wincing, I debate whether to hang up or plow forward. My need to know she’s okay wins out over self-preservation.

“Rue,” I rasp. “Is she there?”

“Logan,” she whispers. “She’s sleeping, but you shouldn’t be calling.”

“I know, but I have to know if she’s okay.”

“She’s not okay. I mean, she is, but she’s not.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means she’s alive.”

“What?” My heart thunders in my chest painfully, making my lungs work even harder to take my next breath.

“It’s complicated and not my place.”

“She did this because of me?” The terror that spikes my blood so fiercely over causing her so much pain is something that hasn’t occurred to me since I was ten years old.

“Yes and no. Look. It’s complicated.”

“Let me speak to her. Please.” My plea affects her as she pauses.

“She’s sleeping. I’m not waking her.”

I can’t force her to do anything, so I clench my aching fist and say, “I’ll call back later. Please, Rue. I need to speak to her.”

“That’s up to her.”

She hangs up, and I have no choice but to chuck the phone back into the safe with the papers and slam it shut, followed by the painting, having memorized her number to dial from a fresh burner later. Needing to distract myself in the meantime, I hobble over to the bucket and pick it up, staggering to the downstairs toilet to dispose of the contents and swill it under the tap before dropping it onto the floor. It’s not the best, but right now, I don’t give a shit. Limping with my arm around my ribs, I take the stairs painfully, slowly, one at a time, in an activity that seems to go on and on.

“Fuck’s sake,” I murmur halfway up. “I didn’t know my bed was at the top of fucking Everest.”

My joke does nothing to spur me on, but several minutes later, I stumble into my bedroom, grabbing the wall as I make my way into the bathroom and turn on the shower before I pass out.

Having already been stripped of my shirt, I remove the strapping around my ribs and loosen my pants, letting them drop around my ankles. Sitting heavily on the toilet seat, I awkwardly toe off my shoes and endure an agony the likes of which I hope never to repeat any time soon, I remove one sock and contemplate showering with the other one on.

After a few seconds breather, the steam from the shower filling the bathroom already, I brace myself and get the other one off with a cry of pain that I’m glad no one else was here to witness.

“Fuck,” I pant, hauling myself to my feet using the toilet paper holder as leverage.

Stepping into the shower, I howl when the hot water hits my lacerated and sensitive skin like razor blades.

“Fucking pussy,” I tell myself, letting the hot water wash away whatever dried blood it can without any help from me.

Minutes, hours, who knows how much time later, I turn the shower off and unsteadily climb out, reaching for a towel to pat my skin dry. Shoving it on the counter, naked, I hobble to the safe in my bedroom, situated a trying overhead reach in my closet.

Clenching my jaw, I open it with the fingerprint scanner and pull out the secondary burner, closing the safe and walking the few paces to the bed before falling into it, panting like I’ve run a marathon. Grunting as I don’t have the capability to re-strap my ribs up again, I hold the phone up to my face.

Feeling that enough time has passed between then and now, I dial the phone, hoping I got the number correct through the haze of my beat-up eyes.

It rings and rings, so I hang up, gathering my strength to try again.

Chapter 26

Serena



“**W**as that him?”

Rue shrugs and hands me the phone. “No caller ID. You don’t have to speak to him if you don’t want to.”

“I don’t know what I want.” Sighing, I sit up in bed, feeling much better than I did a few hours ago. Whatever hangover cure Rue made me seems to have worked. “Sorry that my clothes are too big.”

“Fuck off. I’d give anything for your tits.” She giggles.

“You don’t have to stay. You can go home if you want. Not that I’m trying to get rid of you, but you don’t have to stay.”

“I want to stay, and it’s not that I’m worried you’ll do this again. I believe you when you say you weren’t trying to end it. But like I said, I feel a real friendship here, almost like a sister thing, I guess.”

“Only child too?”

“Yeah, how did you guess? But this is as good for my soul as I think it is for yours.” She pauses. I know what’s coming, and I brace myself. “About what you told me...you need to speak to someone, a therapist or something. You’ve buried it deep, but these things don’t work themselves out.”

“I’m not ready.”

“Okay, but think about it? And please, next time you feel like the walls are closing in, speak to me. I will stop whatever it is I’m doing to listen and be there. I won’t let you get to the point where you need to hurt yourself again.”

“Thanks.”

It’s all I have to say. There is no need for anything else. She gets it and isn’t pushing me.

“So, are you going to speak to Logan? I think he’s going to be calling back any second now.”

“What am I supposed to say?”

“Nothing. Hear what he has to say first.”

“And if we both expect that?”

“Then it will be a fucking awkward phone call.”

I snicker into my hand. “Gee, thanks.”

“Seriously, though. I obviously can’t be one hundred percent accurate, but I feel that your uncle might’ve bent the truth about Logan. I don’t think he ever thought you were a conquest. Not the way he looked when he asked me to check on you.”

“Yeah, well.”

“There’s only one way to find out.” She holds up the ringing phone.

Shaking my head. “He’ll just lie to me.”

“Why? What has he possibly got to gain from lying to you? If it was all a game, he already got his dick in you, so game over, right? Besides, he’s a *man*. A mature man who doesn’t need to play games to get women. Hell, even if this was about a conquest, there will be virgins lining up around the block willing to give it up to him with a few smiles in their direction.”

“I know you’re trying to make me feel better, but that only makes me feel worse,” I groan and flop back to the pillows.

“Jealous?” she jibes.

“Like you have no idea.”

“Then speak to him. Find out what the fuck is going on. The suspense is killing me.”

“You’re an asshole. Go in the other room, and don’t eavesdrop.” Picking up the phone, I shoo her out.

Laughing, she goes, dressed in one of my tees that is way too big for her skinny frame. She closes the door, and I inhale slowly before sliding the bar across to answer the incoming call.

“Hello?”

“Serena.”

His deep, gruff voice sends my blood spiking.

“You sound like shit,” I murmur.

“I look like shit.”

“What happened?”

“You first.”

“A lot. Not all of it to do with you.”

Silence.

“How much of it was because of what I did?”

“None of it. It’s what Quentin decided to tell me on my way home from work yesterday.”

Clenching my jaw, I wait.

“What did he say?”

Okay, no immediate denial, which would’ve smacked of guilt. “He said that I was just a conquest for you. That you were looking into my life to find things to worm your way in, use me, and discard me. His exact words, so I didn’t misconstrue any of it.” I accuse him of this charge before he’s even taken a breath.

“Ouch,” he murmurs. “That is not what I’m doing.”

“Then what are you doing?”

“I’ve fallen hard for you, Serena, and that never happens to me. I’m apathetic toward people. I fuck to give myself a release, but there is nothing in it. No emotions, no need for intimacy. But with you...fuck, when I slid my cock into you, I know all of that changed. You are in my soul, Serena, and there is nothing that will loosen that hold on me. You are forbidden, but I can’t stay away.”

“Forbidden?” I croak, my heart leaping and skipping beats at the rest of his words.

“Your uncle hasn’t taken too kindly to my interest in you. It’s why he tried to warn you off and why he tried to convince me to let you go.”

“What did he say?”

“He didn’t use words.”

Eyes wide, I gulp. “What does that mean?” I whisper.

“Don’t worry about it, angel. Just tell me one thing. Are you okay?”

“I’m all right.”

“That doesn’t sound convincing.”

“There’s a lot going on. I was fragile before all of this. My past...it’s resurfaced, and I’m not dealing with it very well. After being talked to by Quen yesterday, things...got too much. I’m not strong enough, I guess. I’m sorry, I’m a disappointment.” I bring my knees up so I can rest my forehead on them, tears welling in my eyes.

“Please stop saying things like that. You are not and have never been a disappointment. There is nothing you could do or say that would make me

think that, and believe me, that is a revelation to *me*.”

“This is too much, Logan. I’m not ready for anything.”

“Then I’ll wait.”

“Don’t. I don’t know what will happen tomorrow or the day after that, or next month. I’m jobless and have to go back to being a temp after I’d gotten used to the idea of settling down somewhere. Everything has been ripped away from me.”

“Quentin doesn’t dictate to you or me.”

“There was something about the way he said it. He *forbade* me from contacting you or seeing you. I mean, who does that unless they have the means to back it up?” I’m saying too much, but my runaway mouth won’t close. I know something deeper, darker, and fucking scary is going on with my uncle. He showed me a side to him that I have never seen before, and now that I have time to think about it, now that I’m being forced to think about it because of what he did and said, I realize that I look a little bit too much like him and not enough like my parents. What does that mean? Fuck knows. I don’t know anything anymore, except that he scared me, and I don’t want to go against him for fear of what he might do. If Logan says Quen hurt him over this, I can’t put him in that position again.

“I should go.”

“Serena, wait, there are things...dammit. I know what you’re looking for, Serena. I am the man you’re looking for. The savior, the hero of your story. That’s me.”

My heart aches, but I can’t do this. “Bye, Logan.”

I hang up before he can try to convince me not to be afraid. I want to be afraid because it gives me an excuse not to pursue something that is terrifying in its intensity. Logan Carter knows how to use his words. It’s what he does for a living. His ability to convince me to crawl over broken glass for him is what scares me the most.

Scratch that.

What scares me the most is that I would do it, no questions asked.

Chapter 27

Logan



The urge to call her back is clawing at my bashed-in body, but I don't. It will achieve nothing except to possibly push her further away. She says she isn't ready, and while I feel like I've waited my whole jaded life for her, hers is just beginning. I have no business pressuring her or even being a part of it.

Corruption is inevitable.

I don't know how to be any other way than what I am.

Destruction is preferred.

But how can I destroy her when I'm falling for her so deeply?

Sighing, I close my sore eyes and let the exhaustion of the past thirty years drag me under.

* * *

"Logan?"

My eyes snap open. "Huh?"

"Logan, you here?"

"Rose." It's a rasp. My voice is hoarse and as broken as my body. Turning my head painfully, I lift my phone off the nightstand to see it's five o'clock on Monday morning. I remember getting up at some point to pee before falling back into bed. I've slept for too many hours, and I feel like shit for it. My body isn't used to it.

"Logan? Are you all right? It looks like a fucking fight went on down here."

I hear her footsteps on the stairs and her loud gasp when she sees me.

“Fucking hell! What the fuck is going on here?” She strides over and peers down at me. “Who did you piss off?”

Smirking at her accusation, I try for a joke. “Finally told Paddy I wanted to run away with you. He didn’t take it too well.”

She snickers. “Oh, you’re an eejit. You wouldn’t be as pretty if that were the case.”

“Aww, you still think I’m pretty.”

“Fuck off. Tell me what happened.”

“Pissed off the wrong guy.”

“About a girl?”

“You could say that.”

“Ouch.” She pulls back the covers, ignoring my naked cock as she prods my ribs. “Broken.”

“They were strapped, but I needed a shower. Can’t do it myself.”

“I’ll sort you out. I’ve done this more times than I can count. I’ve learned every trick of the trade. Give me an hour, and I’ll have the swelling in your face going down. Let’s get your ribs sorted.”

She bustles off, and a few minutes later, with a lot of swearing from me and yelling by her for me to shut up being a pussy, she’s wrangled me back into some sort of order.

“I’m going to make some poultices with an old Irish recipe. We’ll have you back to fighting fit in no time.”

“I’ll settle for being able to stand up to pee.”

She snorts and hurries off but pauses at the top of the stairs. “Are we expecting him back today?”

“Nah, this happened a couple of days ago. He won’t be back.” *Yet.*

“A couple of days ago? Jesus, Logan. Why didn’t you call me?”

“Truthfully, I’ve been asleep most of the time.”

“Not good. You could be concussed.”

“Probably am.”

She shakes her head, disappearing again, grumbling about how idiotic men are in general. I guess she has a lot of experience with fixing up Paddy after his fights. I’m in good hands.

Wishing I could call Serena again, just to make sure she’s okay, I don’t. The last thing I want to do is pressure her when she’s going through something. I wish I knew what that was, but she won’t tell me. Why would

she? I've given her no reason to be able to trust me. I took what I wanted without really asking her if it was what she wanted too. I'm so used to it being easy. Not once in the last twenty years have I had to work for a woman to open her legs for me. They just do.

I guess that says a lot about me and the women I gravitate towards. But Serena has changed all of that. I hate myself for, let's call a spade a spade here, raping her and not paying any attention to what she was saying to me. It was about me. It was about what *I* wanted. And that is the most significant indicator of all that I'm a selfish dick who needs a time-out. Maybe this lesson that Quen has administered was needed to bring me down a notch or ten.

Grunting, I pick up my real phone when it beeps, shoving the burner under the covers out of sight.

It's a text, but I can't read it. My eyes won't focus, so hoping it's nothing important, I drop the phone on the bed and close my eyes against the dull ache in every single part of my body.

Chapter 28

Serena



“**W**hy hasn’t he called?”

I’ve asked this question a gazillion times.

Rue shrugs, clicking the remote, flicking through all the channels on the TV that she can find.

“You call him.”

“No. I don’t know what to say.”

“Then why do you want him to call you?”

“Fuck. This is ridiculous.”

“You’re telling me.”

I glare at her. “Go home then,” I grouse, trying to snatch the remote off her.

“Nope. I like it here. It’s like a vacation.”

Realizing something belatedly, I nudge her with my elbow. “We could go to your place, seeing as you live with Logan.”

“I don’t live with him. I live underneath him. By three floors.”

“Same thing.”

“Not exactly. But no. You need to be surrounded by your own things.”

“Don’t you want to go to work?”

“Nope. Taken this week off to stay with you.”

I sigh. She is the best friend a girl could have, but I’m climbing the walls, knowing it has everything to do with Logan.

But I still won’t call him. Diving into that well of uncertainty is not what my mind needs right now, even though my body is aching for him.

Rue places the remote down and faces me. “We need to talk about something.”

The blood drains from my face. “What is it?”

“Your uncle. He keeps showing up, so you need to speak to him, even if it’s just to get him to back off.”

“Oh.” I sit back and chew my fingernail, which annoys Rue to no end.

“Stop that. Your nails are a mess.”

“Nervous habit, I guess.”

She sighs. “I know you don’t want to see him after all this, but I get the impression that he isn’t going to stop turning up here.”

“Even more reason to go to yours.”

“If I thought it would help, I’d be the first to help you pack, but all it will do is bring you closer to the one guy you’re supposed to be staying away from.”

“So you’re keeping me safe from myself?”

“I’m keeping you safe from your uncle. No offense, but he sounds like a bit of a psycho. Especially if he...” she lowers her voice, “...beat up Logan over this.”

Suddenly, I stop being mad at her for being so obtuse. “Yeah, he scares me. I’m not sure I want to be alone with him.”

“I won’t leave you alone with him. I mean, I’ll be in the other room, but I’m not going anywhere.”

“Promise?”

She grips my fingers and kisses them. “Promise. But this bad penny needs dealing with. I can’t keep being your gatekeeper. He’s going to get pissed off soon.”

“I know.” Sighing, I reach for my phone and text Quentin to come over.

If anything, I want to find out what he did to Logan.

It doesn’t surprise me when fifteen minutes later, the buzzer goes for downstairs.

Exchanging a worried glance with Rue, she nods and disappears into the bedroom, leaving me to let Quentin up to the apartment and then inside. I really would prefer he stays in the corridor, but that doesn’t sound like the best idea if we start talking about what he did to Logan.

When I open the door, his expression shocks me. He is distraught.

“Serena.”

Folding my arms over my chest, determined not to let him get to me, I ask, “What do you want? I think you made yourself quite clear on Friday, and to be honest, I have nothing else to say to you.”

“Please, can I come in?”

Huffing, I step back, wary as fuck. I don’t trust him. Not anymore.

He enters the apartment, and I shut the door but don’t move from the hallway, wanting this over with.

“I’m sorry,” he says. “I never intended for anything I said to hurt you so badly. If I’d known you were this involved with him, I’d have handled it with more care.”

Clenching my jaw, I know he’s set me a trap. I might be young and have less experience of the world than him, but I’m not an idiot. Not when I have details on the other side of the story.

“I’m not involved with him. I never was. This was your thing. All I wanted was to get on with my life and my job, that *you* gave me and that I was starting to enjoy. You hurt me by treating me like a child, by saying things that were, quite frankly, appalling to say to anyone, not to mention acting like you have any say over my life. This...” I hold up my arms so he can see the bandages, “...was nothing to do with what you said or did. I have stuff going on in my life that you don’t know about and is none of your business, so you can absolve yourself of any wrongdoing and show yourself out.”

“Serena. There is so much you don’t know.”

“And I don’t want to. I want to go back to work when I feel up to it at Carter & Jeffers if they’ll have me back after this shitshow, and I want you to leave Logan alone. He’s done nothing but be a bit of a dick to his assistant, which I hear is nothing new.”

He shakes his head. “That’s not all he’s done,” he says darkly, and I fear we’ve just trodden in a pile of crap the size of a small mountain.

“Whatever you think he’s done or not, it’s none of your business. I can take care of myself.” Okay, so standing here with bandages over my self-harm wounds, we both know that’s a lie. But I’m having a weak moment. I’m stronger than he thinks I am.

“I’m not backing down from this, Rena. He is bad for you, and I mean it when I say you are forbidden from seeing or speaking to him again.”

Glaring at him, I want to say more, but what can I say? Do I really want to test him and find out what will happen if I go over to Logan’s right now? Rue is right. He’s showing himself as a bit of psycho, and I don’t know, maybe part of the mafia or something. He’s certainly acting like some kind of gang leader who bullies people into getting his own way.

“I’m fine. My life is fine. Please leave now.”

He looks like he wants to say something else, but he presses his lips together and brushes past me, standing sentry by the door.

“If you go to him, I will kill him. Are we clear?”

Mouth agape, I watch him yank open the door and stalk out, the apple guy silently following him down the stairs. I have nothing to say to that. I’m shocked and horrified that he would even make a threat so enormous.

But deep down, I know it’s not a threat. It’s a promise. Quentin has shown his true colors, and to say I’m scared is an understatement.

With shaking hands, I close the door quietly and slide the bolt into place. Stepping back, I start to unravel the bandage from my left arm, winding it around and around until my arm is bare, and then I do the other one.

“Are you okay?” Rue asks, coming quietly back into the room. “What did he say?”

I want to tell her, but I daren’t. I don’t want anything happening to her, so I have to protect her from this weird darkness that has fallen suddenly over my family and over my life.

“I told him he had nothing to do with this, so he can go away and forgive himself.”

“And that’s it?”

“In a nutshell. I understand if this freaks you out, but having them on is freaking me out, and I want them off.” I turn to her, dropping my arms to my sides, my fists full of bandages.

“It doesn’t bother me.”

I nod and cross into the kitchen to chuck them away.

“Do you really want to go to mine?” she asks quietly. “Will it help you to see him?”

“I don’t want to see him. Whatever it was, it is over. I want to move forward.” I say the lie with a breaking heart but a bright smile, so she believes me.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Positive thoughts only now. I’ve had my pity party, and now I want to be a normal girl again, not the freak who can’t handle her shit.”

“Well, that’s relative,” Rue starts, but I shush her.

“We’ll take this week off and do some shopping and go out to eat and maybe catch a movie. I want to have fun and put all this dark shit to bed.”

Her brown eyes stare at me, no doubt trying to ascertain if I’ve lost the

plot or am actually shaking this off and moving forward.

“Sounds like a plan to me, boo. But how about today we order a pizza, watch a film and light up the city tomorrow, hmm?”

“I can live with that,” I say with a smile and actually feel it in my heart. My soul, on the other hand, is weeping.

Chapter 29

Logan



“I feel like a fucking mummy.”

“Well, ya look like one too, so unless you got a hot date, shut the fuck up and sit down.”

“Rose,” I whine, sounding like a child, but I must look shocking. Call me vain, but yeah, here we are. My face is bandaged up with old Irish healing herb poultices to bring down the swelling. It’s working, and the pain isn’t as unbearable, but two days later, I could really do with just being a hundred percent fixed up and back to work. Working from home has never been my thing. Although the lack of company appeals to me, I feel I have a lack of motivation. Home is home. Work is work.

“Sit,” she commands, and I do as she says, grateful when there is a knock at the door.

My heart leaps into my throat as I sit up straighter. “Rue,” I murmur. Please let it be Rue. There is absolutely no way I can allow myself to hope it is Serena standing on the other side of the door.

Rising to answer it, I stall halfway, hovering over the sofa, when Rose yells, “Sit yer fecking arse down, you fecking stubborn cunt. I’ve got it.”

Holding my hands up in surrender, I plant my ass back down, turning to face the front door with bated breath.

“Oh, it’s you. Come on in, I guess.”

Frowning, I see it’s Guy. I’m not sure how I feel about him right now. His action got my ass handed to me by the uncle of the woman I’m falling in love with. Ignoring the enormity of that wayward thought, I sit back and fold my arms over my chest when he lets out a loud guffaw at the sight of me.

“Why did you let him in?” I complain to Rose. “And why are you even

here?”

“You’ve not been answering my messages.”

“Been kind of busy not being able to see.”

“What happened?”

“A lot. But none of it is important. What have you got for me?”

“A lot. Can we go upstairs?”

The drop in his volume gets me to my feet. “Sorry, Rose, I’m taking this off for now. You can wrap me up again later.”

Pulling the bandages off and leaving them on the coffee table in an herbal-smelling heap, I lead Guy upstairs. My sight is much better, but I’m still struggling to focus on small words like text messages.

Turning to face him, his wince does nothing to assure me I look any better, even though I know I do. I was an absolute mess a few days ago.

My ribs ache from the trek up the stairs, making it look like I’m in no pain, so I fold my arms over my abdomen, gripping the side of my white tee for support.

Guy lowers his voice even more than before. “It’s big. They found him.”

It takes me a second to register what he said before the blood rushes to my head, making it swim in a tumultuous whirlpool of nauseating emotion. “What?”

He nods. “You look like you need to sit.”

Stumbling to the bed, I lower myself, my heart hammering in my chest.

“His name is Clifford Stanley. He is currently incarcerated at the supermax in Glenridge for multiple counts of murder.”

Remaining as still as a statue, I have no idea what to do with this information. “When?” I croak eventually.

