



MY

BOSS'S

Son's

REBEL BLOOM

MY BOSS'S SONS

**A REVERSE AGE GAP REVERSE HAREM
ROMANCE**

REBEL BLOOM

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*****SOPHIA*****

Gerald Anderson was lucky the windows in his fiftieth-floor office didn't open. He was staring out of them with a pensive look on his face while my direct manager told me that I'd once again been passed over for a promotion. The view of downtown Dallas wasn't holding his attention. I doubted he even saw the beauty in it anymore. No, Gerald was staring out of his floor to ceiling windows in a practiced move that was meant to make it seem like he wasn't directly involved in deciding whether or not I would be promoted. There was a reason I was daydreaming about throwing the owner and CEO of Anderson Inc. to his demise, though. Nothing happened without Gerald's approval.

I'd worked at Anderson Inc. for five years and over the last three years I'd been passed over for one promotion after another. The first couple of times, I bought into Gerald's pouty expression. I'd mostly believed him when he said that he would've given me the job if it was up to him. He pretended to be a CEO who trusted his upper management to do their jobs and treat their employees fairly. I was jaded after three years of his crap, however. I no longer felt the same crushing sense of disappointment in myself. I felt rage. Pure, fiery rage.

"It was a tough call, of course, Sophia." James Flannery shook his head and sighed like he'd been through war while trying to decide whether or not to screw me over yet again.

“Bill Trent just has more experience in leadership. Maybe next time, though.”

Hearing the name of the man they’d chosen over me just sent my mind on a spiral of fury. I had a pretty clear image in my head of kicking both Gerald and James out the window. “Bill Trent? He started here two years ago.”

James cleared his throat and straightened his suit jacket. “He’s moved up very quickly. You’ll be in good hands under him.”

Gerald looked over at me, his steel-colored eyes briefly skating over my body. The looks were never long enough to be obvious, but I got a chill down my back with every one of them. Even as perfectly shaved and manicured as he was, I still felt like I was being watched by a dirty old man. “James, leave us.”

James nodded at our boss and then stood up. While staring down at me, something passed over his face that I couldn’t quite name but it looked a lot like pity. His muttered parting didn’t make me feel much better. “Good luck.”

Maybe I just needed to throw myself out of a window instead. That would *have* to feel better than being left alone in a room with Gerald, being forced to listen to him offer me soft apologies and useless promises to look into things for me. I knew his song and dance, down to the way he’d pat my back.

“Sophia, I think you’re a great asset to Anderson Inc.. It’s employees like you that really keep us growing and moving towards the future in a positive way. I’m sorry James doesn’t see that. I wish there was something I could do.” Unfolding his lanky body to his full height, he walked around his desk and leaned against the front of it. “My offer still stands. If you want me to step in and do something about this, I will. For you. I would normally never question my managers but if you ask me, I’ll do it.”

It was hard to keep my face neutral. I had a feeling that Gerald Anderson would give me the promotion if I acted friendlier with him. His glances and the subtle ways he offered to do special favors for me gave me the distinct impression

that he'd love to help me out. It felt like a situation where I'd be expected to scratch his back after he scratched mine, though, and I had no intention of ever touching his back.

"I don't expect special treatment, Mr. Anderson. I just want fair treatment." I ground my teeth together when he moved closer. His big, overly tan hand rested on my shoulder and stayed there, leaving me internally cringing away. "I'm fine. Thank you for your offer, but I'm not interested in breaking protocol to get ahead. If Mr. Flannery doesn't think I'm a good fit for the role, I'll accept that answer for now."

He gently squeezed my shoulder, twisting his thin lips down in a faux frown. "I know this has to be hard for you. You're a devoted employee and I'm lucky to have you, Sophia."

Desperate to get his hand off of me, I stood up and backed away, putting my chair between us. "I need to finish a few things at my desk before I can go home for the day."

"Such a hard worker. Go on, Sophia. I'll see you bright and early Monday morning." He walked back around to his chair and sat down, unbuttoning his suit jacket as he did. "Remember my offer, though, Sophia. Things aren't always fair in this business. A favor can be just the thing you need to get ahead sometimes."

I walked towards his office door with the feeling of his eyes on me. "Have a good weekend, Mr. Anderson."

"You, too, Sophia."

I avoided his secretary's gaze as I walked past her desk. Tiffany was ten years younger than me and there were rumors about her relationship with Gerald, but I didn't believe them. People just talked when they saw a woman alone with her boss in our business environment. I didn't believe that rumor about the woman, but I did think she was a jerk who felt powerful because of who her boss was.

"Better luck next time, Sophia." Tiffany sounded amused as she watched me hurry towards the elevators.

I pretended not to hear her and kept my head down as I made my way down to the fortieth floor. I rushed through

shutting down my computer and clearing my desk so I could get out of there as fast as possible. I needed to get away from the entire place before I just lost it and screamed.