“Five years ago. He was completely off the grid until he made a massive mistake, and they got his fingerprints on file...”

He explains it to me, but I barely hear a word. All I know is that they picked up a partial from the handle of the knife, and it came back a match.

From this jumble of words, I have deduced two things. One mostly, but two. I can’t get to him in Glenridge. Solitaire might, but that’s a stretch I’m not willing to risk my life for. Not now, not when Serena needs me. The revelation that I’m putting her needs before my own is vomit-inducing in itself, but that’s where I’ve landed, and that’s where I’m staying, apparently.

“Put it back,” I choke, interrupting him, voicing my second thought.

“What?”

“Put it back into evidence. If he is already serving, I can get him the death sentence.”

“I don’t...I can’t...not in my wheelhouse. If you want me to hack the evidence room, I’m your man, but sneaking in to replace stolen evidence, which by the way, has massive chain breakage if it’s caught, is a no. You need to find someone else.”

“Where is it?”

“DWP labs.”

Nodding, I get to my feet. I guess it’s time to sweep everything under the carpet, grab hold of my balls and call Quen as if nothing has happened.

“Have it prepped for pick up in the exact same state as when it arrived. Do a sweep while you’re here as well, please.”

“No, need, you’re clean. Also, you might need to reset your internet in about two minutes.”

“What does that mean?”

“Just do it and know any bugs that are here are dead. I’ll clean up another time. Your housekeeper scares me.”

Hurting my face by letting out a loud laugh which I sorely needed, I nod. “I’ll tell her. She’ll be pleased.”

“No doubt.”

Guy disappears down the stairs, and I pick up my phone. I made a grave error in judgment by calling Serena the other day. But I’ve had no blowback, so I can only imagine Quen doesn’t know about it.

Dialing, he picks up a moment later. “Logan.”

“I need your help.”

“Oh?”

“The gift you gave me needs to be returned. No questions asked, just back where it came from.”

“Where is it?”

“DWP.”

“Consider it done. I’ll be in touch.”

He hangs up as I let out a low growl. I’m so done with him and his favors owed, but this is now out of my hands. While not impossible, killing an inmate at Glenridge is too much of a chain to get done. I can use my influence to reopen the case and go about this the right way. Putting my revenge to bed destroys my soul that bit more, and I give a thought to my family to whom justice is owed. But I know Serena would want me to do this

the right way.

My feelings for her have surpassed anything else, mainly because I *have* feelings for her. Even my revenge was a cold-blooded lack of emotion. More a desperate need to punish those who inflicted damage on me. It's hard to define, but it comes back to want and need. I want revenge, but I *need* Serena.

Chapter 30

Serena



“I ’m not going unless you go.”

Rue's flat-out statement makes me feel bad that I'm hesitating. It's Wednesday. Five days have passed since my breakdown, and I feel fine. I wouldn't say great, but I'm normal for me. By all accounts, I *should* want to go out, but there is something stopping me. I think I'd be fine if it were just Rue and me. We've been to lunch, we've been to the movies and shopping, but as soon as she said Macy had invited us out for drinks, I've shut down again. I don't think I'm ready to be around people in the sense of having to smile and pretend.

“Go. I'll be fine.”

“No. It's not that I don't think you'll not be fine, I just don't want to go and have fun while you're sitting here on your own. That makes me a sucky friend.”

“No, it makes you a normal human. You've been holed up with me for days. Go and have some fun.”

“Nope.”

“God, has anyone ever told you what a pain in the ass you are?”

“Not for a while, so say it again.” Her wicked smirk makes me laugh out loud.

“You are a giant pain in the ass.”

“Ah, and my work here is done.”

“Fine,” I grumble. “I'll go. But the second I want to go home, I'm going. No questions, no cajoling, just me going home.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“Where to?”

“Belmont’s. It’s her favorite place because she always manages to find someone to hook up with there.”

“Fair enough.” My heart nearly shatters at the mention of hooking up. I want to hook up with Logan so badly, it almost brings tears to my eyes. But I have to forget about him. Even Rue has to believe that I’m over him. I hate deceiving her, but Quen scared me more than I’ve ever been in my life. More so even than when Mr. Todd had his hands all over me. I’m not sure what that says about my haunted past, or about my uncle, or even about me, but his words were...chilling. He left me in no doubt that he would follow through and hurt Logan, *kill* him if I didn’t stay away. So here’s me, staying away.

“Okay, so we need to talk.” Rue stands up and starts to pace. “Are we over the whole Logan thing? Because if we are, then we need to find someone you can have some fun with.”

I love her ‘we,’ but this is decidedly the worst idea ever.

“No, Rue. I don’t have fun.”

“Because you aren’t over Logan? And I don’t mean *fun*. I mean, you know, dates and food and laughs.”

I have to admit, it sounds nice. It’s never not been something nice. I want it. I want to live and have fun, but I need love before I have *fun*. I’m pretty sure I love Logan. It’s different from how it was with my ex. He was familiar, and we fell into a relationship from being friends first. With Logan, it’s the exact opposite. It’s wild and all-encompassing. It’s brutal and gut-wrenching. Savage and seductive.

“I am over Logan,” I say steadily. “It was this weird thing, and now it’s done. I can’t be with him, so what’s the point, right?”

“Right.” She doesn’t believe a word I’m saying.

“So, I accept your offer to find me some fun.”

Her slightly surprised look tells me everything I’ve done in the last few days to convince her Logan is no more has been fruitless.

“I’m going home to get something to wear. Will you be okay on your own for a bit?”

“Yes, Mom,” I snicker. “Go, do your thing. I’ll be here, trying to find something to wear.” *And trying to convince myself to pull money out of the savings account to pay for this night out.*

With a firm nod, after some bustling about to make sure I have food and drinks at my disposal, she leaves, and I breathe a sigh of relief. Not because I don’t love her, but because I’m exhausted at playing the I’m Okay game. I

mean, I am okay about life in general, but not about Logan.

Stumbling into my bedroom, I allow the tears of frustration and longing to pour out, my ugly sobbing over having pent up all of this with the added fear and uncertainty about who my parents are or aren't, floods from my soul as I flop face down on the bed. I haven't spoken to my parents in days. And I don't want to. I don't want my mom to know about this incident, and I don't want to speak to her because I will blurt out if she's raising me as her daughter when I'm really her niece.

Pulling myself together after more minutes than I'd like, I wash my face in the bathroom sink, smiling at Rue's cosmetics strewn all over the tiny counter. Needing to do this for her and for me, I march back into the bedroom and throw the closet doors open, searching for something, anything that will look cute but cover up the hideous scars on my arms. They usually don't bother me so much, but then I've never had a reason to hide them before. I know Rue says she's okay with seeing them, but I've been in long sleeves for the last few days since I removed the bandages to save her from having to look at them.

Almost as if I'm compelled to look at them now, I remove my top and glare at the offending marks that make finding something to wear extra difficult in my meager wardrobe.

Eventually, I land on a black, bell-sleeved top with laces at the cleavage that is about five years old and a denim skirt that I forgot all about buying at a market a few years back. It's not the best, but I'll look okay.

Digging out my flat, black ankle boots, I'm happy with them so I don't look too sexy in heels. I don't want to draw too much attention to myself because I really don't want to have any unnecessary conversations. I also hope I don't run into Paul again.

* * *

A few hours later, after a leisurely shower and getting myself ready, Rue returns to collect me and drop off her overnight bag filled to the brim with fresh clothes.

"When you want to leave, say the word, and we'll go," she says, hooking her arm through mine as we head out to the taxi.

"Thanks. You look hot."

“So do you.”

She doesn't draw attention to the sleeves, we just climb into the taxi and head off to the bar, where Macy is already engaging in some hooking up of the tamer variety with a bunch of guys who are fawning all over her, Suz and Tiff.

Exchanging a slightly nervous glare with Rue, we stride over and immediately find ourselves the center of attention with drinks being thrust at us, compliments thrown our way, and lusty looks through hooded eyes.

But none of it means anything to me because Logan isn't here.

Chapter 31

Logan



Standing outside Belmont's, the rain falling in a light drizzle, the cold night air surrounding me, I stare at Serena. She is laughing, happy, and flirting with some guy who looks like he won the lottery.

Namely, because he has.

He has Serena's undivided attention and no threat hanging over his head. To him, she isn't forbidden. She is the low-hanging fruit he can reach out and grab with both hands to devour as and when he sees fit.

It sparks a rage in me that has previously been unknown.

Clenching my fist, wanting to smash his face so badly that it aches.

Stepping back, needing to get the sight of her with another man out of my mind before I kill him, I turn and start walking back to my apartment. This was a mistake. I came out with my face still a mess, my ribs still splintered because being in the apartment alone after giving up the one thing I was holding onto was eating away at my insides.

Without that, I have nothing to anchor me. Feeling myself spiral is shocking and terrifying. I need something to ground me. I need Serena.

Without thinking, I spin on the sidewalk and stride back to the bar. Stopping dead when Serena and her friends tumble out the door, laughing and tipsy, I falter.

She freezes when she sees me. Her eyes go wide, and she looks around as if expecting Quen to jump out and drag her away.

"Logan," Rue says steadily. "Turn around and go home."

Serena's gaze locks onto mine. Her eyes are swimming with so much emotion; I know she is just as lost without me as I am without her.

"Come," Rue says, tugging on her hand.

“Stay out of this, Rue. Walk away.”

“It’s okay,” Serena whispers.

With a sharp huff, Rue takes her friends and backs off but stays close.

Walking two paces, places me in her personal space. Her gaze takes in my face, and her lower lip trembles.

“Are you okay?” she asks quietly.

Shaking my head, I hold my hand up to her face, hovering it over her hair, before I clench my fist and snarl, “Did you let that prick touch you?”

Serena’s mouth drops open in astonishment at my harsh question. “Excuse me?”

Gripping her upper arm tighter than I should have, I growl, “Did that prick touch you?”

Fury welling up inside her, she yanks her arm from my grasp. “What’s it to you?”

“Everything. You belong to me, Serena, but if I can’t have you, no one can. Do you understand me, or do I have to drag you back to my apartment and chain you up to keep you away from men who want to bury their cocks in your pussy?”

“Logan,” she pants, her fear hitting me in the heart, but it’s too late for that. I’m too desperate, too filled with anger and frustration and a driving lust that makes me slam her up against the wall and press my body into her.

“Hey!” Rue shouts, marching over. “Get your fucking hands off her.”

“Stay out of it, Rue. This isn’t your business.”

“She is my business, so unless you want me to call the cops, back the fuck off.”

She makes a muffled noise, and then a hand slams against my back before whoever dares to touch me drags me away from Serena.

“If you want to keep that hand, remove it from me now,” I state my gaze still on Serena. She is stock-still, her hand to her mouth as she remains motionless.

“Get away from her,” the guy who was drooling all over her earlier snarls, shoving me around to face him.

He doesn’t know what he just got in between.

“Wait!” Serena says.

But it’s too late. I’m too far gone. I bunch my hand into a fist and smash this dipshit in the nose. “If you fucking touched her, I will kill you,” I hiss.

“Logan!” Serena shrieks, panic in her tone. “Fuck! Stop this. He didn’t

touch me.”

“No, but he wanted to, didn’t you, asshole?” I haul him closer to me with a hand fisted in his shirt. “You wanted to shove your cock into her, even though she’s mine.”

“Whoa!” he says, holding his hands up, blood dripping from his nose. “I didn’t know she was taken. She didn’t say.”

I shove him away from me and turn back to her. Anger lights up her eyes, but behind them is a driving lust that stirs my cock into action. Reaching for her, I grab her arm and haul her away, taking her away from her friends.

“Serena!” Rue cries, following us, but her friends hold her back, terrified. “Serena!”

Serena looks over at her friend and then back at me.

She makes her choice in a split second.

“I’ll be okay. I’ll see you at home, Rue.”

“Serena,” Rue barks.

“I know,” she says, stopping and drawing me to a halt. “But I can’t stay away.”

“Fucking hell, Serena,” Rue whispers.

Serena smiles and turns her back on her friend, allowing me to continue dragging her away like some sort of fucking caveman. But she’s brought that out in me. Hauling her into an alley, not even having the patience to get her to my apartment, I shove her up against the wall, face first, and press my body into her again. My hard cock is digging into her as she squirms against me.

Fisting her loose hair, I tug roughly, drawing her head back. She gasps but doesn’t struggle to get away.

Not this time.

This time she is ready for me.

My hand goes under her skirt, shoving her panties aside so I can feel her shaven pussy. Flicking her clit, I lick her neck, biting her softly before I purr, “There’s my good girl.”

“Ah!” she cries softly, riding my palm as I cup her between her legs.

“Fuck, angel. I’ve missed you. It’s all worth it. Everything is worth it to be here with my fingers inside you.” I thrust deeply, pressing my thumb to her clit.

“Logan,” she croaks, her voice hoarse with longing.

“Do you want me, beautiful angel? Do you want my cock inside you?”

“Yes.”

“Mm, such a good girl.”

I remove my hand from her to release my aching cock.

“Do you care that we are somewhere everyone can see us?”

“No.”

“Is that how much you want me, baby girl? You’re willing to let everyone see me with my cock in your sweet pussy?”

“Yes, Logan, please. I need you.”

“I’ve waited for those words, baby girl. Fuck, I need you.”

Guiding my cock just inside her entrance, tugging her hair tighter as I nuzzle her neck, she trembles in my arms.

“Logan…”

“That’s it. Good girl. Take my dick inside you. Let me ride you hard so you can come all over my thick cock.”

“Ah.”

She arches her back. I wish I could pinch her nipples, twist them and play with her, but there is no time. My body is insistent, wanting her right now. She pushes back, taking my cock deep into her with one movement, feeling her drench my length with a whimper.

“Does that feel good, angel?”

“Mm.”

“You feel so good around my cock. Fuck, you’re so hot pressed up against the wall as I ride you.”

“Logan, please.”

Slamming my hips against her, I drive my cock into her before withdrawing and plunging into her wetness again and again. I’m ready, so ready to fire my cum inside her. I hold on, waiting for her.

“Baby girl, does that feel good?”

“Yes,” she screams. “Logan.”

I pinch her clit, twisting it gently, and feel her shiver before she tenses up and her legs buckle. Her orgasm is beautiful. Her silent cry is magnificent.

“You’re gorgeous when you come all over my cock. It makes me want to fill your pussy with my cum. Do you want that, angel?”

“Uhng,” she pants.

With one last forceful thrust, I shoot my load into her. “Fuck, yes, angel. That’s it. You’re such a good girl for taking my cum inside your hot pussy. You’re *my* good girl, aren’t you, Serena? My good girl filled with my cum.

Fuck. So hot. You're so hot."

She whimpers as I stop moving, keeping my cock inside her as I rasp against her neck, kissing her softly. I want my mouth on hers. I want to kiss her lips. But now isn't the time. That time will come.

Pulling my cock out of her, I move her panties back into place and whisper. "Fill your panties with my cum, Serena. It turns me on thinking about your pussy covered, sticky, and warm." Sliding my hands over her hips, I pull her back against me. "Does it feel good?"

"Yes."

"You're mine, Serena. No other man will have you."

"No."

"Come home with me."

"Yes."

Stashing my dick back in my pants, I take her hand and lead her out of the alley, taking her back to my tower where she will be safe from harm, safe from any man who lusts after her and wants to touch her. Safe from everything.

Except me.

Chapter 32

Serena



The apartment Logan leads me to isn't that far from Belmont's. Maybe five minutes, and we were already halfway there when he dragged me into an alley to have his wicked way with me. There was no way I was missing out on the good parts this time. I know what to expect with him now. He enjoys the spontaneity of sex wherever and whenever he wants it. It's something I can get on board with because I want to be with him, no matter what. I'm not even that concerned about Quentin leaping out of the shadows anymore. Logan makes me feel safe. He has the presence and strength to protect me and the temper to see it through. I hope Dave is all right. I'll have to call him and apologize once I can get my head on straight.

Silently, Logan and I climb into the elevator, and he stabs the button for upstairs. It's like neither of us wants to talk for fear of breaking whatever this is between us.

That changes once we are inside his gorgeous penthouse apartment overlooking the city.

"Wow," I murmur at the view of the river and the city lights. "Much nicer than my end."

He doesn't reply but pulls me closer, tangling his fingers in my hair. "Serena."

Wanting him to kiss me, I tilt my head back, but he doesn't press his lips to mine. Instead, he traces his thumb over them, taking in every inch of my face.

"You're so beautiful."

Shyly biting my bottom lip, I bring my hand to his face. "You've looked better."

He snorts with amusement and pulls me over to the sofa. “No kidding, angel.”

We sit down, facing each other. He leans his elbow on the back of the sofa and watches me, making me feel awkward.

“What?”

“That guy? You didn’t answer me.”

“Dave?” I splutter, surprised we’re still on this.

“Dave? He has a name?”

“Obviously,” I retort. “I know him from high school. You don’t have to be worried about him.”

“Ah, I see. Still, I meant what I said.”

“Say it again,” I murmur, edging closer, needing this jealousy, this possessiveness. It’s making me feel alive and *wanted*.

“If I can’t have you, no one can, angel.”

“Are you worried? About Quen?”

He pauses, inhaling deeply. “Are you?”

“Yes.”

“Is it going to stop you?”

“No.”

“Then we will figure this out. I’m not losing you as soon as I found you, Serena.”

“I don’t want that either, but what are we supposed to do? I don’t want him hurting you again, or worse. This is... it makes me feel sick to know that someone in my family hurt you this badly.”

“Only because I let him. If he comes at me again, I don’t give a fuck who he is, he won’t get his hands on me again.”

“Why did you let him?” I ask quietly. I wouldn’t take a beating if I had the means to prevent it from happening.

“Many reasons, most you won’t understand yet.”

“Then explain it.”

“One day.”

“You felt you deserved it?”

He narrows his eyes and glares at me in an annoyed way, but not angry. “It’s complicated.”

“What a cop-out.”

He snickers, playing with my fingers, stroking my palm with his thumb, and generally setting my body on fire with his touches. “I adore you, angel.”

You are my good girl, aren't you?"

I lower my eyes. "Yes."

"Do you like it when I call you that?"

"Good girl? Yes."

"Mine," he growls.

Letting out a soft pant, I nod, unable to form words right now.

"I'm so proud of you for standing up to your friends," he murmurs, bringing my hand to his lips to kiss lightly.

I feel like I could float if he let go of me. My self-esteem has skyrocketed, and it makes what I did to myself seem so foolish and ridiculous. He must see my face fall because he grips my chin and lifts my head up to meet his gaze.

"Are you okay, Serena?"

"I'm okay."

"What did you do on Friday night that scared Rue and Quentin so much?"

"I'd rather not."

"Tell me," he demands. "No secrets. Serena. If you keep things from me, it will make me angry that you don't trust me. You trust me, don't you?"

How can I answer that? I don't even really know him. But all I have to do is stare into those magnificent blue eyes and see his worry to know I do. "Yes."

"Then tell me."

Swallowing, I pull my hands away from him, missing his touch, feeling cold at the loss of it. Running my hands up my arms, I push my sleeves up and then hold my arms out to show him.

His sharp intake of breath, followed by a mask of complete sorrow, breaks my heart. I feel worthless for disappointing him so badly.

"I'm sorry," I mutter, dropping my arms and standing up.

He grabs my hand and hauls me down. "No," he says quietly, brushing my hair away from my face. "I'm sorry, Serena. I'm sorry I wasn't there for you when you needed me. I'm sorry that I wasn't there for you all the times you needed me."

"Ooh," I gasp, his words hitting my sweet spot with such accuracy I nearly come on the spot. "You're here now."

He cups my face but still doesn't kiss me. I'm desperate for it, for him. I want to taste him. I want to devour him. "I will be there for you always. You never need to worry about being alone anymore, Serena. I am the one you've been looking for. I am the one who will save you. Do you believe me?"

“Yes.”

I feel so stupid. I can't seem to form proper sentences around him. I'm a panting, sweaty, inarticulate mess with fresh self-harm scars and a beat-up soul. What does he see in me?

Lowering my eyes again and withdrawing, he takes my chin and tilts my head again.

“I understand what it's like to be haunted, baby girl. Tell me, who hurt you?”

Shaking my head, I choke up. “I can't. Not yet,” I whisper.

“I will avenge you, my sweet, sweet angel. You don't deserve to carry this burden around with you. It's dragging you into the darkness, and I don't want you there with me. I want you to be in the light, to flourish and grow into a spectacular woman who has nothing to fear.”

Cupping his face, I dare to ask, “Who hurt you, angel?”

He laughs sadly. “How about this? You tell me yours, and I'll tell you mine.”

“That's not fair.”

“I'm not pressuring you. You will do that to yourself depending on how badly you need to know about me.”

“Very badly.”

“Then you have some thinking to do. I demand absolute and total trust, Serena. No secrets, no fantasies left untold. I want you stripped bare for me to see every part of you. I want you to rip open your soul and bleed into mine so that I don't know where I begin and you end, and in return, I will do the same. Can you do that, angel?”

With my heart pounding in my ears at his delicious words, I shiver. “Yes.”

“Good girl,” he murmurs, fisting his hand in my hair. “You're so brave. So beautiful. I'm so proud of you for so many reasons, but fighting your darkness is difficult. I know, and I'll be there with you every step of the way, reminding you how amazing you are. I will make up for all the times I wasn't there.”

“Logan,” I croak, tears welling up. “I need you.”

“That makes me so happy to hear, angel. I need you too. You soothe the savage beast inside me. Without you, I'm lost.”

Wanting to kiss him, wanting to climb into his lap to ride him all night long, I know I have to get back to Rue, or she will be frantic. A phone call

won't cut it. And I won't say that the thought of Quen showing up and killing Logan isn't constantly pestering me, either.

"I should go," I murmur reluctantly.

He nods and stands up. "Wait here."

Looking around his apartment as he runs up the stairs, I note how immaculate it is. I'm such a slob compared to him. He is everything I'm not. Again, I wonder why he is doing this. Why does he say he wants me?

"Take this," he says when he returns, holding a small black phone out to me. "It's a burner. I'll call you on it and message you several times a day to make sure you're okay. If you ever need me, the number you can reach me on is in there. Don't show it to anyone, not even Rue, okay, baby girl?"