Still, I had to take a moment once I was sitting behind the wheel of my car. Resting my head on the seat, I blew out a deep breath. I'd known when going in that morning that I probably wouldn't get the promotion. I couldn't help feeling crushed, though. I worked hard. I spent so much of my life at Anderson Inc. and I was more than qualified for the promotion I wanted. There was an itch at the back of my mind that told me I was never going to move up in the company if I didn't play nice with Gerald.

Since I was never going to do that, I needed to figure out my next move. I could start looking for other-

A call came through on my car speakers, distracting me from whatever big plans I might've gotten to. That was the thing about life. Change was hard enough but when my time wasn't my own, I didn't even have the energy to look for better options.

"Hi, Mrs. Johnson." I tried not to sound completely bothered by the elderly woman who lived across the street from me.

"That boy with the colored hair is using that chainsaw again, Sophia." Her voice wobbled and I could practically see her clutching the fake pearl necklace she never took off. "It's a nuisance. The whole neighborhood is filled with the sound of that thing. And his hair is offensive. When are you going to do something about this?"

I rubbed my temples. My time definitely was not my own. Sighing, I put my car in gear and pulled out of my space. "I'm on my way home now, Mrs. Johnson."

*****SOPHIA*****

The forty-minute drive to my house in a suburb outside of Dallas was somehow both too long and not long enough. I had plenty of time to dread the mess I would find when I got home and not enough time to actually unwind from my day. I was still mid-fight with the imaginary Gerald in my brain when I pulled into my driveway and saw my sister's long-term boyfriend, Milo, wielding his favorite chainsaw. That was pretty typical behavior for Milo. It was my sister, Ava, and my daughter, Lily, trying to hold the log he was aiming that chainsaw at that had me slamming the car into park and trying to jump out before I took my seatbelt off.

I wrestled myself out of my car and tripped over Lily's bike. I heard the side of my skirt rip and swore under my breath while climbing up the side of my car. "What the hell are you three doing? Turn the chainsaw off, Milo! Put that log down Ava! Lily, drop the log and move your bike!"

Milo looked over his shoulder at me and killed the power to his chainsaw. Swiping his newly dyed green hair out of his eyes, he smiled and lifted a hand to flash me a peace sign. "Soph! You're home! I need some help."

Ava was my younger sister by three years and she knew me well enough to know that I was on the verge of freaking out. She tossed the log down and pushed Lily towards her bike. "Welcome home, Sis. That wasn't what it looked like."

Milo grinned even wider. His eyes were slits that I wasn't sure how he could see out of and I counted myself lucky that Mrs. Johnson hadn't called to complain about the smell of Milo's pot again. "My new project is going to be amazing, Soph. I'm going to have people hold the log and I'll make one cut that way. That cut will lead me into my final piece. What do you think?"

Lily threw herself at me and wrapped her long limbs around me. At seven, she was taller than all the other kids her age. "Mom! I'm going to be part of Milo's art!"

I kissed the top of her head and frowned when I smelled peanut butter. "Did you do another one of your spa days, Lily?"

"I have to move my bike, Mom!" Lily's avoidance told me that I was going to find a mess inside the house. Her spa days were just her taking random food and using it in new, creative ways. They typically ended in the house being destroyed and her smelling like whatever food she'd used last.

Ava walked over to me and held out her hands. "I'll clean it up."

I took a deep breath and held up my hands. "Nope. I can't talk to you yet. Not until I inform your boyfriend that his new idea is idiotic."

"Aw, Soph. You really think so?" Milo scuffed his shoe across the ground in front of him and frowned.

"Milo... Yes." I stepped over scrap pieces of wood to rest my hand on his arm. "We've talked about safety a million times. Do you think it's safe for you to chainsaw something that someone else is holding?"

He groaned. "You're right. Damn."

I let his innocent nature improve my mood. "I love the idea, though. It's beautiful. You just can't have anyone hold the wood you're cutting. Okay?"

He nodded. "I'll figure it out."

I watched him meander away, already lost in his ideas. Turning back to my sister, I saw she was shaking her head while smiling. “What?”

“I tried to tell him that a million times. He wouldn’t hear it. You say it one time and suddenly he can’t agree fast enough. If I didn’t love how much he loves you and looks at you like family, I’d be pissed.” She hesitated and then groaned. “Shit. You found out about the promotion today. They passed you up again?”

The urge to cry had my eyes burning but instead of giving into the tears, I pinched the bridge of my nose and nodded. “They gave it to a guy who’s been with the company for less than two years.”

“Did they say why?”

“Supposedly he has more leadership experience.” I watched as Mrs. Johnson stood in her yard, pretending to water her flowers as she stared at us. “I know it’s probably because I won’t stay at the office for eighty to ninety hours a week, but I can’t help thinking it could have something to do with Gerald.”

“That creep. Of course it has something to do with him, Soph. You’re always saying that you feel like he’s hinting at something with you.” She gave me a knowing look. “You’ve got the best gut I’ve ever known. You’re never wrong.”

I waved at Mrs. Johnson and forced a smile. “She called me again on the way home. Apparently, Milo’s hair is offensive.”