"Okay," I say, taking it and standing up. "When will I see you again?"

"Soon. I can't stay away now that you're so close, but there is a masked party on Saturday. Ask Rue to be her plus one, and I'll see you there; in the meantime, I'll find a way to see you."

"I hate this sneaking around."

"We will be together soon. I promise you."

He leads me to the front door. Part of me wishes he'd protested and begged me to stay. It makes me insecure again that he wants me to leave. But when I look into his eyes and see them filled with such longing and sadness that we have to part, it washes all the doubt away.

"I'll make sure you get home safe," he murmurs.

I shake my head. "No, stay here. It's okay. I'll grab a cab. The last thing I want is Quen to find out about this. He will go ballistic. Fucker," I add under my breath.

Logan laughs softly. "Not much longer, baby girl. You will be mine out in the open, your uncle and his threats be damned. But no, I'll see you home."

"Please, stay here. We've already risked too much."

"You don't know what you're asking me."

His intense gaze bores into mine, and I nearly give in, but his presence isn't required.

"I'll be fine," I murmur and turn to the elevator before he has a chance to protest again, or I decide not to leave and throw myself at him to ravage as he sees fit.

As the door slides shut, I press the button for three floors down, and when they open, I see Rue pacing up and down outside an open apartment door, checking her phone impatiently.

I smile, knowing she'd come home to wait for me.

“Hey!” she practically shouts. “Fuck! What is going on?”

She doesn't wait for me to answer, she just grabs my wrist and drags me into her apartment, closing the door quickly and quietly before she turns to me, demanding answers.

Chapter 33

Logan



Hiding my smirk, I close the door after the elevator doors close. She thinks she got away with that, but I know one thing.

Holding my real phone up, I flick to the app for the GPS tracker that has been slotted into the battery case of the burner phone and watch as I know exactly where she's going. I'm not wrong. She is directly below me by three floors.

And that's why I let her go.

There is absolutely no way she would've walked out of here alone if she were leaving the building.

But now she thinks I'm chill and will let her do things on her own when in reality, it is the exact opposite. If anything, I'm even more possessive of her than I was an hour ago. Luckily, I trust her with Rue.

But only because of who she is.

Pouring myself a Scotch from the bottle that seems to be permanently out on the side now to dull the pain in my face and ribs, I take a savoring sip, closing my eyes at the pleasant burn of the alcohol mingled with the extremely satisfying memory of Serena pushing her ass back to encase my cock in her pussy.

"Fuck," I breathe. I'm ready to go with her again, and I wish we could've, but there will be time. Plans need to be made, and orders defied. But I'm prepared to leave Solitaire over this because if I see only one way out...I'm taking it. Logan Carter doesn't get trapped. I'm like a snake and will find a way to slither out every single time.

Crossing to the safe, I move the painting and unlock it, staring at the gun. My fingerprints aren't on it. Shelley's are. And wherever she is, if she

survived, she will find herself with some explaining to do. If not, well, my hands are clean.

Speaking of which, she is a loose end that has escaped my attention the last few days. Guy hasn't checked in, and I need to know if he's found her yet.

Sending a message, I check the app again to make sure Serena is still at Rue's, noticing how much time has passed. I was ruminating over my plans for longer than I realized.

A firm knock at the door makes me look up and frown. Striding over, I pocket the phone and open the door, half expecting Quen to be standing there.

"Rue," I say, stepping back. "What can I do for you?"

She shoves me aside. "You're a fucking dick."

"I know, usually. But why now?"

I slam the door shut and watch as she strides over to the terrace and slides the door open, stepping out into the cold night. Having no choice but to follow her, I do, leaning in the doorway as she stares out over the city, her hands on the railing.

"You know you are messing up over her."

"She's worth it."

"Not to me!" she hisses, her temper flaring, but then she calms instantly and smiles. "Not to my parents. Serena is special, I get it. I do. I was never meant to become so involved, but she is like a sister to me. I care deeply for her, which is astonishing, but it makes me fiercely protective of her. My parents sent me here to audit you, Logan, to see if you are fit to move up the ranks past Quentin. But right now, you are making it very difficult for me to recommend this course of action."

"Oh, so that's why you're here," I chuckle softly. "I did wonder why Viktor and Francesca allowed their heir to become a receptionist at a law firm a hundred miles from Coe Bay."

"Well, now you know. I'm only telling you this, so you get the bigger picture. I'm here covertly; no one knows who I am apart from you."

"Well, Quentin knows."

"What?" she spits out. "You told him?"

"I had to. You shouted out your full name while he was standing right here, for fuck's sake."

She presses her lips together. "Dammit," she mutters. "Does he have any

idea why?”

I shake my head. “He was still talking about me taking his place when he moved up. I’m guessing Vik and Fran have decided otherwise.” The Di’Castellos *are* Solitaire insofar as humans go. No one is higher up than them, except for one man. I knew Rue coming here had something to do with Solitaire, but I didn’t question it because who am I to question anything the higher-ups do? Plus, it never really interested me. If I thought about it at all a few years ago, I probably assumed she was here for Quen. But I’m starting to get the feeling she has no idea who he even is or was until she befriended Serena. The sector she comes from is separate, and this isn’t an everyone knows everyone kind of deal. In fact, it’s the exact opposite.

“You know,” I say casually. “If I get even a whiff of betrayal from you towards Serena, I *will* kill you.”

“Oh, I know,” she says. “Like the guy in the alley, Paul, was it? Like poor dumb Dave earlier. You’re losing your shit, Logan, and my parents don’t like shit being lost. They like it all packaged up in a neat little pile of crap that can be swept up with no mess, no fuss. Am I making myself clear?”

“You assume I want what you’re offering. This is the first I’ve heard of it, and the only reason you’ve come clean is because of Serena, so you’ll forgive me if I’m a little hesitant to ask, ‘how high.’”

She grimaces at me before looking back over the city. “Fair enough. I hear you. You want details?”

“Not really. What I want is Quen to leave Serena and me alone.”

“I can’t make that happen. If I could, he would be out of her life after everything that’s happened in the last few days. She is sweet and kind; she doesn’t deserve to be dragged under.”

“Isn’t that what you’re doing by lying to her?”

“I’m not lying to her,” she says quietly. “Everything she knows about me is the truth.”

“Except that you’re a Secret Society princess with a very detailed undercover life.”

“I said, everything she knows about me. The real stuff,” she says stiffly.

I give her a startled look before straightening up. “You want to tell her, don’t you?”

“I can’t.”

“Your parents are hardly going to kill you for spilling the secret.”

“It will be out of their hands. You know how this works.”

“Then recruit her.”

She looks back at me, pushing her lips out in a pout that I guess some would call sexy. To me, it’s just a facial expression.

“You’re trying, aren’t you? That’s your end goal, here.”

“No, my end goal is to get your ass moved up the chain. But based on current events, that’s not happening. In fact, you’re headed for the shredder.”

“Ouch.”

“You told her to ask me to be my plus one for the masked ball. Are you fucking out of your mind? You know that high-ranking members of Solitaire will be there.”

“Only because they’re on my board of directors. Still my company, Rue. Don’t forget that.”

“How could I forget? I work there.”

“What a joke.”

“Fuck you. I do a fucking good job, and you know it.”

“Oh, you do a great job. But it’s not surprising, really, when the most vicious person in the room currently isn’t me, now is it? It kind of dims the brightness of your guard dog capabilities when you probably threaten them with an evisceration followed by a Colombian necktie.”

She smirks. It’s cold, cruel, and utterly beautiful. Not in the sexual sense, but it speaks to me, nonetheless. “Well, go with what you know, yes?”

“Always. Hurt her, and I will do all of that to you and more.”

“Never,” she hisses. “And if *you* hurt her, I think my reputation precedes me. Get your shit together, Logan,” she says, brushing past me. “Before Quentin Livingstone catches on that not all is as it seems.”

“Noted. Goodnight, Rue. Close the door on your way—”

It slams, and I turn to glare contemplatively at it, only slightly surprised by what just happened. Especially maybe Rue’s confession. All I know is that she has handed me exactly what I need to get rid of Quen once and for all.

A slow smile spreads over my face. “Oh, you’re a sly one, Ms. Di’Castello. Very sly indeed.”

Chapter 34

Serena



Ambling into the sitting room when I hear the door open, I dig the spoon into the ice cream I'm eating straight from the carton and give Rue a quizzical stare.

"Where did you go? And don't tell me it was to take the trash out."

"Busted," she replies with a smile. "I went to see Logan."

Leaning on the kitchen counter in this open-plan apartment, I inhale deeply. "Oh? What did you say to him?"

"I told him exactly what I thought about this situation."

"Which is what?"

"That it's dangerous."

"And what did he say?"

"He agreed, but he isn't going anywhere."

"So how did it end?"

"Amicably."

"Great, so now you're besties, are you going to answer my question about the party?"

"Of course you can be my plus one," she replies. "I'm just being cautious."

"I know, and I appreciate it. I love you for it."

"But you can't stay away?"

"Nope." Digging the spoon into the ice cream again, I come up with a big scoop and stick it in my mouth, tasting the sweet vanilla slide down my throat.

She exhales and seems to come to some sort of conclusion. "Then we make this work somehow. Whatever you need. Do you want to move in here?"

Be closer to him? Maybe your uncle won't know if you do a moonlight flit from your place?"

I snicker and thank my lucky stars that I have her. "You're the best. I'm not sure if he will still find me. If he does, it puts you in the line of fire as well. I don't want to do that, Rue."

"I get that you're looking out for me, but I can take care of myself."

"I dunno, my uncle is proving to be a bit whacked in the head."

She giggles. "That's putting it lightly. I mean, who does he think he is *forbidding* you? It's like it's the Middle Ages or something."

"Right?" I laugh with her for a moment, but then the sense of foreboding descends again, and I sober up. "But you saw Logan's face. Quentin did that to him. It's shocking and makes my insides curl up and want to hide. If he decides to pursue this, I dread to think."

"Yeah." She chews her lip.

"I know you think it's not worth the risk, but I can't stay away from him. I'm not sure what staying away will do to him or me."

"You have to do you, boo. Always."

"I'm sorry for dragging you into my messed-up life."

"This isn't messed up. It's adventurous," she scoffs with a soft laugh.

"Call it what you will. I'm going to bed now. I'm exhausted. I have to call the agency tomorrow and try to get something lined up for next week. I need the cash."

"So you aren't even going to try to go back to C & J?"

Frowning, I contemplate her words. "You think I should?"

"I think Quentin doesn't have a say in who Logan's assistant is."

"I guess you have a point. Maybe I'll see what Logan says, but the idea is that we stay away from each other. Make it look like we've forgotten each other."

"True, but you need a job. And maybe you need a dummy boyfriend. I dunno. Just an idea."

She actually has a really good point. But I don't see it flying with Logan. He'd go nuts. "We'll see. I'll call the agency anyway."

She nods. "Nite."

Placing the carton of ice cream back in the freezer and the spoon in the dishwasher, I wave to her and close the door of the guest bedroom. It's bigger than my bedroom at home and as lavish as the surroundings I grew up with.

Stripping off and sliding between the silk sheets, I pull out the burner

phone from under the pillow.

Texting Logan, I ask the question that has been playing on my mind since I left his apartment. I'd totally forgotten all about it until I saw his place earlier.

Who is Rose?

I wait, but not for long, as he replies almost instantly.

My housekeeper. Why?

His housekeeper. He tried to make me jealous while speaking to his housekeeper. Asshole.

No reason.

What are you wearing?

I giggle and decide to be a bit daring.

Just my cum-soaked panties...

Giggling when the phone immediately rings, I squint at the caller ID.
AnswerMeNowOrElse

"Hello?" I answer sweetly.

"You're a tease," he growls back. "Touch yourself. Let me hear you orgasm over the phone as you're talking to me."

"Just like that?"

"You want pretty words?"

"They don't hurt."

"Mm, be a good girl for Logan, angel, and slip your hand into your damp panties. Stroke your clit and come for me. I'll be so proud of you if you do."

"Fuuuck," I groan, doing as he says with no questions asked. I would do anything for him, so this is easy. Getting past my previous attempts at this is easy when he praises me, when he wants me to think of him and talk to him while I'm doing it.

"That's it, angel. Tell me what you're doing."

"I'm rubbing my clit slowly. Do you have your cock in your hand?"

"Yes." His slight croak tells me he is telling the truth. "Are you all slippery, angel?"

“Yes. Are you hard?”

“So hard.”

“Logan,” I pant, speeding up my movements.

“Come for me like a good girl, Serena. Let me hear you scream my name as you ride your fingers to ecstasy.”

“Ah,” I gasp, feeling the orgasm building quickly. “Logan, are you stroking yourself?”

“Yes, angel.”

“Are you going to come?”

“Soon. I want to hear you come first. Good girls always come first.”

“Fuck, Logan.” I rub harder, increasing the pressure and speed of my fingers gliding over my clit. I’m so wet. I’ve never felt my pussy so wet before. I mean, I probably have been during sex, but I’ve never felt my own cum in this quantity before. “Logan!”

My blood rushes straight to my clit, and it pulsates under my fingers, my legs shaking, my stomach muscles convulsing at the intensity of such a climax.

“Fuck, angel. Fuck. Yes. Yes. I wish I was there. I wish it were me touching you. Fuck. No man will ever touch you again, angel. Only me. Only me.” His breathing is heavy and rasping.

“Only you, Logan.”

“Uhn...” He grunts loudly. “Fuck, I’m coming, Serena. I’m coming all over myself thinking of you riding your own hand.”

My muffled moan of desire as I cup my hand between my legs and curl up, cherishing the last of my dying climax; I nearly tell him I love him. The words are on my lips, but I stop myself just in time. I won’t say them unless he says them first. Everything about this relationship will be guided by him. Anything he wants me to do, I will do. He is my obsession, and if I had any doubts about being with him, they have been washed away with this one phone call.

“Perfect, angel. You’re so perfect.”

“So are you, Logan. Perfect for me.”

Chapter 35

Logan



Deciding to go into the office on Thursday morning, regardless of my face, which looks like a unicorn shat a rainbow all over it. I'm climbing the walls sitting around here, and Rose, God love her, is driving me up the wall with all her coddling. If I thought a few weeks ago that I wanted her here full-time, I've changed my mind. She can come and go and give me my fucking space back.

Grimacing as I feel like a dick for thinking that, I know it's only because I'd rather it was Serena taking care of my every whim, especially the whim of my hard cock, which, if I thought was excessive before, is now getting to the point where I have to jerk off twice a day. It's just not the same as sinking into a hot, wet pussy, even gloved up, it's a feeling I miss. But now that my dick has gotten soaked by Serena, I will never want or need another pussy again. She has captured every part of me. My heart, my mind, my body, my soul, and my cock. They all belong to her.

Striding past the reception desk, which houses a fierce-looking security guy and not Rue, I take a moment to be grateful that Serena has her. She will protect her when I can't.

Allison comes hurrying over, her face stern when she looks at my face. "You should be at home."

"I'm going crazy. And I don't look that bad."

"That's up for debate. I told everyone you were in a car crash."

"Fair enough."

"Uhm..."

Stalking past her, I stop dead when I see a blonde braid attached to a woman sitting at Serena's desk, and my heart leaps in my chest.

“Logan,” Allison says quickly, scurrying up to the woman. “This is Katrina.”

When I realize it isn’t Serena, the only word I can think of for my reaction is ‘balk,’ but that doesn’t even cover what I do with that information.

“Excuse me?” I spit out, giving a scathing glare over the *girl* who has risen and turned to look at me with a bright smile.

If I didn’t know better, I would say they were sisters, but with Serena being the older and far more attractive one. She has the same long blonde hair, all neat and braided. A cleavage that is showing more than it should. A bright smile, green eyes that are wide and guileless, and her name...

“Fucking dick!” I spit out and storm past her and Allison to kick my office door with such force that it breaks the lock and bounces off the wall before nearly smacking me in the face as I barge through the opening. “That’s it. That’s fucking it.”

Sitting down, I hold my hand up to Allison as she bustles in, flustered by my response to the half-assed clone, she is lost for words, which is a first. I’ve never seen her so out of her depth before.

“What is going on with you?” she asks after a few moments, getting her poise back. “You are making a scene.”

“Am I?” I grit out. “Who gives a fuck? Get that girl out of my sight.”

“Again?” she complains, throwing her head back in a gesture made for teenager sulks, not middle-aged women in a professional setting.

“That one has to go.”

“Quentin said—”

“I don’t give a rat’s ass what he said or did or will do. She needs to go.”

Allison purses her lips and huffs. “He is the Chairman of the Board,” she says eventually.

“Which doesn’t give him jurisdiction over who my assistant is. I owed him one for Serena, this...child...does not belong in my presence.”

She blinks and silently backs out, no doubt to tell tales to her Society superior, but honestly, at this point, I don’t care. *Katrina* is about twenty. I know what game Quen is playing, and he’s sick. He’s trying to lure me away from his niece with a younger, tastier bait, but he has absolutely no idea that I’m as turned off by Katrina as I am at the thought of screwing Allison.

Serena is my type—end of story. There is no in-between, there is no replacement, there is no one else. Never in the history of my sex life have I ever gone for a younger woman apart from Serena, and that is only because

of who she is. The age thing is significant, but nothing at the same time.

It's time to put an end to this shitshow once and for all. Rue gave me a weapon, and I intend to use it.

Rising to close the door, quietly this time, I pull my phone out and scroll through the contacts.

Hitting dial, I wait while it rings.

"Logan Carter. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Viktor. We need to talk."

"Why, yes, we do."

Chapter 36

Serena



“**W**ow.”

“Really?”

“I mean, wow.”

Blushing, I tug on the black silk fingerless gloves that cover my arms from the top of my hand to my elbow.

“I’m so envious of your rack,” Rue says. “Look at those girls.”

Giggling, I look down. I do look hot in this black strapless dress that sweeps the floor, with a tight bodice, and shows off my cleavage nicely with excellent support for my larger breasts. Logan is going to freak out. In a good way, I hope. He has begged and pleaded over our many phone calls and texts over the last two days to see my dress, but I have refused, wanting him to see me for the first time in person. Rue had to lend me the money to buy it, but I’ll totally pay her back when I can. We tried to stuff my curves into one of her dresses, but yeah, nope. That wasn’t happening. I looked like a strung-up joint of beef ready for the oven.

Not attractive.

“You look amazing,” I compliment her, dressed in her signature white, a slinky designer halter neck dress that barely covers her tits or the top of her ass at the back. It’s long but has no back in it at all. She’s held in with tit-tape, which wouldn’t hold even one of my breasts for a microsecond before creaking with the strain and then giving up, exhausted and spent.

“Logan is going to lose his mind when he sees you,” Rue says, handing me a black lacy mask that partially covers my face. My hair is coiled up in a tight bun on top of my head. I wanted to leave it loose, but it’s too recognizable should Quentin be lurking. I mean, I’m no fool. If he looks at

me, he will know who I am, but the slight anonymity the mask gives me settles my raging nerves a little bit.

A knock at the door distracts Rue. She crosses to open it while I fuss with the top of my dress, paranoid it's going to slip down too far and show a nipple or two to the world. But it's secure and not going anywhere.

"Rue, darling!"

Looking up at the female voice with the slight accent that sounds like honey dripping slowly onto melted chocolate, I blink at the woman descending on Rue in a tight hug before she releases her and steps aside for her husband to do the same. It doesn't take a genius to know these are Rue's parents. Rue looks exactly like her mother.

After embracing her father, she turns to me with a smile. "This is Serena. Serena, these are my parents, Francesca and Viktor."

"Ah, yes! Serena!" Francesca exclaims, sweeping over to me in an unsurprisingly white couture dress that probably cost more than my entire year's rent. "You are magnificent. Look at you!"

Grinning, despite my nerves, I decide I love Francesca. She gathers me to her in a tight hug like she did with Rue, and I nearly weep at the sudden emotion that goes over me. My mother-slash-aunt has never hugged me in quite such an emotive way before. A quick squeeze or shoulder hug is her go-to. This is a proper embrace. Knowing I have to speak to my mother-aunt-whatever soon, I step back, feeling a bit dejected that the thought ruined my moment with Francesca.

"Beautiful," Francesca says, her dark hair bouncing in waves around her.

"Thank you, Mrs. Di'Castello. You are a vision."

"Oh!" she cries. "Call me *Frrrancesca!*" She holds her arm up dramatically, sending a waft of expensive perfume in my direction as she rolls her R, making me giggle.

"Francesca."

She smiles and turns to her husband. "Viktor, don't just stand there; say hello to our daughter's wonderful new friend."

Shyly giving the devastatingly handsome man a small, awkward wave, he steps forward to give me a hug as well, surprising me into making a muffled 'oof' sound as he crushes me.

"As pretty as Rue said," he croons, his voice making me want him to sing to me or even just keep talking.

Catching Rue's eye, she's giggling, clearly at home with her parent's

ostentatious behavior. I'm in awe. They're magnificent.

"We shall all ride together," Francesca says, sweeping back over to Rue to brush a stray lock of hair away from her eyes.

"No, that's okay, Mom. We've got a car coming."

"Cancel it."

I feel like it's an order I wouldn't argue with, even on my most ornery day. The confidence I thought I had when I first yelled at Rue has vanished over the last few days, having been battered and swept off my feet by events. I wonder if that bit of mean girl even still exists in my soul anymore.

"Okay," Rue mutters and pulls out her phone.

"Come," Francesca says, looping her arm through Viktor's and leading us out.

Exchanging an impressed look with Rue, who just rolls her eyes, we head out. I have no idea who they are to Logan's company, but I have a feeling I'm going to enjoy this ride a lot more than when I thought it was going to be Rue and me and my nerves.

Chapter 37

Logan



My heart nearly stops when I see Serena enter the ballroom of the Courts hotel. It's a lavish building with embossed gold and gilded mirrors, a rich red carpeted floor, and chandeliers. It's the Carter & Jeffers Annual Christmas ball, which only reminds me that another year is almost over. I refuse to go into the new one without Serena. Knowing I had no choice but to call Viktor and go around Quentin has set my nerves on edge, but only because I'm afraid of Serena getting caught in the crossfire. I can only hope that Rue will act fast if things go sideways and get my girl to safety. I'm banking a lot on her, which makes me feel slightly sick, but I feel she is invested in her relationship with Serena. She won't throw her to the wolves to save herself.

I hope.

Aching to go to Serena and embrace her, finally kiss her before I take her upstairs to ravage her, I know I can't. There are things that need to happen first. Catching Viktor's eye, he gestures with his head for me to move off to the side while Francesca commandeers her daughter and Serena, plying them with Champagne from the passing servers.

Giving Serena a last lingering look, my cock going hard at the sight of her in that dress and that sexy mask, I feel my anger flare up that every man in this room can see her delectable curves. They will be imagining sliding their cocks between her luscious tits before plunging between her cherry red lips, visible below the black mask she is wearing that covers her eyes and nose. So far, there has been no sign of Quentin, but Guy has eyes and ears everywhere, so I'm reassured for the moment that Serena is safe.

"Logan." Viktor extends his hand for me to shake when we meet up on

the other side of the ballroom. "Let's walk." He leads me through one of the archways out into the lobby of the hotel.

"I realize that Rue coming clean about your intentions was probably not what you had in mind, but you see my predicament."

"I do. The girl is spectacular."

Jealousy fires up, but his tone is bland. He is renowned for not having eyes for anyone but his wife, so I shouldn't be jealous of his words about Serena.

"She is," I murmur.

"This does bring forward the plans we were hoping for, but if you want the position, it's yours. You have impressed us for many years. You have been loyal, and your contributions to the Society have been greatly appreciated. But more than that, I feel you were always destined for great things, Logan. Your professional accomplishments are outstanding, and the Society will be lucky to have you as a high-ranking member. The South-West Sector is in desperate need of new blood at the top. Tony has become complacent and lazy."

His disgust at that makes me hide my smile, but his words have startled me. Head of the South-West Sector is not what I was expecting. That encompasses an extremely large area. I expected to get one step above Quentin as Head of the Tri-City region of Grove City, Glenridge, and Sinnsfeld. The area Viktor is talking about reaches as far south as Coe Bay and as north as Wicksend.

"You appear confused."

"Slightly. I wasn't aware I was in the running for a sector."

He snickers. "Rue didn't say?"

"I didn't ask for the details, in all fairness."

"Ah, well, yes. Tony is about to be canceled. He has made several errors in judgment recently, and we are not able to accept any more fuckups. So are you in?"

"Yes." I don't even have to think about it. If I get promoted over Quentin in his sector, that means I can have him canceled as well. It's, and there's that word again, perfect.

"Marvelous. I shall make the arrangements. You may stay here in Grove City as your base."

"And Quen?"

"That is now for you to handle." He holds his hand out for me again.

Gripping it tightly, he places his other hand on my elbow. “No mess, no fuss, yes?”

“Yes.”

He nods, and with a slow, almost predatory smile, he backs away with a mock salute, filtering back into the crowd of the ballroom, leaving me to inhale deeply, close my eyes, and exhale slowly, opening my eyes again as reality strikes me between them.

This is more than I cared for, but I will do whatever it takes to make Serena mine and to remove any obstacle that prevents us from being together.

Striding back into the ballroom, I search for Serena but find no trace of her. Rue is with her mother, but Serena has vanished. Scouring the crowds almost frantically, I march over to Rue, pausing to give Francesca a quick double air kiss before I focus on Rue.

“Where is she?”

Rue frowns and glances nearby. “At the bar...” Her eyes narrow.

“You did not lose her!” I hiss.

“No, she was there literally a second before you came over. I saw her. I’m keeping an eye on her.”

“Why didn’t you go with her?” I grit out, scanning every inch of the ballroom for her.

“I wanted to. She said she needed a minute. I had eyes on her, I swear. Dammit. She’s a sneak. I should recruit her.”

Francesca looks between the two of us. “Do it,” she says. “She is wonderful. I love her to bits and pieces already. She would be an asset to us.”

“What?” Rue says, distracted momentarily, but I don’t have time for this.

Storming off, determined to find her, I forget about everything else except finding Serena. It is my only priority.

Chapter 38

Serena



Removing the mask from my face, I take a slight breather. I've found a deserted back staircase, which is probably used for staff or a fire escape, maybe. It's cooler in here, but I fan myself with the mask anyway, feeling relief at the small breeze and the lack of a crowd. It was getting a bit overwhelming. I know Rue means well, but she was hovering, and I just need a minute to pull myself back together before I have a mini meltdown. Shoving the gloves carefully down my arms, the dry scabs pulling slightly on the fabric, I rub the unmarked skin around the wounds. They're itchy as fuck and irritating me with these gloves on. But I wasn't being seen in public without them. Leaning against the wall with the gloves bunched around my wrists and the mask dangling from my hand, I close my eyes momentarily, but they snap open when I hear the door open opposite me.

Panic spikes my blood when I see it's John Jeffers. I'd managed to avoid him last week at work, even with Logan out at court, but now he is looming in front of me.

"Ah, Serena. There you are, dear. I've been searching everywhere for you."

His slimy voice makes me cringe. I push forward and turn to head down the stairs, but he grabs my arm quicker than I anticipated for such a heavy-set man.

"Where are you going? I just got you alone."

"Let go of me," I grit out, wondering if anyone would hear me scream. Or even if screaming is such a good idea when I'm supposed to be flying under the radar.

He grunts and shoves me back to the wall, his beady eyes roaming all

over my body. "So tasty," he murmurs, reaching out to trail a finger down my throat and over my bare shoulder.

"Stop," I manage to get out before my throat closes in fear. Bringing my hand up to push him away; he's stronger than he looks. He grabs my wrist, pinning it to my side as his other hand grabs my breast through the dress.

"Shh, little girl," he murmurs. "I know you want John to touch you."

"No," I whisper, frozen to the spot.

Move, Serena. Move, for fuck's sake.

But it's like telling myself to spread wings and fly. It's impossible. I can't do it.

"Please stop," I whimper when he lets go of my wrist and grabs my other breast, pushing them up so they pop out of the top of the dress, showing him my nipples.

He licks his lips. "Mm. So well-endowed for a little girl."

"Eww," I mutter and try to push him away. "Get off me."

He roughly pinches my nipples, and it's an automatic reaction then to struggle, trying to get away from him.

Before I get free, he pulls me closer, his grip tightening. He tugs my dress, ripping the delicate fabric with his aggression. My breasts are completely exposed now.

My mind races, but my body is rooted to the spot, my limbs paralyzed by fear. I can't move; I can't scream. All I can do is stand there, my heart hammering in my chest. Fear and panic make it difficult to breathe. My lungs close, and I go lightheaded. It's exactly how it was when I was younger, when I was once again helpless in the face of danger. I remember the fear, the terror, and the feeling of being completely powerless.

Knowing I have to fight, to resist, is one thing; doing it is something else.

I try to push him away, but he's too strong. He grabs my wrists and pulls me closer, his grip tightening, his breath hot on my face. It's the stench of booze and poor hygiene. I gag, turning my head as far away from him as I can. He licks my throat, making me shudder. My dress slips lower, the air cold against my sweating skin.

I am exposed, embarrassed, and violated.

Yet, I can't stop it.

Panicking, my mind racing, I have to figure out a way to escape, but I'm too scared to move. I am trapped in my own fear.

When his mouth closes over my nipple, I cry softly, squirming to get out

of his grip, but I can't go anywhere. My floor-length dress has tangled around my legs, trapping them. Trying to bring my leg up to knee him is impossible, impeded by the black silk.

"Help!" I cry out as he bites my nipple roughly. He lets go of one of my wrists to ram his hand roughly between my legs. I buck against him, thrashing, clawing him with my free hand, but it's no use. He snatches my wrist and squeezes, shoving his knee between my thighs, panting over me, practically drooling on me.

I'm just not strong enough to get away.

So, I stop fighting.

Closing my eyes and willing it to be over with quickly, tears seep out of my eyes. Falling back into the recesses of my mind, I hear a commotion and then feel the pressure ease up on my body.

"Serena! Serena!"

"Logan," I murmur, forcing myself to open my eyes, hoping I'm not imagining it. "Ahhh!"

My soft exclamation is followed up with my hand to my mouth. The only movement I seem capable of right now. Logan punches John, his hand wrapped around the other man's throat. Blood is spraying out everywhere, hitting the harsh, white-painted walls.

"Logan!"

The scream is loud in my ears, making me realize it's coming from me. "Logan!"

"Dammit, Serena," he grits out. "What the fuck is this?"

"I—I—don't—" I stammer, unable to form a complete sentence.

"Cover yourself up, for fuck's sake," he growls, smashing John in the face one more time before he goes down, his face an absolute mess.

"Logan..."

He turns to me, his face furious, splashes of blood all down his white shirt and over his partially covered face. He is wearing a Phantom of the Opera-type mask, which he rips off when he sees me floundering. Striding over, he grabs my upper arms and shakes me.

"Serena! Fight back, dammit. When someone attacks you, angel, you fight. Please. Please, Serena. Don't just stand there and let it happen! You fight with everything you have. You said no other man would ever touch you again. You fight back! Fuck. I'm sorry, I'm not... Fuck!"

Tears stream out of my eyes as I stand there, being yelled at by the man I

needed to comfort me. “I’m s-s-sorry,” I sob.

“No!” he roars. “No! Don’t apologize. This is all *him!*” Furious, he lets me go and spins, running his clean hand through his hair. The other one is covered in blood and split open again. I know now that he was in a fight before when I saw his hand bandaged up. Beating on poor Dave as well, I see his temper now, and I cower in the corner.

John groans and tries to get up, drawing my eyes back to him.

Logan roars and kicks him in the ribs. Then he pulls something out of his jacket pocket and leans over John, blocking my view.

A strangled howl, followed by a spray of blood that hits the wall lower down with a sickening splatter that brings bile in my mouth.

I hold it down, biting my tongue so I don’t throw up all over Logan when he turns back to me, his face pale and livid.

“Please cover yourself up,” he whispers, pulling his phone out and making a call.

Who could he possibly be wanting to talk to right now?

“Cover yourself up right now, Serena,” he growls. “I’m not fucking about.”

Glancing down, I see my breasts are still exposed, my dress around my waist. With shaking hands and the strength of a kitten, I tug it back up, struggling to contain the mounds in the ripped fabric.

“I didn’t mean—”

“Ssh.” He places his finger to his lips and turns from me.

Letting out an ugly-sounding sob, I slide down the wall, trying not to look at John. But I can’t help it. Logan has slit his throat, and he is bleeding out all over the beige tile of this back staircase where anyone could come across us and arrest Logan, and probably me, as an accomplice.

“I need a clean-up at Courts. Back staircase, first floor,” I hear Logan say clearly but quietly.

“We need to call the police,” I say loudly, finding my voice.

He spins to me, his face stricken, shaking his head vehemently as he hangs up quickly.

With a trembling hand, he reaches for me, hauling me to my feet.

“Logan, we can’t just pretend this didn’t happen. They’ll find us.”

“Serena, I need you to keep your mouth shut and do exactly as I say. Can you do that?”

Giving John another petrified look, I murmur, “Logan.”

“Can you do that?” he asks, gripping my arm tighter.

I nod because there is nothing else I can do.

“This will be taken care of, but you cannot say a word. You were never here. Do you understand?”

I nod again, dumbstruck.

“I need to hear you say the words, Serena. Do you understand?”

“Y-yes,” I croak.

Letting him drag me off, I pick up my skirt so I don't trip over the hem, my mask still tangled around my fingers, looking back over my shoulder again at the dead body of my attacker, lying in a pool of his own blood. My attacker that Logan killed because he touched me.

Chapter 39

Logan



Feeling sick that I had to see even a small bit of John slobbering all over my girl, I drag her roughly away from the scene of the crime. She is going into a meltdown, and I fear she might start screaming at any moment. I need to get her out of here. The cleaner heard her over the phone. I know he did before I heard the click of the line doing dead. She is in grave danger. I've shown her my hand and ripped open the Society right in front of her. We are both in serious shit if this gets out. Rue saying she wanted to recruit her and Francesca agreeing isn't binding enough to save her. Serena will be canceled, and I won't be far behind. The things Solitaire does...the things we do to ensure wealth, success, and to be one step ahead when crimes are committed, all of these things are illegal, criminal and would get us sent down faster than we could assemble a crack team of attorneys to sort it out.

My first priority is to get Serena out of here and back to my place; then, I can deal with the disgusting nature of having to erase John's hands and mouth from all over her body.

I'm filled with rage that she just stood there and didn't fight. Not so much at her, but at this entire situation. She should never have been on her own. We were so busy trying to keep her safe from Quentin that we didn't even remember John had his perverted eyes on her as well. Scratch that...I forgot.

And I hate myself.

I'm taking it out on her when all I want to do is throw myself on her mercy and beg her forgiveness.

Acting purely on instinct, with her following me in a complete daze, I drag her down the street, and then we get lost in the darkness of the back

alleys and side streets. I can't risk anyone seeing her or me. She is a mess, her dress torn and her face tear-stained, and I'm covered in John's blood.

Making it to within several feet of my building, I stop my brisk walk and inhale sharply, calming my soul now that we are close to home and away from the crime I committed. Stripping off my jacket, I wrap it around her shoulders and pull it closed. She looks up at me, at a complete loss for words or actions.

"I'm sorry," I mutter, closing my eyes and leaning my forehead against hers. "I yelled, but I wasn't angry with you. I'm supposed to protect you, and I failed. I'm angry at myself."

Feeling her hand on my cheek, I open my eyes again and pull back from her. "No," she says. "You should be angry with me. I said no man would ever touch me again, and I stood there and let it happen. I'm sorry, Logan." She drops her hand and sinks to her knees in the filthy alley, falling into a puddle as light snow starts to fall around us.

"Get up."

"Please forgive me."

My throat is so thick with emotion that I'm not sure I can speak again. "Get up," I choke.

"Forgive me, Logan, please."

"Serena, there is nothing to forgive. If anything, you should be forgiving me."

She clutches my thighs, gripping my pants as she bows her head. Her soft sob tears through me, and I can't bear to see her like this.

In the next second, I drop to my knees in front of her, taking her in my arms and kissing her head as she cries into my shirt.

"Please forgive me, Logan. I need to hear you say it."

"I forgive you."

Those three words that catch in my throat are what she needs to move past this. Trying to convince her there is nothing to be sorry for isn't really how this works.

"Thank you," she weeps, soaking my shirt, mingling her tears with John's blood. "Thank you."

Tangling my fingers into her snow-covered hair, I squeeze her tightly. "Do you forgive me, Serena? I don't deserve it, but I'm so sorry I let you down."

"You didn't, Logan. You saved me."

“Too late.”

“No. Not too late.”

“We need to get inside.”

She nods, and I help her to her feet, feeling like someone punched my still-beating heart before squeezing it until it nearly bursts. She doesn't know the danger she is in, but it's my job to protect her now and always. I will never allow anyone to hurt her or try to take her away from me again. She is mine, truly and eternally.

Holding her close to me, we stumble into the building and into the elevator. When it arrives on my floor, I quickly unlock the front door and pull her gently inside, closing it and bolting us in.

“Let's get you in the shower,” I murmur.

She nods, brushing the snowflakes from her face. “I need to call Rue.”

“I'll do it. You go upstairs, and I'll be with you in a minute.”

Pulling the bloody knife out of the jacket pocket, she hesitates, holding it out to me with a shaking hand. Circling my hand around the hilt, I take it from her before she surrenders to my request, still shaken and shivering. Placing the knife in the dishwasher, I pull my phone out of my pants pocket, I check the messages first to make sure the clean-up is done.

It is confirmed, so I breathe out a sigh of relief.

There is no mention of Serena being at the scene of the crime, so I ignore the peril for now, needing to take care of her first.

Firing off a quick message to Rue to tell her I have Serena and she'll be staying the night here, I switch off the phone and strip off my shirt. Stuffing it into the washer and turning it onto a hot wash, I go upstairs to find Serena sitting on my bed, her head in her hands.

“Hey, baby girl. Look at me.” I take her hands and crouch in front of me.

“Who did you call?” she asks, her voice muffled into her chest as she stares down at her lap.

“It's something we need to have a conversation about but not now, okay, angel? Let's get you in the shower, cleaned up and warm first.”

She nods slowly, accepting that as much as she can. Pulling her hands out of mine, she shrugs the jacket off and reaches up to slide the side zipper down on the ruined dress. Helping her with a steadier hand, she drops hers to her lap, letting me undress her slowly, flinching only briefly when I expose her naked body.

“I will never hurt you, angel. Please don't be afraid of me.”

“I’m not.”

Her defiant tone makes me smile sadly. She is trying to convince herself rather than me.

“This isn’t the first time, is it?”

She shakes her head.

“I’m sorry, angel. I’m sorry that you’ve been hurt by this before and again today. I’ve failed you.”

“No,” she says, shaking her head, so the wet tendrils of hair that have dropped out of her bun stick to her face. “This isn’t your fault.”

“It is because I wasn’t there. But you don’t have to worry ever again. I will never let you out of my sight ever again.”

She smiles sadly. “Don’t be ridiculous. You can’t be with me all day, every day.”

“Wanna bet?”

She cups my face gently. “You’re sweet, but I’m okay.”

I’m not sure I believe her, but choosing to for now, I lead her into the bathroom, where I strip off the rest of my clothes and turn on the shower.

Chapter 40

Logan



Climbing in first, I help her in. She is exhausted, mentally and physically, from the mad dash through the streets, where I half dragged her back to my apartment. Wanting to stare at her body, take in every inch of her naked beauty, I don't. I keep my eyes on hers. Reaching for the pins in her hair, I pull them out and settle them on the soap dish. Her hair cascades down her back in those perfect blonde waves that have captivated me. Grabbing the soap and sponge, I lather up and start at her shoulders, gently cleaning every inch of her, patting the scabs on her arms that cause me so much hurt for her before I shampoo her hair and rinse it out. Her contented sigh as the hot water pounds down around us fills me with a joy that is unusual. To be pleasing someone in this way, making her happy, is fulfilling me on a level that excites me. I want to take care of her in every way, worship her, and never have her be hurt or strained again.

"How do you feel?" I ask when I'm done.

"Better," she replies softly, taking the soap and sponge with a slow smile. "My turn."

Chuckling, I let her clean the remains of the blood off me that hadn't already been washed down the drain. She pays extra attention to my already hard cock but doesn't jerk me off or drop to her knees to suck me. When she's finished, I turn the water off and get out before her, grabbing a towel to wrap around her and another for myself.

"Thank you, Logan. I needed that."

"Oh, I'm not finished," I murmur.

"What did you have in mind?"

Leading her back into the bedroom, I pause to dry her body and then mine

before I turn to face her with a serious expression. “With your permission, I want to erase John from your body permanently.”

Her eyes widen. “How do you mean?”

Moving in closer to her, I cup her face gently. “I want to kiss and caress every inch of you, so when you think about your body, you only think of me. Do you want me to do that, angel?”

Her lips part with a soft pant. “Yes.”

“Good girl. I’m so proud of the way you’ve handled tonight, Serena. I know I was an ass, but I was so scared for you, so angry that I wasn’t there to protect you. But you were so brave and so courageous. You survived, and you didn’t break down. You saw what I did, and you didn’t scream or cry, and you weren’t afraid of me. You aren’t afraid of me, are you, Serena?”

She shakes her head vehemently. “No, not at all. You saved me. Again.”

“That is what I do, angel. I’m your savior. No one will ever hurt you again.”

She nods but lowers her eyes.

“You have questions.”

“Yes, but they can wait as long as you are okay?” She touches my chest with her cool fingers, thrilling me with that tiny bit of contact.

“Don’t ever worry about me, Serena. That isn’t your job. I can take care of myself, and now it is my absolute honor to have the role of taking care of you.”

Her shoulders sag under the weight of whatever haunts her. “I want that. I’m tired, Logan. I’m really tired of fighting these demons by myself.”

“You don’t have to, angel...” I trail off and narrow my eyes, turning her slowly around so I can see the tattoo etched into her skin. I understand everything now. “You have been crying out for help for years, and no one answered your call. I’m here now, baby girl. I’ve got you.”

“Logan,” she sobs and turns around to fling her arms around me, needing me to comfort her, to hold her, and keep her safe. It’s a role I *never* imagined being in. A protector. A savior. I was the one who needed saving until I met her. Now, all I want to do is keep her safe from the world. Crushing her in my strong embrace, soothing her, letting her cry out her fears and pain, I eventually pick her up and cradle her, walking to the bed to lay her down.

“Are you ready for this, baby girl?” I can’t call her ‘angel’ anymore. It isn’t right. She isn’t the angel. She is seeking one. Or was, rather.

“Yes, I want this. I want you, Logan. My soul weeps without you. I need

you to bleed into me like you said you would. Take over half of my being, for I am nothing without you.”

“Fuck, Serena. You’re hurting so badly. I want to take all that pain away.”

“You will. Kiss me and become part of me.”

Unable to resist the smirk, she narrows her eyes and then giggles after the serious moment. “Yes, I’ve noticed you don’t kiss.”

“I do now,” I murmur and cover her body with mine, pressing my lips to hers gently until she opens up, and I savagely devour her mouth with mine in a bruising kiss that she squirms to get closer to. Wrapping her legs around me, she claws at my back, raking her fingernails over my skin, marking me as hers. It’s not enough. I want more. I need more. Twisting my tongue around hers, I trail my hand over the swell of her breasts.

Kissing down her neck and chest, my lips lightly brushing against her skin, I move my body down, planting soft kisses on her hips and stomach.

Taking my time, exploring her with my hands, teasing and pleasing her in all the right ways, her body trembles in anticipation, her breathing growing ever more intense. Sucking her ripe nipples elicits a feral groan from my throat, so raw and so real it nearly overwhelms me.

“Is this okay?” I rasp, needing her reassurance that she isn’t thinking about John but about the pleasure I’m giving her.

“Perfect,” she purrs, fisting her hand lightly into my hair. “Keep going.”

I trail my way down the length of her body, my hands roaming her skin in anticipation. I move lower, settling between her legs.

Nipping at her thighs, she gasps in pleasure. My hands slide up her legs, my fingers teasing her inner core. Trailing my tongue along her soft skin, I can feel her growing more and more aroused. Pausing at the apex of her thighs, I smile when she arches her back, eager for me to continue.

I lick my way up to her clit, and she cries in pleasure. Circling my tongue around the engorged nub, licking her hungrily, she moans louder and writhes on the cool silk sheets as I continue to tongue fuck her relentlessly. She trembles, her orgasm building as I work my magic on her pussy.

Suddenly, she screams as her orgasm breaks over her, my tongue tasting her sweet nectar as she floods my mouth with her juices. I savor the taste of her pleasure as she shudders against my mouth.

Rising slowly from between her legs, I cover her body with mine again, closing my eyes when she cups my face and runs her thumb over my damp

lips. When I open them again, her eyes burn with desire. She cups the back of my neck and pulls me to her, her lips eagerly meeting mine, tasting herself on my lips in a hungry kiss.

Unable to hold out any longer, I position myself at her entrance, sliding in, inch by inch, until I'm fully embedded within her. Settling for a minute before I begin to thrust, I move slowly, savoring every second of it, my body rocking in perfect rhythm with hers. I kiss her deeply as I drive myself deep inside her. We move together, our bodies in perfect synchronicity. Her body trembles beneath me, her moans growing ever louder. Her body tightens around me, pleasure washing through her in waves. I drive myself deeper and deeper until we both reach our pleasure peak. She cries as her climax hits her full on, her pussy clutching my cock possessively as I thrust one last time, spurting out my hot cum, filling her pussy until I collapse onto her, both of us spent and sated.

“Good girl,” I rasp. “You’re so good to me, Serena.”

I take a deep breath, cherishing the moment and the feeling of being completely and totally in love with this woman who bewitched me from the first second I heard her say my name.

Chapter 41

Serena



Pouring coffee from the fancy machine situated on Logan’s kitchen counter, dressed only in one of his gray t-shirts, I smile when he presses his body to mine from behind. Dressed only in sweats, he is so fucking sexy, and he is mine.

He kisses the top of my head before he reaches over me to grab a mug from the cupboard. Giggling, I duck down slightly, but it’s not necessary. He towers over me, and I love it. It adds a layer to the protection he provides, which thrills me into placing my mug down and turning into him, running my hands up his ribs.

“Still sore?”

He shakes his head.

I had no idea that Quen broke his ribs when he beat him up, but after making love more times than I can count last night, he came clean, pleading reprieve to his aching body.

“I’m so sorry.”

“You have nothing to apologize for,” he growls.

“This happened because of me.”

“No, it happened because your uncle is a megalomaniac who enjoys inflicting pain on people.”

Biting my lip, I know I have to tell him about my thoughts on this so-called uncle of mine. I’m about to spill the beans when the front door unlocks, and the handle turns, but it doesn’t open.

“*Logan?*”

With a small smile, he pulls away from me to answer the door to the woman on the other side.

Sliding the bolt across, he steps back and returns to me as it opens to let in a very attractive brunette in her mid-fifties or so.

“What’s with locking me out? I said I was coming over to make you something to eat,” she scolds him in an Irish accent that makes my knees go kind of weak. She’s shit hot. I glance at Logan, feeling insecure all of a sudden.

“Who are you?” she asks when her eagle-eyed glare lands on me.

I nearly wither from the steel in her eyes.

“Uhm...”

“Rose, this is Serena.”

Rose. *Of course.* I relax, knowing this is his housekeeper. Too bad he neglected to mention she was coming over this morning. Here I am, looking like some just-fucked hussy, which she *definitely* thinks I am by the scathing glare adorning her features.

“That girl,” Logan mutters when he sees how awkward this has become.

Rose’s face changes instantly, and she beams at me. “Oooh, that one. Well, nice to meet you, that girl. You’re pretty as a picture.” She squints and comes a bit closer. “Bit young, but maybe that will keep this one in his prime a bit longer, hmm. You cook?”

Shaking my head, I feel like a complete failure.

“Not to worry. You look like a quick learner. I’ll teach you all the things to keep him happy.”

Nodding, my eyes wide as Logan snickers.

“Well, not *all* the things.”

Rose glares at him. “Oh you, get yer mind out the gutter.”

Hiding my giggle behind my hand, I decide I like this woman. She knows how to keep Logan in line, which I find hilarious.

A knock at the door draws all of our attention to it, but no one moves. It suddenly occurs to me that I shouldn’t be here. What if it’s Quentin? Or the police about last night? Logan and I still haven’t had that conversation yet, and now it seems like a foolish thing to do, putting it off. What does he want me to say if it is the cops? I don’t know. We don’t have our stories straight.

Outright panic hits my chest, but when Rue calls out, “Serena, you in there?” I nearly faint with relief.

Logan, his face relaxing as well, after tensing up to the point I thought his teeth were going to crack under the pressure from his jaw, crosses over to it as Rose bustles about, getting what appears to be the fixings for a roast dinner

organized. My stomach growls to my utter embarrassment, but Rose does a bang-up job of ignoring it. Grabbing my coffee mug, I move across to Logan, who is letting Rue in, then closing and bolting the door behind her.

“You two have got so much explaining to do!” she starts but then eyes up Rose and slams her lips shut.

“We know,” Logan says quietly. “Come upstairs. Serena needs to rest.”

Blinking at the statement, I want to point out that I feel fine. Great, even. But then the feeling of love and happiness washes over me with the knowledge that he is doing just what he promised. He’s taking care of me.

He takes my hand and leads me upstairs, with Rue following. I feel a sense of weirdness descend when I realize we’re going to the only upstairs room. Logan’s bedroom, with his rumpled sheets and the scent of sex permeating the air. But in this open-plan apartment, I guess it’s the lesser of three evils when we need privacy. The downstairs toilet or the outside terrace being the other two. After it started snowing when we were outside last night, it hasn’t stopped, and the city is covered under a white blanket of a perfect winter wonderland. Only the blood and darkness that lies underneath it is a stark reminder of everything that happened last night.

Rue trails into the bedroom behind us and lets out a loud snort. “Okay, guess you two are just fine and dandy then.”

“We are perfect,” I inform her, almost loftily and a bit smug.

She smiles; it’s genuine and happy but is tinged with a cautiousness that I know is about to threaten the happy bubble I’m floating in right now—the one of denial and selective remembering.

“What is it?” I ask, gripping Logan’s hand tighter, forgetting all about my coffee.

“I need to know exactly why the cleaner was called up last night. My parents are...concerned.” She folds her arms and speaks directly to Logan.

“Cleaner...” I say the word quietly, remembering something Logan said about a clean-up. Frowning when it strikes me that Rue is aware of things and doesn’t seem to be freaking out about it, sends me into a tailspin of suspicion, causing me to pull away from Logan and back into a corner.

“Serena,” he says carefully, turning to me and holding his hands up. “Remember I said we needed to have a conversation about what happened?”

Nodding slowly, I do remember that, but something has suddenly leaped up and constricted around my throat.

“Sit, baby girl, and I’ll tell you everything.”

Lowering myself to the floor, for lack of anywhere else to sit in this far corner of the room, I slide down the wall and pull my knees up, tugging the t-shirt down to cover my bits.

“What is this?” I ask, glaring between the two of them.

Logan huffs out a breath, and with an encouraging nod from Rue, which sends up a major red flag, he says, “This, Serena, is Solitaire.”

Chapter 42

Logan



“Solitaire?” Serena asks slowly. “What is that supposed to mean?”

Crouching in front of her, I run my hand through my hair. “Take everything I say very seriously, Serena. It’s going to sound ridiculous, I know, but it’s all true. I haven’t lost my mind. Yet.” I try for a smirk, but she’s not buying it, so I continue. “It’s a Secret Society that operates globally but is split up into areas, sectors, and cities. There are tens of thousands of members, and no one really knows who is in unless you are part of the city Society. I’m part of the Grove City Society, and Rue belongs to the Coe Bay one.”

“Rue?” she hisses, her eyes finding her friend. “You?”

“Yes. I wanted to tell you, but there are rules, strict ones, that we have to abide by. The clue is in the *secret* bit. No one outside is supposed to know.”

“Then why are you telling me?” Her voice goes shrill, and panic sets in. She struggles to breathe, dropping her legs and placing her hand on her chest. Eyes wide, they find mine, and I see that this is real anxiety, and she’s scared.

She chokes and splutters, her hand waving around as Rue drops in front of her and grabs her hands. “Focus, Serena. Everything you know about Logan and me is real. This isn’t a big deal. It’s just another layer to things you know about the people you care about. Who care about you.”

Crawling closer to Serena, I give her the space she needs while also being near in case she needs me. Rue is good with her; she knows what she’s doing. I’m still learning. Panic, fear, and anxiety, these are not things I’m used to dealing with, but it runs deep in Serena, so I need to learn.

Fast.

I take in everything Rue says to her, learn the words, the cadence of her tone, and her relaxed manner so I can be the one who soothes her when she needs me.

Serena's breathing calms, and she gulps back a few choking breaths before she exhales slowly. "I don't understand any of this," she gasps. "What does any of this have to do with me or what happened last night?"

"Quentin, your uncle, is part of the Society, Serena," I say when Rue shuffles over to allow me closer to her now. "He is my boss, for all intents and purposes. He is the Head of the Grove City Society."

"What?" Her shock is genuine, so if I had any doubts she already knew and was keeping it from me, they're gone. I dislike that I had that niggling doubt, but after Shelley, after every other woman I can remember, that insecurity is there. But I needn't have worried with Serena. She is everything I dreamed of and more. "Quen?" she splutters. "Are you fucking joking?"

Shaking my head, I give her a sad smile. "No, I'm not joking, baby girl."

"That explains so much," she mutters, giving Rue a mutinous glare. "You knew."

"Yes and no. As Logan said, very little is known about the different sectors. I'm from Coe Bay, as you know. I was born there, grew up there; Macy, Suz, and Tiff are from there and are my childhood friends. They don't know about any of this, obviously. My parents are...well, they are pretty important in the Society."

I choke back my scoff. "Downplay it, why don't you? Serena, they're about as high up as regular humans go."

"Meaning?" she asks, confused. "There are irregular humans? Robots? Androids? Does the Society have that technology?"

I can't tell if she's joking or not, so I choose to ignore her comment. "There is a Don. He sits above Viktor and Francesca. Only they know who he is, and they would die before revealing his identity to anyone."

"Ooh," she breathes. "This is like the mafia, then?"

"Sort of, not exactly," I say.

"But you can kill people and have them *cleaned up*."

Okay, well, she has me there. "Yes, but it's not as bad as it sounds."

"Isn't it? You killed John, and you had him cleaned up, and you don't seem at all bothered about the cops, or being caught, or anything!" Serena's hysteria is getting louder, and with Rose downstairs, I need to shush her before all of us get into a pile of shit we can't get out of.

“Serena, love. Listen to me. This is hush-hush. We shouldn’t have told you any of this, but I said I didn’t want secrets between us, and now there isn’t. Yes, cleaning up is part of the Society business, but most things we do are illegal.”

“But you’re a lawyer!”

“I know, but that has nothing to do with anything.” I’m losing her. For once in my life, I don’t have the right things to say. If I had to, I could talk my way out of the Minotaur’s Maze, but this is...I’m floundering like a fish out of water.

“Have you killed before?” she asks, attempting to lower her voice at least.

“Yes, and I would again to protect you.”

“So you’re a killer? I’m in love with a killer?”

Narrowing my eyes, I pick up what she laid down. “You’re in love with me?”

“How many?” she grits out, ignoring me.

“Many. That’s neither here nor there unless it’s a deal breaker for you? Is it?” Asking her that gives me a spike of absolute, unadulterated fear. If she rejects me now, I will have no choice but to lock her up until she loves me again. I’m not losing her. Never, and certainly not over this.

Her fearful gaze meets mine. She stares deep into my eyes, showing me her soul. “No,” she whispers. “No, it’s not a deal breaker. What you did to John...you saved me.”

“And I will do it as many times as I have to in order to keep you protected and safe.”

She lowers her eyes and bites her bottom lip. I know it hits her right in her sweet spot. She wants to be cared for and kept safe. She needs it. She needs me.

“Serena,” Rue interrupts our moment with a sharp tone of reality. “Can you keep this a secret?”

“Why can’t I join?”

It’s a fair question and one that neither Rue nor I want to answer.

“Am I not good enough for your little club?” she hisses.

“Oh, you are,” I mutter. “But there’s no simple pathway to recruitment. Francesca wants you in, but there are things you need to be prepared to do. It’s not a simple case of joining and then sitting back and reaping the benefits for nothing. Does that make sense?”

“So what do I have to do?”

“Make a sacrifice.”

Part of me is glad that Rue said it and not me. The other half is cursing myself for being a coward.

“What kind of sacrifice?” Serena whispers.

“That’s kind of the problem. Only Solitaire will tell you when it’s enough.”

“Oh.” Her face falls.

“Usually, we come to you when we think you’re ready to be a member. It’s a process. You get on our radar, and we watch you.”

“Back to Quen,” she says, shaking her head as if to clear it. “He’s not my uncle.”

Frowning at her words, I’m about to ask what she means when she blurts out three words, I never thought I would hear.

“He’s my dad.”

Chapter 43

Serena



“Excuse me?” Logan mutters.

Rue gives me a thoughtful stare and then slowly nods her head.

“Interesting, and it makes sense.”

“How long have you known this?”

Meeting Logan’s gaze, I sigh. “I don’t actually know for sure. It’s an educated guess. The way he came in so hard about you and me, the whole forbidding thing, the fact that I look more like him than my parents. It all sort of fell into place, but like I said, I don’t know for sure.”

“It does make sense,” he mutters. “It explains a whole lot, really.” He chuckles softly. “I guess I was going up against Daddy and not Uncle. No wonder he smashed the living daylights out of my face.”

“I’m so sorry,” I cry, stroking his face, which has mostly healed up now. “I can’t believe this.”

“I guess you need to confirm it.”

“Yeah, but I don’t want to speak to my mom-aunt-whatever. I mean, where do I start? And no, I’m not talking to Quen. He can get fucked. If this is true, he gave me away to his sister to raise me as her own. Who does that? And why?”

“This aside,” Rue says carefully. “Can we trust you with our secret?”

“Obviously,” I scoff. “Who am I going to tell? No one would believe me anyway.”

Rue nods and stands up. “I’ll leave you two to talk. But Logan, my parents need an answer about last night.”

“Tell them I was protecting Serena. If they want me, they can come for me.”

What does that mean?

“Fair enough,” she mutters, and then, with a quick wave, she’s gone.

“There are severe repercussions,” Logan says, carrying on the conversation. “You aren’t safe right now.”

“Why, because you’ve just told me all this? I won’t say anything, I swear.” I’m deadly serious about this. I won’t utter a word because it’s ludicrous, for a start. I can’t really process it properly, though, with first Rue and then Logan hovering over me. I need a minute to think, to have a quiet calm so I can go over it and just think. There’s so much to unpack here, John’s death only the least of it. But I suppose there’s the whole deal that Logan won’t get into trouble for it.

“No, I think the cleaner heard you on the phone last night,” Logan mutters.

“What?” I ask, confused. I don’t really remember too much about what happened after I saw Logan kill John. It’s a bit of a blur.

“When I was on the phone, you spoke, and I think he heard you. So he knows someone else was there. You need to stay here for your safety.”

“What about Quentin?”

He blows out a breath and says, “There’s a lot still going on. Viktor and Francesca offered me a higher position last night. Higher than Quen. It means I can deal with him however I see fit. But now that you think he’s your dad, well, that kind of puts a wrench in the works. I can’t just kill him now.”

“Why not?”

My serious question gets laughed at.

“I’m not going to kill your father.”

“Even if I don’t care?”

“Especially if you don’t care. Because maybe you will care in a year, or when we get married, or there’s some other milestone, and you want to share it with him.”

“Blergh. You think we’ll get married?”

He chuckles. “Absolutely, baby girl.”

Grinning, I feel sort of detached from the rest of the stuff. Like it’s real, and some part of me *cares*, but the part that lights up when Logan smiles at me with that sexy curve of his lips, yeah, that part doesn’t give a flying fuck about anything except him. I’d already come to the conclusion that I would say and do anything to be with him. He’s the hero of my story. The older man who has swooped in and taken responsibility for me in a way that my soul

was crying out for. I didn't realize how low I was until he picked me up and cradled me in his arms.

But a sad smile creeps over my face, knowing I have to tell him the whole truth and hope he doesn't back out.

"I don't want kids."

Biting my bottom lip as I wait for him to take that in and process it, I wring my hands in nervousness.

"No?"

I shake my head. "Sorry, I'm just...I don't think it's ever been part of my plans. I'm not stable enough, I may never be. I'm sorry."

Logan grabs my hands and kisses them, holding them tightly between his own. "Look at me."

Forcing my gaze to meet his, I let out a soft sob at the love and warmth in his eyes. "It was never part of my plans, either, baby girl. I'm too jaded, too selfish. My conscience is murky gray at best, and I've seen how vile this world can be. You and me together is all I need to be happy, Serena. Don't ever feel bad over the things you want. No one has a right to tell you what you can and can't do or feel. No one. Do you hear me? You decide."

Overwhelming emotions bubble up and pour out in the form of relieved tears. He is perfect for me. He understands me on a level that no one else ever has. My ex was so dead set on having kids, a house, a dog, and maybe a cat. I can barely look after myself, so how can I even begin to think about bringing children into my shitshow. As much as being with Logan is right for me, I'm not whole. If I ever do become whole, and it's a goal I want to achieve someday in the far future when it's possible, it will be something I want to hold onto and celebrate, to find the freedom that I've never had from being a child to growing up. But right now, I'm still that lost little girl, seeking a reprieve from the demon who haunts me.

Logan gives me that. I only need him.

My angel.

Reaching out, he gently strokes my face and rubs his thumb over my lip. "Let me show you something."

He helps me to my feet while curiosity gets the better of me. "What is it?"

Leading me to the closet, he opens the door and steps inside, pulling me in with him. "There is a panic room built into the back of the closet." He shoves his suits aside to show me a small panel.

Blinking rapidly, I peer closer at it. "What's it for?"

Punching in a number, he steps to the side as we hear a click, and he shoves open a door that appeared to be the back wall of the closet.

“Oh,” I exclaim.

“The number is 1125. Can you remember that?”

Nodding, I repeat to him. “1125. Why are you showing me this?”

“In case they come for you, Serena. I’m deadly serious about this. You need to hide in here if anyone breaks in. Anyone at all. Can you do that?”

Sweat beads my upper lip as I glare into the tiny box room. “It’s very small.”

“It is, but it will keep you safe, and that’s all I care about.”

“I have claustrophobia issues.”

“I know, that’s why I’m asking you if you can do this.”

“How do I get out?”

“Same panel and number on the other side.”

Nodding slowly, I inhale and then breathe out. “Okay, I can do that.”

“Good girl. Thank you. I know it will take so much courage for you to put your fears aside, but I can’t let anything happen to you, Serena.”

Buoyed by his praise, I beam. “I will do it for you.”

His sad smile confuses me momentarily. “You should do it for yourself, Serena, but I’ll take it.”

“My life is nothing without you.”

He grabs my hand again as he closes the secret door. “Mine is nothing without you, which is why I need you safe.”

“Are you really in the clear for John’s death?” This needs reinforcing. I will die if anyone takes him away from me, and I will kill anyone who tries.

“Yes, baby girl. You don’t have to worry about that.”

“Okay, now we are going to go downstairs and eat that magnificent meal that Rose has got cooking, seeing as I’m starving, and later you are going to tell me everything I need to do to get accepted into this Society. I won’t be sitting on the outside looking in. It’s how I’ve lived my whole life.”

“Not anymore,” Logan says, drawing me to him. “I’ll tell you anything you need to know, and I will facilitate your acceptance however I can, but know it won’t be easy.”

“Nothing worth it ever is.”

His blue eyes catch mine, and he gazes at me with such love that I nearly start crying again. “Truer words were never spoken.”

Chapter 44

Logan



When we go back downstairs, Rose is on her way out.
“I’ll leave you two alone. Take the chicken out in an hour; the rest is on a slow boil and will be ready at the same time.”

Giving her a smile, which she returns almost knowingly, I chuckle and see her out, making sure to bolt the door behind her. I’m not taking any chances with Serena. Until my new position becomes official with Solitaire, she is locked up where I know she is safe. Guy is coming around later to change the locks to electronic ones, so if Quen or Isaac decides to just wander in like they’re used to, they will find it less accessible.

Moving to the kitchen, I turn everything off.

Serena pouts and tugs the tee further down. “Rose said an hour.”

“I know, but what I have in mind will take longer, and we don’t want it to spoil.”

A slight blush tinges her cheeks. “Okay, but before we do that, I need to say something.”

Stalking her, I narrow my eyes. “What is it?”

“I need clothes and my stuff from my apartment.”

“Clothes? Oh no, my good girl doesn’t need clothes.” Passing the kitchen counter where I keep a spare blade, just in case, where Rose won’t find it in a holster underneath at the back, I slip it out and keep stalking my girl. Flicking the knife around, I drop to my knees in front of her. Her gasp is music to my ears.

Running my hand up her leg, I bunch up the tee and carefully slide the blade through the fabric at the side of her panties, slicing the material cleanly. Serena’s legs tremble slightly as I bring the knife to the other side and cut the

material holding the scrap together. It falls away, leaving her bare pussy right where I can lick it.

But I don't.

Dropping the hem of the tee but keeping my grip on it, I rise and proceed to bring the blade through the fabric of the t-shirt, right up the middle, rending it in half until it falls away from her breasts.

"That's better," I murmur, keeping my gaze on hers. "Good girls need to be naked so I can fuck them wherever and whenever I want."

"You have more than one?" she chokes out.

The flash of jealousy warms my heart.

"More than one what?" I tease.

"Good girl." Her whisper is terrified. She doesn't have the faintest idea what I feel about her, which fills my heart with pain.

"Oh no. Just the one," I reassure her, carefully dragging the blade over the skin between her breasts. Her relieved expression provokes a slight smile on my lips.

Turning her around, I pull out the hair band from my sweats pocket that I snatched up as we left the bedroom. Braiding her hair, I tie it off and step back. Reaching into my other pocket for the mask from the ball, I pull it out and wrap it around her head.

She faces me as I pull my sweats down to show her my massive erection. "Slide your pretty mouth over my cock. I want to see my good girl being bad."

Her lips part and she does as I ask, dropping to her knees and taking a firm hold of my cock at the base. Reaching out, I wrap the braid around my hand and fist it tightly to keep her in place. When she opens her mouth, I thrust forward, claiming her mouth as I fuck it, gripping her hair tightly as I stare down into her eyes.

"You're so hot when I fuck your mouth, Serena. Fuck, you're gorgeous. This feels so good, baby girl. Mmm."

Ramming harder into her mouth, her eyes widen when I become a bit too rough with her, but she doesn't complain. I'm nowhere near done with her yet.

Pulling back so she can take a breath, I pull my sweats up and haul her to her feet, leading her over to the fireplace. Pushing her up against the wall, her eyes light up, thinking we are about to fuck, but I have other plans for her.

Her demons need to be brought to the surface and whipped. She needs to

be stripped bare, raw, and wild. She is going to hate me at the same time she loves me, but no matter what, I can't stop. She can hide behind the mask, and that's why I brought it along.

"Show me where he touched you."

Serena blinks. "What?"

"The man who abused you when you were younger. Show me where he touched you."

"Logan, no, I—I'm not ready."

Her panic hits me square in the chest, but I keep going. She has to erase this imprint, and I'm the only one who can do this for her.

"Be my good girl and show me, Serena."

"Logan, please." Her lower lip trembles and my heart aches for her.

"Show me so I can rid the images from your mind, Serena. When you think of it, you will think of me touching you, and you will be safe. Show me."

With all the bravery I know she is capable of, she hesitantly reaches out for my hand. I allow her to bring it closer to her.

"Here?" I murmur, cupping her breast.

She nods, her eyes scared and blank. She is about to shut down on me.

"Keep going, my brave girl. I'm so proud of you for taking this small step."

The fire ignites again as she clenches her jaw. She takes the knife from me and draws my hand to her other breast.

"Here," she whispers.

"Then what?"

"He sucked my nipples."

"Did he moan while he did it?"

She nods.

Feeling sick to my stomach, I lean in and place my mouth over her right nipple with a soft groan. "Like this?" I ask softly.

"Yes."

"Were you standing up?"

"Yes."

"So just like this?"

"Mmph."

Her muffled sob makes me look up at her, but she is determined to go on.

"What were his hands doing?"

She clamps hers over mine and pushes up, so her breasts are plumped up. Sucking her nipples gently, I let her get used to it with the image of that predatory asshole in her mind.

“Did he touch you anywhere else?”

Eyes scrunched shut, she nods.

Cupping her pussy, I ask, “Here?”

Her stricken features confirm it.

Sliding my finger over her clit, she cries in anguish, tears seeping from her eyes as she relives the horror I’m inflicting on her. It tears me up inside. Thrusting my fingers inside her body wracked with sobs, I say clearly, “Open your eyes, Serena.”

She shakes her head.

“Open your eyes, baby girl. Look at me.”

Her green eyes shining with tears from her past trauma, open and fix on mine. My heart breaks for her, but I smile.

“What do you see?”

“You.”

“Me. That’s right, baby girl. I’ve got you. This is me. I touch you this way, no one else.”

She nods, her breath ragged.

Moving in closer to her, I remove my fingers from her pussy and press my body against hers.

“Who touches you, baby girl?”

“You do.”

“Who do you see when you feel hands on your body, a mouth over your nipple, fingers thrusting inside you?”

“You.”

“Only me. I demand it, Serena. You will think of no one else in this way, do you understand me?”

“Yes.”

“Did he slide his cock into you?”

She shakes her head, choking back the wounded noise of agony.

“Do you want me to fuck you, Serena?”

“Logan...”

“I’m sorry, baby girl.” I kiss her forehead, cupping her face. “I was harsh, but I needed you to see that it’s only me. Only ever me now. You don’t need to be scared again.”

“Yes,” she whimpers. “I need you, Logan, please.”
“Good girl.”

Chapter 45

Serena



The sound of my heart thunders in my ears, pounding louder and louder as Logan closes the gap between us. His body feels like a wall of solid steel, and I find myself pushing back against him, unable to resist the overwhelming pull. His eyes burn like embers, the desire coiling inside him, ready to break out at any moment.

He leans in, his lips inches from mine. He takes the knife from me and places it on the mantle next to us. Inhaling sharply, my body melts against him as his lips brush lightly against mine. It's a whisper of a touch that makes me shudder with dark pleasure. His exorcizing of my demons was brutal, and the memories are still right at the surface, hurting me and causing me unbearable anxiety, but I trust Logan with my life. His methods are harsh, but I want only to think about him. I don't ever want to feel fear around him.

His fingers dig into my hips, and the heat of his skin against mine is scorching.

Releasing his cock as his tongue dances with mine, gentle like a butterfly, I grip his shoulders and devour his mouth. Pushing away everything but him, I do as he demands and fall into him, wholly and completely.

He lifts my leg, and I wrap it around him, ready for him to claim my body. He positions his cock at my entrance and thrusts forward with a soft groan.

“Gorgeous. You feel gorgeous, baby girl.”

“Ah!” I cry when his hands go to my ass.

He lifts me up, and I wrap my other leg around him, burying him even deeper into my pussy. Soaking him, I close my eyes and feel the long, even stroke of his thick cock stretching me open, his fingers digging into my ass.

“How does it make you feel to know that no other woman will ever have my cock inside them?” he murmurs. “Does it make you feel good?”

“Oh, yes,” I moan, the thought thrilling me. “All mine.”

“That’s right, baby girl—all yours. And you are mine. You will never have another dick inside you ever again.”

“No,” I pant.

“If another man tries to stick his cock in your sweet pussy, I will kill him, Serena. Do you know that?”

A tingle of excitement skitters through my blood. “Yes, I know that.”

“But if you *ever* take another man’s cock inside you, baby girl, I will kill you. Are we clear?”

“Ahh!” My shocked exclamation is met with a deadly serious gaze that doesn’t frighten me, but delights me. “My vicious protector.”

“Answer me, Serena,” he growls.

“Yes, we’re clear. You have nothing to worry about. Yours is the only cock I want, the only one I need. Fuck me harder, Logan. Rip me apart.”

A deep, wild noise escapes his lips as he pounds into me, slamming me up against the wall harder and harder as he relentlessly fucks me until I cream his cock with a loud scream of ecstasy. The climax tears through my body, my pussy clutching his cock possessively, my cunt dripping wet with my desire for this man in my arms.

“Oh, Serena. That feels so good,” he groans. “You’re so wet for me. It makes me so happy, baby girl. Fuck. I love you.”

Eyes wide, I give him an astonished look.

“Say it back, Serena. I need to hear those words from your lips.”

“I love you, Logan. Fuck, I’ve never loved anyone as much as I love you.”

“Uhn,” he grunts and shoots his load inside me, filling my pussy and driving me into a state of sheer hedonism as another orgasm thunders over me.

Suddenly, he pulls away, and I gasp in surprise. His eyes are blazing, with an intensity radiating from his body. He reaches for the knife again. My breath hitches as I watch him, unsure of what he is going to do with it. He leans in, his lips grazing my ear, and his warm breath tickles my skin.

“I want to see your name on my chest,” he whispers, his voice hoarse.

My heart skips a beat as I stare at him, my mouth slightly parted in shock. He wants me to carve my name into his chest. Images of the knife cutting

into my skin as I hurt myself flash through my mind. A sudden wave of fear rushes through me. Taking a deep breath, I try to process the request. He wants to show me that he belongs to me, that he is loyal and devoted. The power of his gaze draws mine to his, and I know he would do anything to ensure I stay with him.

He drops me to my feet and grabs my hand, shoving the knife against my palm, his grip firm and sure. I stare at the blade, the metal glinting in the light. A lump forms in my throat, and my stomach clenches as the reality hits me. I can do this to myself, but can I do it to him?

“I'm not sure...” I whisper, looking up at him. “I don't want to hurt you.”

His lips curve into a smirk as he presses his chest against the tip of the blade, forcing it into his flesh. He gently tilts my chin up to meet his gaze.

“Do it,” he whispers, his tone firm and commanding.

Swallowing hard, my heart pounding in my chest as I grasp the knife tightly in my hand. I know that he won't let me go until I do what he asks. I don't want him to be disappointed in me. It would kill me if he ever got upset with me, so I slowly begin to make the first shallow cut. He holds my hand steady as I slowly carve my name into his chest. Blood seeps from the wound, but he doesn't flinch. A strange mixture of emotions washes over me as I work my way through the letters of my name, wanting it to end but, at the same time, wanting it to go on so I can see him bleed. Finishing the task, a sense of pride and accomplishment arises.

“Is that okay?” I whisper.

“It's beautiful.”

My heart flutters in my chest, and my cheeks flush. I want to say something profound, but I'm suddenly at a loss for words. He pulls me closer, his lips crashing against mine as he kisses me deeply. Our tongues intertwine as his hands roam my body, exploring every inch of my curves. His hands are rough and insistent, and I feel like I'm melting into him.

He takes the knife from me, and I breathe out a sigh of relief, but then he presses the tip to the skin in between my breasts.

“You are mine, Serena. Any man who tries to take you from me will have this stark reminder that I will come for them and eviscerate them before I burn their still-beating hearts before their eyes.”

“Ooh,” I moan as the knife slices deftly into my skin as he carves his name.

The burn is beautiful and intense. Arching my back, begging him to keep

going, needing it, needing to be marked with his name.

He finishes and pulls away, looking into my eyes, a satisfied smirk tugging at his lips. “Thank you,” he whispers.

I cup his face, a soft smile playing on my lips as I feel the blood dripping down my chest.

My heart swells, and suddenly, it all makes sense. I belong to Logan, and he belongs to me. I have finally found my savage solace, and I’m never letting him go.

Chapter 46

Logan



Leaving her is like leaving half of myself behind. She has wrapped around me and consumed me, but this is a necessary action.

“Do not open this door for anyone. Not even me.”

She frowns. “What do you mean?”

“I know the codes for the new locks. If I ask you to open the door, don’t.”

Serena nods firmly. “Got it.”

“Do you?”

She giggles. “Yes. I’ve got it. But do you have to go?”

“I won’t be long, baby girl. I promise I’ll be back soon.” Drawing her to me, I kiss her sweetly.

“Can you at least tell me where you’re going?”

“It’s just business. Nothing to worry about.”

“That makes me worry.”

“Don’t, please. I love you.” Lingering, with my lips on hers, I eventually pull away, or I’m going to be late.

“I love you, Logan. Please be safe.”

“I’ll be fine. Remember the room, Serena. Stay upstairs, and if you hear anything that isn’t me, you enter it. Promise me.”

“I promise.”

“Code?”

“1125.”

“Okay, good girl.” I kiss the top of her head and then pull away.

A few days have passed since I heard anything from Quentin, which is worrying. He is planning something, I’m sure, so I need to take care of this once and for all. Killing him is a last resort. I’m going to try to reason with

him first, for Serena's sake.

Guy has installed a state-of-the-art electronic mechanism that slides a bolt into place when I activate the lock from the outside. Serena will be able to manually unlock it if she absolutely has to, but I'm hoping it doesn't come to that. There should be no need. I intend to be an hour at most.

Slipping into the waiting car, it glides away from the curb as soon as I shut the door, and minutes later, we are pulling up to the chosen location—a disused building in the abandoned area of town.

As soon as the car stops, I get out and stride into the deserted building, adjusting the gun at my back and under my coat as my footsteps echo on the concrete floor.

"Quentin," I say when I see him on the far side, staring out of the grimy windows into the yard at the back.

Scanning the area for Isaac, I see him loitering a few meters away. Keeping him in my sights, I don't put it past Quentin to have someone behind me ready to blow my head off.

"Logan. What is this about?"

"The return."

He turns to me with a surprised look. "That was all sorted. Did I forget to tell you?"

"Yeah."

"Well, my apologies."

I don't believe it for a second. Not that the item hasn't been returned, I already knew that because Guy made sure, but his forgetting to tell me. He wanted me to come to him. Probably so he could lure me out and kill me. It sets my senses on high alert.

"How is Serena?" he asks.

"She's healing. She knows."

"Knows what?"

"That you're her father."

"I figured as much. I did come down hard on her, which would've gotten her thinking. What has she said about it?"

His curiosity intrigues me. He really wants to know how she feels about him.

"Not much. She's processing."

"Ah. Well, she will have time to come to terms with it after she grieves for you."

Chuckling softly, I pull the gun out and aim it at his head. “I take that as threat enough.”

“Kill me, and you are over. You know how this works, Logan.”

“I do, but you see, things have changed, Quentin. You are no longer the highest-ranking member of Solitaire in this building. Viktor is fully aware of my actions.”

The flash of fear in his eyes is all I need to be assured he didn’t know about any of this. It’s gone in a split second. “Be careful whose names you’re throwing around, Logan. You have no idea what you’re getting yourself into.”

“But I do,” I reply, stepping closer and leveling the gun at his face. “Leave Serena and me alone, and you will live. I’m now Head of the South-West sector, so you can’t touch me.”

Fury burns in his eyes. It’s higher than the role he had hoped to be moved into. “Sector,” he murmurs. “You know the sacrifice for such an honor will be great.”

“If anyone comes for Serena, they will regret it with every cell in their being. She means more to me than Solitaire ever did.”

My focus shifts momentarily as Isaac steps forward. Frowning, I notice he casually pulls on a pair of black leather gloves.

“You would give up Solitaire for her?” Quentin asks in surprise, drawing my attention back to him before I glance back at Isaac. Something isn’t right.

“Obviously. I love her. I can’t live without her. I can live without Solitaire.”

Clutching the gun tighter, ready to end this if Isaac comes any closer, he stops next to Quentin, a few feet away. Before either of us can say another word, I watch in surprise as Isaac pulls out a gun, holds it up to Quentin’s head, and pulls the trigger.

Taking a step back from the soft *ping* from the silencer as Quentin goes down. I turn the gun on Isaac.

“Welcome to the higher echelons of Solitaire,” he says in that quiet, calm way of his. “Viktor sends his regards with this gift.”

“Gift...”

Isaac puts the gun away and turns his back to me, clearly unconcerned about the weapon trained on him.

I lower it.

There is no threat here.

“Shit.” Moving a bit closer to Quen’s dead body, I crouch down and let out a slow breath. “Fuck. Serena.”

I take a moment to consider how the fuck I’m going to tell her that her father is dead, and she will never get to ask him why he gave her up. I was fully prepared to take him out but was pretty sure I could reason with him using Serena as a temptation he couldn’t refuse.

After a few moments, I straighten up and replace the gun in the back of my pants. Making my way back outside into the weak winter sun, the car is still idling, waiting for me. Climbing in, resigned to my new position now, the weight of it bearing down on me.

Sacrifice.

Solitaire always demands a sacrifice.

My phone rings in my pocket, so I grab it quickly, thinking it’s Serena. It’s not.

“Viktor.”

“Logan. Are you happy with your gift?”

“Yes,” I croak.

“Not many people know this about me, but in my eyes, you showed the greatest loyalty.”

“What do you mean?” My palms sweat as I wait for his reply.

“To your love. It showed me that you are a man of substance. You were ready to give up everything for her. Even your life.”

Even my life.

That threat hangs there like a noxious gas.

“She’s worth it.”

“Indeed. I’ll be in touch, Logan.”

He hangs up, and I replace my phone, almost worried about what that phone call will entail. All I know is if anyone, even Viktor, threatens Serena, it will be the last thing they do.

When the car stops outside my building, it takes me a second to gather my thoughts. There is no way I can keep this from Serena, and I’m concerned about her reaction. She has made some progress in the last week. She appears healthier and talks about the future. I don’t want anything setting her back.

With a sigh, I get out of the car and make my way upstairs. Unlocking the door, I wait for the click of the bolt and then call out, “Serena, it’s me,” before I push the door open.

With my thoughts still on everything that happened earlier, I’m distracted

not to react quickly enough when the staircase door next to the elevator bangs open, and the cold steel of a blade is pressed against my throat.

“Logan. I’ve been waiting for you.”

Chapter 47

Serena



“L ogan?”

I’m not sure what’s going on. Standing at the bottom of the stairs, ready to run up them to the panic room, I hesitate because Logan is standing in the doorway.

Slowly, he raises his hands and is shoved inside.

“Logan!” I exclaim, moving forward when I see he is being held at knifepoint by a tall brunette with sharp features and expensive clothes.

Her gaze zeroes in on me, her eyes narrowing. “Get inside,” she mutters, shoving Logan again, digging the blade into his neck and then reaching under his coat. Slamming the door closed with her foot, she releases Logan and presses the gun she took from him to his temple.

Eyes on me, she asks, “Who are you?”

“Upstairs,” Logan murmurs.

Knowing I should go, I remain rooted to the spot. Not out of terror of being shot by this woman, but for Logan, who she clearly has a beef with. She’s here for him, not me. She doesn’t even know who I am.

“Go!” he grits out, his hands half held up in surrender, but one is twitching, almost as if he’s getting ready to strike.

Shaking my head, hating the look of anger in his eyes that I’ve disobeyed him, I stand my ground. I’m not running to safety while he gets shot or worse. How could I live with myself?

“Serena Wakefield,” I say to the woman, hopefully distracting her so Logan can do whatever he’s itching to do.

She purses her lips, but then brings the gun back and whacks Logan in the back of the head with it.

“Logan!” I shriek as he slumps to the floor, lunging forward until the woman steps toward me, gun leveled at my face.

“What do you want?” I ask. I’ve got fuck all except the few clothes and toiletries that Rue brought over a week ago. I have no money because I sent everything that I had left back to the woman who raised me, leaving me completely broke.

“I want him dead,” she spits out. “But you...maybe I can make him hurt first.”

“Wh-what do you mean?” I stammer.

“You mean something to him, or he wouldn’t have told you to run.” She squints at me, coming closer. “You his daughter or something?”

Balking at the insult, I choke out, “Eww. No, I’m his girlfriend.”

She snorts with amusement. “Oh, really? Do yourself a favor, girlie, and forget that label. Logan doesn’t do relationships.”

“He does with me,” I state slowly, the feeling of jealousy rising, about to bubble out. Containing it because it makes me want to claw her eyes out with my bare hands, I bite the inside of my lip, telling myself not to do anything foolish.

“Oh, you are so deluded. Is that what he’s spun you?” Her mock sad face angers me. She has no idea what she’s talking about.

“Probably deflowered you, did he? You look young enough,” she scoffs. “Guess he decided to switch to the less experienced.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about!” Why is she doing this? Why is she trying to hurt me?

“Take it from me, *Serena*, Logan Carter is a user. He will fuck you and leave you and then come back and kill you if you show any signs of power. I’ve realized he wants his women weak. It’s why he wouldn’t help Shelley and me.”

“Who is Shelley?” I ask with trepidation.

Her dark eyes laser through mine with a fury that makes me take a step back. “My twin that he killed.”

“What?” My stomach coils into a knot. Twins?

She raises her eyebrow at me, smugness written all over her cruel face.

“We fucked him so hard,” she purrs. “All night long, we took turns with him. He’d fill my pussy with cum and then take Shelley and do the same to her, over and over...”

“Lies,” I hiss, but with a victorious smile. I know she’s lying. Logan told

me he always wore a condom until he had sex with me. Even knowing he wouldn't lie to me about it, I know it's true in the way he groans about how good I feel wetting his cock, how warm and juicy, and how attracted he is to see his cum dripping out of me. "You've never felt his cock inside you, not the way I have."

My implication hits home, and she hisses, coming closer. My confidence fails me, and I step back again, further away from Logan. But I've remembered something. I do need to get upstairs because I saw a gun in Logan's closet the other day, in the panic room. If I could just get to it, even when I have no idea how to use it, it will help even the score, and maybe I can get it to Logan before she shoots me. Backing up until I see the bottom stair in my peripheral vision, I clench my fists and gather every ounce of courage I have left in me to try to save the man I love. I have to do everything I can, or I've failed him.

Launching myself up the stairs, knowing she is going to follow me, I'm not wrong. Taking them two at a time, she roars and chases me, catching me at the top.

"I didn't come here to kill you, but I will," she snarls, grabbing my braid tightly.

"Leave her alone, Shelley!" Logan thunders, appearing at the bottom of the stairs.

"Kelly," she snaps, turning to him.

"Huh?" he asks, a puzzled expression on his face that I would find funny if I weren't hovering on the edge of the staircase in the grip of a mad woman.

"I'm Kelly. The woman you killed was Shelley."

"Ooh," he drawls. "Twins. That makes more sense than you coming back from the dead."

"You killed her, you fucking prick. Sliced her throat like she meant nothing to you!"

"She didn't," Logan says, rubbing his head, unconcerned about the gun pointing in his face. "She was somewhere to stick my cock."

"We!" she screeches. "We were! You couldn't even tell the fucking difference, could you?"

His face pales before he scoffs. "Both of you. You played that lame game. Seriously?"

"Always. You have no idea the depth of this cover, but you've ruined it. You killed her, leaving me all alone, so now I'm going to kill this little

blonde plaything you seem to have an attachment to.”

“She’s innocent in all this,” Logan says, stepping onto the bottom stair.

I struggle in Kelly’s grip, knowing I have to get out of this. I was stupid enough to think I could be as ruthless as she is, but I wasn’t quick enough or strong enough, and now Logan and I are probably going to die.

Not caring about me as much, I growl when I think about her killing Logan. Focusing all my energy, I clench my fist and tense my arm, drawing it up so I can slam it back into her stomach. I’ve never done this before, so I have no idea what I’m doing or if it’ll work or anything. But Logan told me that when someone attacks me, I fight. So I will. I won’t let him down.

Gritting my teeth, I elbow her as hard as I can.

With the pain reverberating up my arm, I duck out of her loosened grip, and while she is still surprised, I reach for the gun.

“NO!” Logan thunders, lunging up the stairs two at a time. “Serena!”

Struggling with Kelly to gain control of the gun, I’m failing. She is much taller than me and stronger, and clearly more determined.

“You little bitch!” she hisses when I stamp on her toe, and she hobbles around with me clinging to her with one hand clamped around her wrist and one around the barrel of the gun.

“Serena, let go,” Logan says, slowing down and approaching with caution at the gun waving all over the place.

But I’m lost in the struggle. I have to get this gun away from Kelly, or I’ve failed again to protect myself and now Logan as well.

Ducking, I let go of Kelly’s wrist, throwing her off-balance. She backs up to the edge of the top step. In her heeled boots, she is off-center, and I can see only one way out of this.

As Logan lunges for her, panting, I let go of the gun, and lift my sneakered foot, kicking her in the stomach.

She scrabbles as she loses her footing, her arms going up, the gun firing at the ceiling, nearly breaking my eardrums.

I shriek, clapping my hands over my ears as I watch in horror as Kelly crashes down the stairs, her body distorted, her limbs snapping in the wrong direction.

“Logan!” I cry, my actions catching up with me as she hits the bottom of the stairs.

Silence descends as he reaches for me, pulling me to him as we stare down at the misshapen body of Kelly. Her neck is twisted, and blood is

pooling under her head. She is quiet. Her eyes are open and glazed over.

“Is she dead?” I rasp.

“Fuck,” Logan says, turning me into him. “Don’t look. Stay here, where you should have been all along, and I’ll deal with this. Serena...” He runs his hand desperately through his hair.

“I—I was getting some coffee.”

His frantic gaze lands on mine, and his expression softens. “I know, baby girl. I know.” He takes me in his arms again and strokes my hair as I stand stock still, not able to move save for breathing, and even that’s a struggle. My shallow pants are loud in my ears which are still ringing from the sound of the gunshot. Looking up, I see the bullet embedded in the ceiling.

“Is she dead?”

“Stay here,” he demands and lets go of me to run down the stairs to check on the lifeless woman at the bottom that I know I just killed.

Chapter 48

Logan



Glancing up at Serena standing at the top of the stairs, her hand around her throat, I reach for a pulse on the body in front of me.

Drawing my eyes to her face, I can't see any difference between her and her twin. Granted, I never looked closely enough.

"Well?" Serena calls down, her voice is weak and terrified.

Standing up, I look up at her and my face must say it all because she balks and turns away, a sob wrenching out of her chest.

Knowing she needs a minute to come to terms with her first kill, I pull my phone out and rub the back of my head where Kelly cold-cocked me. Fucking bitch. She knew me better than I had anticipated. She knew I was armed. But having Serena here threw her off. She wanted to taunt her, play with her.

Hurt her.

As I dial the cleaner, I have to wonder how many times, over a couple of weeks, I fucked Kelly and how many times Shelley. I can't help it. It's a random thought that I will never express out loud to Serena. It doesn't matter, but I'm curious. Things like this bug me, and now I will never know.

"Clean up at my apartment," I murmur when the phone is answered on the other end. There's no need to give my address as I hang up. He knows it's me. He knows where I live.

Glad that Rose wasn't here to witness any of this, I'm forced into activity when there is a soft knock on the door. Considering that this building is secured at the front, there seems to be enough people appearing out of the cracks lately. That needs looking into immediately, especially with Serena moving in here, which I haven't discussed with her yet, but will, once we've dealt with this mess, and then me having to tell her that her father is dead as

well.

“What a fucking shitshow,” I mutter as there is another knock.

“Logan? It’s Viktor Di’Castello.”

Biting back my laugh, as if I didn’t know which Viktor, I cross over and open the door.

“Shots fired?”

“Come in.”

He steps into the apartment, followed by Francesca.

“How did you know?”

“Your downstairs neighbor called the police, but we took care of it.”

“Oh, shit. Sorry,” I mumble, having not even considered that. I’m too used to things being less loud. It’s why I prefer a knife over a gun. Also, it’s more personal, and I like getting my hands dirty.

He shrugs.

“Where is Serena?” Francesca asks.

Pointing upwards, she nods and strides over to the stairs. Maybe Fran’s eccentric personality is just what Serena needs right now.

“Can I ask what happened?” Viktor asks, striding over to the dead body that Francesca ignores and steps over before she disappears up the stairs.

“That is apparently Shelley Thorpe’s twin, Kelly.”

Viktor gives me a surprised look before turning back to the body. “You don’t say?”

“Hmm.”

“Did you know?”

“Did I fuck. This was news to me. How come Solitaire didn’t know? She was recruited. Surely it would’ve come up.”

“No.”

Heaving a sigh, I say, “She said that she and Shelley always did this, and I had no idea the depth of the cover. I’m guessing it was their intention to infiltrate Solitaire as one woman but have two at their disposal.”

“Genius, really,” Viktor comments. “Know any more twins? I might have a use for them.”

“No,” I grit out.

“Hmm, well,” he says, straightening up from his investigation and crossing over to open the door to the cleaner.

We don’t make eye contact. I have no idea who it is or what he looks like under the mask.

“Move her first,” I murmur. “Serena doesn’t need to see this.”

Viktor nods to the cleaner, who looks to him for confirmation.

“Coffee?” Viktor asks.

“Sure.”

We turn our backs as the cleaner gets to work moving Kelly before hacking her into little pieces to place neatly into the two large ice coolers, he brought up with him. Definitely not something Serena needs to witness. It will give her nightmares.

Pouring Viktor a mug of coffee and handing it to him straight, I pour another for myself.

“You’ve had quite a day.”

“No shit. You didn’t need to kill Quen. I was handling it.”

“You don’t like your gift?”

“Serena might’ve had questions. Now she will never know.”

“She can ask her aunt.”

Biting my tongue to stop the sarcastic comment, I grimace. He has a point, but still. First-hand is always best. Her aunt might not know anything useful.

“I have a proposition,” he adds after a pause. “Rue was quite insistent that we look at recruiting Serena. You know the rules, though. There was nothing outstanding in her resume apart from her being Quentin’s blood. Until now.”

He glances over his shoulder at the cleanup going in the middle of my living room, which has been sheeted off to prevent blood from getting everywhere.

“Oh?” I croak.

“Shelley Thorpe was a, how can I put this mildly? A pain in the ass. You took care of it, and that is what secured your promotion. I believe that you didn’t know about this development, which makes for an even bigger ass pain. Do you follow?”

Yeah, I fucking follow. “You’re recruiting Serena because she killed Kelly. How do you know it wasn’t me?”

“She was pushed, no? If you had done this...well, need I say more?”

“No.” Taking a sip of my coffee, just for something to do to pass the time, I ask eventually. “Will Francesca bring her in now? She is in shock, and I’m not sure she is thinking clearly.”

“Fran will be the judge of that. Don’t you worry about your girl. Mine is quite capable.”

Nodding slowly, my gaze is drawn to the stairs. Wishing I was a fly on the wall, I have to leave them to it.

“Shall we retreat to the terrace?” Viktor asks a moment later. “The smell is vile.”

“Agreed,” I murmur, and follow him outside, where it’s freezing but less disgusting; I leave the door open so I can hear Serena if she needs me.

I really hope she doesn’t need me, or things might get ugly.

Well, uglier.

Chapter 49

Serena



The scent of Francesca's perfume fills my nostrils, overwhelming my senses so much I have to reluctantly pull away from the hug.

Her phone beeps, so she checks it, and then she smiles, putting it away before leading me to the bed to sit. Stroking my hair when we are settled, she says, "You are so brave, Serena. What you did was necessary."

"Was it?"

Francesca reaches for the box of tissues on the nightstand and pulls one out. "Absolutely. This woman was going to kill you and Logan. You have to protect yourself. Always."

"Yeah."

"You are not convinced?"

Shaking my head, I sigh. "Well, I mean, I am but I'm not. Maybe there was another way? We'll never know."

"You can't think like that, dear girl. It will only lead you down a path that will drive you nuts."

"I know." Pausing, I want to ask her if she has ever killed anyone, but that would out myself as knowing about the Society.

"You know about us, Serena. That places you in a very exclusive position."

My blood runs cold at her words. "Uhm, what do you mean?"

She giggles. "Don't play coy. I know. Solitaire wants to recruit you, Serena."

Meeting her gaze, I hold it for a moment. I don't see any murderous intentions behind her statement, but who knows with this crowd? Killing seems to be a weekly thing with them.

“Solitaire.”

“It’s okay, Serena. You do not need to be afraid. You have impressed us, and Rue is so enamored with you. She rarely finds people she connects with, not even her old friends, but you...she loves you.”

“I love her too.”

“This predicament was interesting. You have done Solitaire a favor by ridding us of this woman.”

“What do you mean?” Maybe I’m slow on the uptake, but what did she have to do with Solitaire? I thought she was just an ex of Logan’s who went a bit crazy.

“Let’s not get into that right now. Just know that this has put you on the map, Serena. Your actions were courageous and necessary. You did what you needed to do with no hesitation.”

How does she know I didn’t hesitate? I mean, I didn’t. I saw Kelly off balance, and I shoved her. Simple in the way that spontaneous murder can be. Murder.

There’s that word I was trying to avoid thinking about.

The weird thing is, I don’t feel that shaken up. I didn’t know her. I certainly didn’t care about her. She tried to kill me and Logan. If it hadn’t been her, it would’ve been me. Maybe not Logan; he’s got more experience in surviving, I feel, but definitely me.

“How do you feel?”

“About Kelly or about Solitaire?” I ask boldly.

“Both.”

“Kelly was a threat.”

“She was.”

“I’m not broken up about *her*, more that I didn’t think I was capable of this.”

“We never know what we are capable of until the right circumstances present themselves.”

“True.”

“You did a good thing for Solitaire. We owe you a debt of gratitude.”

Shaking my head, I smile sadly. “No, that’s not right.”

“But it’s true.”

“Thanks, then, I guess.” I have no idea what else to say.

“Don’t thank me, just say you will join our family, yes?”

“Do I get much choice now that I know?” It’s a valid fucking question.

“Of course,” she scoffs, but I have a feeling it’s a lie, luckily, it is what I wanted. I said I didn’t want to be on the outside looking in, and I meant it. Logan doesn’t get to be some big hot shot Secret Society man, and I’m the little girl tagging along and clueless. No chance.

“Well,” I huff out a breath. “It’s a good thing I want in.”

Beaming at me, she says, “Fabulous! Rue will be so excited to have someone to talk to about things!”

Returning her smile and feeling weirdly okay about what just happened, I blow my nose and brighten up a bit. My life has crashed so badly again, but I can’t keep doing this. I can’t keep falling down and expecting Logan to pick me up. He will get annoyed with me and my whining, and eventually, he will leave me, and I wouldn’t even be able to blame him. I not only look to him to be my protector, my savior, but I look *up* to him. He can teach me so much about the world and myself and how to love deeply and irrevocably. If I don’t do this for myself, then I have to do it for him and for us. It scares me a bit, knowing that I have to be stronger and more capable, to accept the darker aspect of life, but I will. I know the dark exists, I’ve witnessed it several times, but I’ve survived, and Logan has made me stronger.

“So what do I have to do?”

“Just be you, Serena. Your wonderful, perfect self. If we need you, we will let you know.” After that rather ominous-sounding statement, Francesca rises and cups my face. “Are you okay now?”

Nodding, I reply, “Yes. I’m good. Thanks for being here. I think Logan would’ve handled that a lot differently.”

“Oh, you mean like a man?” She snickers at her joke.

“Yep, he has his methods, and I love them, but I guess I needed a softer touch today.”

Francesca looks down at me, her eyes serious. “If you ever need me, Serena, I will be here. You are like my little protégé. I feel we are going to have a magnificent time.”

“Hope so and thank you.”

With a glorious smile, she drops her hand and leaves me to contemplate everything on my own before Logan will inevitably come up here asking how I am. I want to tell him with no uncertainty that I’m fabulous, and while killing Kelly was a shock and will be something that sticks with me for a while, I don’t regret it.

That’s the main thing, right? No regrets.

Rising steadily to wash my face and tidy up a bit, I coil my hair up into a braided bun and stick some pins in it. I've been wearing it this way for days, hoping Logan would grab it again and use it to hold me in place while he does dirty things to me, but so far, that hasn't happened again. He's been gentle and loving. Maybe it's time to take the bull by the horns and force him to be rough with me. Needing it, craving it, I want to be slammed against the wall, fucked over the dining table where I leave boobprints on the clear glass, ravaged, savaged, cut, my hair tugged, my pussy battered by his enormous cock.

Is that too much to ask? I don't think so, so I will force him to make the first move and then it's up to him to pick up what I've laid down.

Wondering what has happened to Kelly, I round the corner from the bedroom and peek down the stairs. She's not there anymore and the blood has been cleaned up from the parquet floor.

The cleaner.

I guess that's why he has the title.

"Can I come down now?" I call, biting my lip and rolling my eyes at the absurdity of my question. But I really don't want to walk downstairs and unexpectedly find the cleaner stuffing Kelly into a suitcase to walk off with. That would be a bit too much for my conscience to bear. I'm toeing the line as it is.

Logan appears with that smile, the wicked curve of his lips that thrills me to my very core. "Yes, baby girl. It's safe."

Nodding, I take the stairs slowly. Walking my way through Kelly's last moments, wondering what went through her mind as she fell to her death.

By the time I've reached the bottom and Logan takes my hand, kissing my fingers, I realize that I don't really care.

Chapter 50

Logan



Francesca said Serena was fine and that she had accepted the offer to become part of Solitaire, but I wasn't sure what to expect. It wasn't this slightly more confident goddess that has, to my dismay tied her hair up in a bun.

"How are you?" I ask carefully.

"Good. Francesca is great. She showed me that what I did was necessary, or I would be dead, and probably you as well."

"All true. That woman was...disturbed." Coming from me, that's saying something. "But are you sure you're good?" She seems to be, but killing someone, especially the first time is shocking and takes a while to come to terms with.

"I'm okay. You don't have to worry about me."

"But I want to. You mean everything to me."

Her eyes light up, and it stirs my cock. She adores the words that make her feel good, and I can't wait to show her with actions for the rest of my life. But unfortunately, there are things hanging over my head. "I have something to say. Now probably isn't the best time, but I have to tell you."

"What is it?" Her sense of dread is there even though she's trying to hide it.

"I went to see Quentin earlier."

"Oh? How come? Is everything okay? Did he hurt you?" Her eyes laser over me, checking for injuries.

"I'm fine. He...Isaac shot and killed him."

"Wh-what?" she stammers, her eyes wide. "Who is Isaac?"

"The big guy."

“The one with the apples?”

Frowning, I want to ask her how she knows about the apples, but shake my head and say, “Yeah, that guy.”

“Okay. Is he definitely dead?”

“Yes.” No way am I telling her he was shot in the head.

“Fuck.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry, Serena.”

“Fuuuuck! Now what am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to get answers?”

“See! I knew you didn’t want me to kill him,” I can’t help pointing out like an idiot.

Her incredulous expression makes me want to laugh out loud, but I don’t. “Seriously? That’s your issue here?”

“No, but I’m still sorry. I couldn’t stop it. It was an order from higher up.”

“Rue’s parents?”

Shrugging my response, I ask, “You need to speak to your mom, and ask her what happened.”

“Mom,” she scoffs. “Yeah, okay.”

“For all intents and purposes, she was your mom.” Feeling it unnecessary to remind her that she *has* parents, I press my lips together.

“Yeah, I suppose,” she admits reluctantly. “I’ll call her later.”

“Do it now.”

It’s an order that I want her to obey. This will hang over her head, and to be honest, tonight, I want to make her forget everything. The cleaner her slate, the easier that will be. She might seem okay right now, but when she closes her eyes and the night darkens, boxing her in, she is going to see Kelly’s last moments over and over again.

“Okay, I’ll do it,” she says, pulling away from me to dig out her phone from the oversized handbag Rue brought with her belongings a few days ago. Even though the threats against her and us are over, I’m not allowing her to leave this apartment to go back to hers. This is her home now.

“Dead,” she announces, holding it up.

“Charger,” I reply, pointing to it plugged in the corner of the sitting room.

“Fuck,” she mutters and ambles over to plug it in.

As she does so, my phone rings. Answering it as I see it’s Guy, he is quick to jump in before I’ve even said hello.

“I thought you said you were going the legal route?”

“With what?” Casting my glance over to Serena, who is staring at her phone while it boots up, I need him to hurry up.

“Clifford Stanley.”

Narrowing my eyes, something doesn’t feel right. “What about him?”

“He’s dead.”

“What? How?” My blood runs cold as the implications hit me. I was still in the process of getting the case out of cold storage. How the fuck?

“Shanked.”

Closing my eyes, I shake my head. Viktor and another one of his *gifts*, no doubt. He is tying me deeper and deeper into the Society, and while not a bad thing, certainly isn’t what I was hoping for. The feeling that this isn’t the end of it plagues me because I’ve figured out his endgame and the fact that it scares me should tell you the severity of what he is planning in the future, possibly sooner than I can predict.

“Dammit, Vik,” I mutter.

“Huh?”

“Nothing. Thanks for the update.”

“Anytime.”

We hang up, and I turn to Serena, needing her comfort, needing her arms around me for just a second so I can feel real and not some pawn in a power play that is way above my pay grade.

“What?” she asks, the dread in her voice palpable this time. She drops her phone and comes to me, wrapping her arms around me as I stand completely still, unable to fully process everything that just happened.

“The man who murdered my family and tried to murder me has been killed in prison.” I blurt this out, knowing it will shock her, but needing the simplified version of events for her.

I’m not wrong.

“Fuck. Wow, that’s...shit, Logan. Why didn’t you tell me any of this before?”

“You don’t need my shit weighing you down.”

“Hey,” she snaps, gripping my chin and being the fierce, badass woman I know she can be. “This is our shit to deal with together. I don’t get the monopoly on bringing shit to the relationship. If you feel up to it, I want to know, but if you’re not ready, I’ll be here when you are.”

Contemplating her words as I stare into her wide, innocent green eyes,

which are now tinged with darkness, I fall so deeply in love with her, I'm finding it impossible to breathe. It was there before, a possessive love that made me want to consume her, but that's not who she is. She is mine, but she isn't *mine*. As much as I want to lock her away from the world and keep her all to myself, I know at that moment, she needs to fly, to extend her burgeoning wings to become the woman, the wife that will be a force in my life. Because shit just got real, and with the knowledge I've pieced together that Viktor and Francesca are planning to overthrow the Don, I have a nasty feeling, she is going to need all the strength in the world to remain by my side, to grow and learn and find herself.

And as much as I hate that I can't keep her caged, I'm going to have to let her soar.

Chapter 51

Serena



“**H**ow does it make you feel? Knowing that he died before he could be held accountable?”

We’ve been sitting in front of the fire, talking about this for a while now. He has opened up about witnessing his family’s murder and nearly joining them. I totally get it now. I get where his darkness comes from. No one can come back from that and be in the light. It’s a wonder and a testament to him that he has stayed out of the complete black. His strength of character is everything.

“He didn’t die. He was murdered,” he points out caustically, but then his face crumples. “I’m sorry, that was cold after everything you’ve been through today.”

Shaking my head, I take his hand and lace our fingers together. “Don’t think about me, right now. This is ‘you’ time.”

“You’re sweet, but you know what? Good fucking riddance. I’m done with this shit.” He drags me onto his lap and adds, “My cock needs to be in your pussy, but first, you forgot something.”

Wiggling and riling him up, I smile. “What’s that then?”

“Call your mom.” He deposits me next to him and stands up, crossing over to my phone, which will be all charged up by now.

Sighing, I take it from him and decide to rip the band-aid off. Dialing, I switch to speaker, wanting Logan to hear everything, mostly so I don’t have to repeat and waste more time. My pussy wants his cock, and this is getting in the way of that.

“Serena.” The sound of her voice sends a chill down my spine. I don’t know why I suddenly feel such resentment toward her.

“Why didn’t you tell me Quentin was my biological dad?” I ask, getting to the point of hurrying this shitshow along. I have no need for the drawn-out heart to hearts. I want to know what I want to know right now. Maybe in a week or a month, or a year, I’ll want to know more.

“Oh,” she says, “You know.”

“Yup.”

“How?”

“I have his fucking face,” I snarl, but Logan shakes his head and takes my hand to calm me down. It works like a charm. “Sorry,” I murmur.

“Good girl,” he whispers.

It fires up my engines and now I want to quit this call and ride his cock until I can’t come anymore.

“Okay, I understand your anger, but Quen is involved in some things—”

“I know all about the things,” I interrupt.

“So it should then come as no surprise to you that he did it to keep you safe.” Her very blunt, very solid statement hits home, and I clench my jaw.

“That’s it? That’s all you’ve got?”

“That’s all I’ve got.”

“Do you even love me?” I ask, choking back the sob.

“Oh, Rena. Don’t be silly. You know your father, and I adore you,” she says, her voice softening. “I’ve wanted to tell you for so many years, but he forbade it, and I understood why. It doesn’t make it a secret any easier to keep. I’m sorry.”

Her apology throws me. I was ready to cut her out of my life and hate her, but she was as much a toy in this game Quen was playing as me.

“Is that why you’ve been avoiding me?” she asks quietly.

“I wasn’t...okay, I was. It’s been a lot.”

“I know. Please don’t think that we don’t love you. We do so much. You are *ours*. I don’t care that Quen is your biological father.”

Exchanging a glance with Logan, he raises an eyebrow. I guess Secret Society hits remain precisely that...a secret. She has no idea her brother was murdered.

“Who is my biological mother?”

The pause seems to go on forever.

“A woman called Anne Gardner. She died in childbirth.”

“Ooh.” That hits me harder than I expected as tears prick my eyes. “I killed her.”

“Oh, no, Rena. Don’t say that. This isn’t your fault.”

“But probably why Quen gave me up.”

“I think so.”

“So you did know more.”

“That is all I know, I swear. I’m sorry, Reenie. I know this must hurt.”

“I’m okay.” Now I get it. Now I understand why killing Kelly doesn’t bother me so much. I’m a killer and always have been.

“I need to go and think about this.”

“Of course. Please, Serena, don’t blame yourself, and I’m so, so sorry, baby. We love you, please know that.”

“I do.”

Hanging up, I blink at Logan.

“Wow. I wasn’t expecting that.”

“No, that was heavy.”

“Ugh!” I cry suddenly. “I am so sick of this. Just fuck me and help me forget all this shit for a bit.”

He grins wickedly. “Oh, you don’t need to ask me twice.”

He hauls me to my feet and spins me around, cupping my breasts as he nuzzles my neck.

“Rough, Logan. I want to feel every inch of my skin bruised, used, and ravaged.”

“Done, baby girl. And when this night is over, I want you to move in here with me permanently so I can never have you out of my sights.”

“I need to work.”

“No, you don’t. I have more money than I know what to do with.”

“Fuck that. I don’t mooch.”

He chuckles. “Mooch away, my good girl. I cannot wait to spoil you rotten and take care of your every whim. Please let me.”

The shiver that tingles over my skin is electrifying and exhilarating. “So you’re going to be like my sugar daddy?” I tease with a snort.

“Err,” he stammers. “How old do you think I am?”

Spinning in his arms to cup his face and press my body against his, I rub my thumb over his bottom lip. “Who the fuck cares? We’re in love, that’s all that matters.”

“Agreed,” he murmurs before he plunges his tongue into my mouth, bruising my lips, just like I asked.

Taking my hand, he leads me through his apartment with a mischievous

glint in his eye. Guiding me to the dining room table, my heart pounding as anticipation builds within me.

How did he know what I wanted?

How does he always know what I crave from him?

He spins me around, pulling the pins out of my hair so the bun unravels the braid. He glides his hands down my curves, removing my clothes bit by painfully slow bit until I'm left naked and wanting. Pushing me forward, my breasts hit the table, and I gasp as the chill of the glass peaks my nipples. He strips off and throws his clothes on top of mine before his hands roam my body, exploring every inch of me as I arch my back like a contented cat. He flicks his tongue over the tattoo at the base of my spine, making me quiver with longing. His touch becomes more demanding, his hips pushing me further into the table. Grabbing my braid, tugging me closer to him as I bow my back against the strain, I gasp. Running his fingers down the curvature of my spine as his lips move to my neck, kissing and nibbling until I can barely keep still, waves of pleasure radiating through me. He pulls his mouth away, pressing his hard length against me. Turning my head, using my braid to guide my movement, Logan's mouth is on mine again, our tongues dancing together as he begins to slide himself inside me.

He grunts with pleasure as his cock slides deeper and deeper into my pussy, pushing my pleasure higher and higher. The strength of his thrusts is causing the table to dig into me, hurting me, but I want it that way. He pushes me closer to the edge of pleasure when his movements become savage as he drives his hips against mine. A delicious heat builds up within me, making my core ache for a release. Our moans mingle in the air, the sensation of his cock pounding my pussy, slamming into me, pushing me higher as he grips my hip and tightens his hold on the braid. Reaching my peak, I scream, my entire body quivering as Logan's thrusts become more insistent, pushing me further into a state of pure bliss. Opening my legs wider for him, pushing my ass out so he drives deeper into me, I know the climax is close. It's hovering there just out of my reach.

The words.

I need the praise.

"Does that feel good?" I moan, trying to encourage him.

He chuckles, knowing my game. "Oh, yes, baby girl. Fuck, you feel so hot around my cock. Am I hurting you?"

"Yes."

“Do you want me to stop?”

“Never.”

“Good, that’s good. I don’t ever want to stop fucking you. You feel too good around my fat cock. So fucking gorgeous. I want to fuck you forever, baby girl.”

“Yes!” I scream, the orgasm edging closer.

He hauls me up by the braid, so my back is arched unnaturally. Gasping at the position, he surprises me when he lets me go and withdraws.

“Logan, please,” I beg. “Was I bad? Did I do something wrong?”

Spinning me around, he says, “No, you’re my good girl. My special princess. You let me fuck your pussy whenever I want to. You let me come inside you, taking my load like the clever, beautiful girl that you are.”

“Please, Logan.” Tears are seeping out of my eyes the longer he denies me the pleasure of his throbbing cock.

He lifts me onto the table and nestles between my legs, ramming his dick back into me harshly.

“Fuck, yes, Serena. You’re perfect. My cock is the perfect fit for your pussy. Do you feel it? Do you feel it buried deep inside you, riding you, stretching you, and filling you?”

“Yes!” I scream, my pussy responding to the words and soaking his cock to his delight.

“Oh, God, that feels wonderful, baby girl. Keep doing that. Keep soaking my cock with your come as I ride your sweet pussy. You look so fucking hot while I pound you.”

“Logan!” I scream as the orgasm crashes over me, shaking my body violently.

With each thrust, my walls tighten around him, milking him until nothing is left. His breathing grows heavier and his thrusts more erratic.

Wrapping my legs around him to draw him closer, he kisses my lips, thrusting his tongue into my mouth as he relentlessly claims my body and my soul with his.

“Fuck. I’m coming, baby girl. I’m going to flood you with my cum. Do you want that?”

“Yes, Logan, please, please.”

He grunts as he shoots his load inside me, his cock pumping out his cum to fill my wet heat enough so it slides back out.

Withdrawing from me, he drops to his knees in front of me. “Seeing my

cum gushing out of your pussy turns me on so bad, baby girl.” He runs his fingers over his cum and shoves it back inside my pussy. “So warm, so slippery, mmm, I love your pussy, baby girl.” Logan brings his fingers up to my clit and circles them gently over the sensitive nub, thrilling me once again. “Come for me, Serena. I want to see your pussy contracting around my cum-soaked fingers. Fuck, it’s such a turn on. That’s it, baby girl. Mmm.”

“Ah!” I cry, arching my back as my orgasm races through my veins and straight to my clit.

“Good girl,” he purrs. “You love doing what I tell you, don’t you? It makes you feel good to please me.”

“Yes,” I pant before he lowers his mouth to my clit and sucks it roughly.

He bites down and tugs it, thrusting his fingers into me again, giving me more pleasure than I ever thought possible. He will keep doing this to me until his cock is hard again and then I will straddle him and ride him like he’s never experienced before.

The wait is almost unbearable.

Chapter 52

Serena



The dimly lit room shimmers around me like a dreamy cocoon I find myself in. There is something about the atmosphere that makes me feel alive, and every step I take seems to propel me further into a surreal world of anticipation and excitement. I'm going deeper and deeper, my skin and nerves prickling in anticipation of what is to come.

Logan's presence commands attention, and my body trembles with desire as he steps closer to me.

He left me a few minutes ago to dim the lights and to set up an area near the living-flame fire for us. On the verge of needing him again, I look into his eyes and feel a spark of desire surge within me, a flame that burns all the way to my core. It's as if he can read my every thought as if he knows my secrets and desires and can make them all come true.

He has a glass of whiskey in each hand. I've never had it before, but I will learn to like it for him. Anything he wants, I will do.

Jumping back in surprise when he smashes the first glass on the hardwood floor, my heart leaps wildly. With a hooded look of desire, he smashes the other one, creating a sea of shattered glass between us.

"Come to me," he says.

Staring into those deep blue eyes, so full of wicked anticipation, I hesitate for only one moment. He is testing me. He needs to see that I would do anything he asks. As I drop to my hands and knees, there isn't even a question.

"Serena," he rasps.

His cock twitches in response to seeing me on my hands and knees, ready to hurt myself to be with him.

With no thoughts but to get to him, I move forward, my palm crunching on the broken glass as I press down.

The pain isn't even a blip on my threshold. Getting to Logan is the only thing on my mind. Slowly crawling forward, lacerating my palms and knees with the sharp shards of glass, his breathing is loud over the crunch of broken crystal underneath me,

"Serena," he pants. "Oh, baby girl. You have no idea what you're doing to me."

Smiling serenely, I continue forward, slowly, carefully, each movement strategically placed to ensure I cause myself the maximum amount of pain.

But still, I don't feel it other than an annoyance on my way to reaching my target. An obstacle. A gauntlet that he has laid down. I will never disappoint him. I will do anything he asks me to do because I trust him and need his approval and praise. Those words that I know he will whisper to me when I reach him spur me on to reach my final destination.

Leaving bloody handprints behind me, I come to the edge of the field of ruined glass, triumphant when I look up at him.

The love and admiration in his eyes is all I need to know I did well, but I *need* the words. I won't survive without them.

He steps nearer and holds his hand out. Reaching for it, he clasps my fingers and helps me to my feet. My soles crunch over the fragments as he draws me to him. His lips crush mine in a kiss that is so passionate and deep, I moan softly. The sensation of his tongue exploring my mouth sends shivers down my spine. I cling to him, my body trembling with expectation, eager to explore further.

Logan pulls me into his arms, holding me close as we kiss deeply. His lips move hungrily against mine, and my body ignites with desire. His hands slide down my back, caressing my curves before resting on my hips. His hard body presses against mine, the heat radiating from him, intensifying my need.

He pulls away and brushes back the tendrils of hair that fell into my eyes, with a gaze so soft, I nearly die in his arms just to be locked in this moment forever.

"Good girl, Serena. You're my precious girl, so brave, so bold. I adore you more than I ever thought possible."

Running my fingers through his thick, dark hair, feeling the soft strands tickle my skin, I smile with pride and happiness.

"I will do anything for you, Logan. All you need to do is ask."

“The same goes for me, Serena,” he says seriously, turning us around and backing up so he can walk over the broken glass away from me.

His breathing becomes ragged when I follow him, bleeding from the shallow cuts on my hands and knees and now my feet. But I don't care. I want what he wants. My heart beats for him. My soul exists because he demands it. Without him now, I would wither away into a shell of nothingness, an abyss of torment and loss, knowing that my reason for living isn't with me. He draws me over to the other side of the glass, showing me he would hurt because I hurt.

When we are free from the glass, he explores my body. His hands slide over my waist and up my sides, tracing the shape of my body before coming to rest just below my breasts. I can feel myself melting into him, my body craving his touch. He takes my hands, gently brushing the sticky glass away as much as he can, before kissing my palms. My breath hitches at the dark love he is showing me. It's almost more than I can bear.

“Take me, Logan. I need your cock inside me.”

With a slow smile, his lips tinged dark red with my blood, he moves his mouth to my breasts, plumping them up and dipping his tongue in the valley of the mounds. Fisting my hands in his hair, I throw my head back, my mouth slack with the arousal coursing through me. Brushing his mouth over my nipples, sending sparks of pleasure through me, he attaches his mouth over one and sucks, grinding his teeth over the peak. My hands ache to move down his body, exploring every inch of his toned skin. Pushing him away, I take his hand and lead him to the sofa. Shoving him back, I climb on top of him, straddling him, feeling his hard, delicious length pressing against my pussy. My desire builds as I run my hands over the scratches of my name, over the muscles in his arms, and his chest, feeling them contract beneath my fingertips as his arousal overtakes him.

Leaning forward, my lips move to his neck, trailing feather-light kisses up to his ear. My tongue flicks out, tracing the delicate curve of his earlobe before I move down his jawline. He shivers at my touch, thrilling me.

Trailing my mouth across his collarbone before moving down his chest, my tongue swirls around his nipples, teasing him until his breath is a harsh rasp of longing. Logan's hands grab my waist before moving lower, traveling down my stomach to my hips.

Moaning in response to his soft touch, my hips arching towards him, I take his cock in my hand and stroke him. He grows even harder, eager for me

to slide my pussy over him. As much as I want to keep teasing him, I need him. Rising, I guide him to my entrance.

His heated look when he grabs my braid and tugs roughly, pulling my head back, is arousing, causing my pussy to get wetter.

Shoving him inside me, his other hand on my waist, he tilts his hips, pushing his cock further into me. We move together slowly at first, the sensation of his skin against mine, the way his cock feels inside me, drives me wild with pleasure. I moan, and he kisses me, tugging my braid harder. Our tongues dance together in a passionate frenzy. With each thrust, I'm drawn in deeper until I'm lost in him and he in me.

The intensity of the moment takes us by surprise as we reach our climax together quickly and fiercely, our bodies slick with sweat and trembling with pleasure. Clenching around his cock, he grunts, unloading into me with a look of pure gratification adorning his face.

“Perfect,” he murmurs. “We are perfect together.”

Slumping against him, we collapse to the sofa in each other's arms and lie there, breathing heavily and staring into each other's eyes. I've never felt this close to someone before and never will again.

“Marry me,” I whisper.

“That's my line, baby girl.”

“Too late.”

His eyes flash with a wicked gleam as I use his own words back on him in the most unexpected way. “Yes, baby girl. I will marry you. Will you marry me?”

“Yes, Logan, I will.”

Chapter 53

Logan



“Are you absolutely sure?” Serena asks me for the hundredth time.
“Yes, Serena. Go out with your friends. I’m not jealous. Not in the least.”

“No?” Her tone hints at wishing I was.

With an almost sinister smile, I pull her to me, trailing my lips over the tops of her breasts stuffed up into that sexy-as-sin bustier she had on the night I hunted for someone else and found her. I insisted she wears it. She wanted to cover up, but I want every single man, or woman, to know what they’re missing. They need to know she is *mine* and no one will ever touch her. My name is etched into her exquisite skin marking her forever.

“Fuck, Logan,” she pants, getting turned on. “That’s it; I’m staying.”

“Nope, you’re going. I will be fine here by myself.”

“Lo-gan!” she exclaims. “You can’t say that to me. Now I feel terrible. Come with me at least.”

Giving her a look of sheer distaste, I could think of nothing worse than sitting around getting tipsy with a bunch of younger people talking shit about music or the latest app they’ve downloaded or whatever the fuck it is they do. Serena is different. In many ways, she is mature and more on my level than I could have imagined, but at the same time, she is vulnerable and a little girl seeking reassurance, love, and approval. It’s the best of both worlds. I want to give her that validation. She deserves it more than anyone I have ever known. I’ve used the words to get women to do what I wanted for years but never has it had the greater, more significant effect on them as it does Serena. It’s not just an ego stroke, it reaches her soul, and it arouses me beyond comprehension to experience those words through her. It makes me crave to

say them, to praise her, to tell her how beautiful and amazing and brave she is.

“No.”

“No?” she pants. “Then I’m staying.”

“No, you’re going. You haven’t seen Rue for a few days; you’ve been cooped up here with me.”

“I like it here with you,” she pouts.

“And I love you being here, but I won’t stifle your growth, Serena. I’ve been there and done that with going out and getting drunk. I’m happy in my space.” Blinking, I can see the words on the tip of her tongue but beat her to it. “Our space.”

She giggles. “Fine. I’ll go for an hour. But if you want to join us, please do. I want you there.”

Nodding just to appease her, I let her go, and she heads out the door with a backward wave. Immediately, I open my phone to track her movements. She knows; it’s not stalking. Although, it kind of takes the fun out of it.

Turning to the fireplace, I pick my whiskey up from the mantle and take a savoring sip. Finally letting go of the burning hatred of the man who ruined my life, I realize I only have him to thank in some sick, morbid way. If he hadn’t done what he did, I would never have come across Serena, and she is the only thing I care about now. She is the other half of my soul, and without her, even if I’d lived a light and happy life, I would know something was missing. Raising my glass to my fallen family, hoping that wherever they are, they are at peace, I forgive myself for surviving when they didn’t, knowing that they have been vindicated, if not by my hand. Crossing to the dining table, I sit and pull out my laptop. I’ve made working from home a priority so I can be closer to Serena. I’m still trying to convince her to come back and work for me. I think I’m getting closer, but she has two options and two options only. She stays here, or she works for me. Not a fucking chance is she going off to work for some other man who will attempt to do what I did with her. The thought of her bent over some other fucker’s desk while he sticks his dick in her is *not* even in the hemisphere of things she is allowed to do.

Scrawling away, time passes in the quiet apartment. Before, it would be my island, but now it just feels lonely without Serena. Wanting to call her to tell her to come home, I decide to go to her instead.

Pulling on my coat and checking the phone to make sure she is where she

said she would be, not that I don't trust *her*, I make my way out to Belmont's, marveling at how well she has taken pretty much everything on her chin since she met me. From me being an overbearing dickhead, to finding out her uncle was her dad, witnessing me kill John, killing Kelly, the Society...she is a goddess. True and beautiful. I don't doubt the demons are lying in wait, but I will be there when she falls.

Staring through the window at Belmont's, the Christmas lights twinkling in the windows, I see her laughing and chatting with Rue and her friends. Growling when I see the hoard of guys surrounding them, I take a step forward but halt my roll. Going in there like a bulldozer will embarrass her, even though I don't give a flying fuck. Clenching my fists, I breathe deeply and curb the jealousy rushing through my body. I trust Serena. I've never trusted anyone before, but she demands it from me, and I'm happy to give it to her. She has proven that she can hold it close to her and nurture it, helping it grow.

Swallowing back the anger at these perverts practically drooling all over her, which is my own fucking fault for making her wear the bustier, I unclench and open the door, striding over to the group and wrapping my arms around her, kissing the side of her neck.

"I'm taken," she says playfully. "And believe me. You don't want to mess with him."

"Jealous, is he?" I murmur in her ear, biting the lobe.

"Care to find out?" She giggles and spins on the stool, her smile bright and happy. "Hi."

"Hi."

"You changed your mind?"

"I was lonely without you."

"Same."

"Liar."

She takes my hand and links our fingers together, bringing them up to kiss softly. Casting my glance over the crowd of disappointed guys, I feel like a god.

"Sorry, fellas, she's mine," I taunt, trying not to be smug about it but failing miserably.

"Yep," she agrees. "I like the old men."

I splutter back a noise of indignation. "Who's old?"

"You are, my love. Let's go back and have some wine and cheese before

we snuggle up in bed and go to sleep for nine.”

Her smirk is gorgeous.

“Snuggle up in bed; I can do that, but when you say nine, know it’ll be tomorrow morning.”

“Ooh, big talk,” Rue snorts. “You have to follow through now, you know.”

“He can keep up,” Serena says confidently. “Mostly.”

Chuckling, I pull her to her feet. “I’ll show you, Mrs. Carter,” I whisper, kissing the ring on her finger that I slipped on two days ago in front of the Justice of the Peace.

“Mm, looking forward to it, Mr. Carter,” she replies, grinning at Rue over her shoulder. “See you tomorrow.”

Rue nods. “Don’t forget I’m coming over at *ten*.”

We nod and drift off into the late December night, wrapping her coat around her and pulling her close. She lays her head on my shoulder, sighing with happiness as my hand rests on her ass.

Chapter 54

Serena



Rue is prompt, knocking on the door at precisely ten o'clock the next morning.

Opening the door with a smile, I beckon her inside, staring at the box in her hand. "What's that?" I ask, leading her to the kitchen so she can place it down on the counter.

Logan stares at it with suspicion, folding his arms over his chest.

"This is a gift from my parents. Uhm...is Rose here?"

"No, she's got the day off today. I'm cooking today!" I inform Rue with a bright smile.

She presses her lips together to stop her laugh. "Oh, okay."

"Hey, I'm learning. Rose is great. And she's left me a step-by-step guide. I can't fail."

"I'll ask Logan later," she jokes. "Okay, if it's just us...open it."

She leans on the counter, her dark eyes sparkling with excitement.

Reaching for the lid, she quickly places her hand over mine. "Be prepared."

"For what?" I ask, dread welling up.

"You'll see," she murmurs and lets go of me.

With a trembling hand, I lift the lid a fraction and then drop it in horror, my hand going to my mouth. "What?"

"What is it?" Logan demands, flipping the lid off so vehemently that it goes flying across the kitchen. "Oh. Who is it?" He peers at the severed head with curiosity.

"Mr. Todd," I murmur, clenching my fists as I glare at my abuser's head and hands nestled on either side of the box.

“Welcome to Solitaire,” Rue says.

“Fuck,” I mutter, feeling the vomit rise up. Turning, I slap my hand over my mouth to stop its progress.

“Get rid of it,” Logan mutters.

“That’s up to Serena,” Rue says, handing me a brand-new phone. “Cleaner is listed under C.”

“What?”

“I know this is hard, but your demon is gone. Dead, and most of him buried. Call the cleaner and get him here to remove the rest of this plague from your life.”

Catching Logan’s eye, he nods grimly, coming to me and placing his hand on my back as I make the call.

It is answered after two rings, but no one says anything, so I speak, my voice hoarse with emotion. “Clean up needed at my apartment.”

A click sounds to signify the cleaner hanging up. Placing the phone back on the counter, I swallow back the fear looking into his dead eyes brings me.

“Well, actually, it was me, but you know, I have to come bearing gifts from the folks,” Rue says.

“You?” The fact that my best friend is so violent doesn’t faze me at all. If anything, it makes me love her even more.

She nods and clasps my hand. “I avenged you, my sweet friend. You never have to fear him again.”

While Logan replaces the lid on top of the box, I lick my lips. She’s right. With Logan by my side, propping me up, and the knowledge that Mr. Todd is gone, I have nothing to fear. “It was Solitaire, wasn’t it?” I ask Logan.

“What?”

“Who killed that man in prison.”

“Yeah.”

“So this is how it works?”

“Pretty much. Quid pro quo.”

Taking that on board, I feel oddly satisfied with the system. I’m not saying this is over, it will never truly be gone from my life, but it’s a fucking good start to slaying that demon.

Turning to Rue, gripping Logan’s hand tightly, I say, “Thank you, Rue. Whatever you need from me, whenever that is, I am here at your service.”

Logan kisses the top of my head, pulling me closer as he murmurs, “Good girl.”

The next book in the Praise Them series is [Tempt Me](#) Pre Order for June 2023

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Dark, age gap, praise romance coming June 2023



Wicked & Lovely

About the Author

Eve is a British novelist with a specialty for delicious romance, with strong female leads, causing her to develop a Reverse Harem Fantasy series, several years ago: The Forever Series.

She lives in the UK, with her husband and five kids, so finding the time to write is short, but definitely sweet. She currently has over fifty books in her catalogue. Eve hopes to release some new and exciting projects in the next couple of years, so stay tuned!