Ava immediately raised her middle finger at the old woman. “That’s right, you old hag. Get your panties in a twist. Milo’s hair is beautiful!”

I pulled Ava’s hand down and sighed. “You know she’s going to call me about that.”

“What? She couldn’t hear me.”

“You flipped her off, Ava.” I watched Mrs. Johnson stomp her way inside her house and turned my attention to Lily. “How was she today?”

“She was good.” Ava hesitated. “I promise I’ll clean up the mess inside. Maybe I should go ahead and do that now. Why don’t you stay out here with Lily?”

“It’s fine. I’d rather just come inside and nurse my wounded ego.” I smiled for what felt like the first time all day as Lily came running towards me. “Where’s the fire?”

She held out my phone. “Uncle Jack’s on the phone!”

I looked in my purse and raised my eyebrows. “How’d you get my phone without me noticing?”

Ava cleared her throat. “How about we go inside and start cleaning while Mom talks to Uncle Jack?”

“Aunt Ava taught me how to pickle pocket, Mom!”

Ava took Lily by the shoulders and directed her towards the house. “Ha. Ha. That’s a good joke, Lily. You’re hilarious.”

I brought my phone up to my ear and groaned. “Jack, I live in a circus.”

My best friend since middle school, Jack Henry was my lifeline most days. He was my rock. “Are you just now realizing that? There’s even a clown. What color is Milo’s hair today?”

“Green. Mrs. Johnson called it offensive.” I smiled. “What does it say about me that her hating it makes me like it more?”

“It says that you’re taking your power back where you can. I can tell by your voice that Anderson fucked you over again.” He paused but when I didn’t say anything, he let out a colorful string of curses. “You’re not pouting and feeling shitty tonight, Soph. You’re coming out with me.”

I could hear Lily and Ava arguing from inside the house about who was going to clean what. I loved my crazy little family but after the day I’d had, I didn’t think I could stay in and listen to them bicker all night. “When are you picking me up?”

SOPHIA

I glared at Jack from across the hightop table we were sitting at. He'd taken me out to a bar that was full of children. Maybe not children, but they might as well have been. *Blaze* was a club that Jack had just invested in and he was proud of it, but if I'd known he was dragging me out to a bar full of people in their early twenties, I would've passed. At thirty-seven, my early twenties felt like a lifetime ago.

"Relax, Soph. You fit right in." Jack reached over and took my hand. "You look hot, you don't have a single line on your face, and I've already seen multiple guys checking you out."

Glancing around, I noticed that most of the women around us were tiny. It had me sucking in my stomach and wishing I'd worn my Spanx. Looking back at Jack, I saw he already had his eyes on a cute guy across the room. "Oh, no, you don't. You're not leaving me yet. You can find him later."

"Lord, you *are* stressed. I'm not going anywhere, babe. I told you. I'm getting you hammered tonight. You're going to feel better by the time you crawl into your bed tonight." Jack glanced back at the cute guy and smirked. "I'm also going to feel better by the time I crawl into *his* bed tonight."

The waiter appeared at our table with a tray full of shots. "Mr. Henry. Jen said if you leave sober she'll have to give your money back."

Jack laughed his boisterous laugh and helped the younger man unload the shots. “Tell Jen that she can’t get rid of me so easily.”

I watched Jack as he moved with ease and existed as if he belonged in every space he occupied. It was easy to be jealous of him. He was larger than life and looked like the Brawny man, if the Brawny man was hotter. His laugh drew people to him and everyone loved him. He never got passed over for promotions. He would tell Mrs. Johnson to stop calling.

“Oh, shit.” Jack pushed a shot at me. “I can see you feeling sorry for yourself. That’s not what this night is about. This night is about getting drunk and dancing until you forget everything else. Take these shots. Right now.”

I did as he said and winced as the top shelf tequila settled in my stomach. “People who say the expensive stuff tastes better are full of shit.”

“You’re just a lightweight.” He threw back two shots in a row. “It makes you a cheap date, though, so I’m not complaining.”

“Cheap and messy if you’re not careful.” I threw back another shot and stood up. “Alright, then. Let’s dance.”

“You’re not even going to let me get a buzz first?” Standing with me, he wrapped his arm around my waist and led me to the dance floor. Despite the bar being packed, the dance floor wasn’t so bad. Jack pulled me into his chest and then spun me away from him. When I let out a loud laugh, he tugged me back and then dipped me. “That’s the last of my moves, so don’t expect much more, babe. Plus, once those shots hit, you’ll end up flat on your ass if we do that again.”

I threw my head back and laughed, letting the stress of the day melt away. Between the shots and Jack, I was feeling better already. “I bet you’d dip me again if I was one of your boy toys.”

Jack’s smile was cocky. “You bet your sweet ass I would. I show up for people who put out.”

“It’s not my fault that you only like younger men who make you feel like the big strong bear that you are.” I gestured down at myself. “I can’t help that this is the hand I was dealt.”

He spun me again and then playfully patted my ass. “If I was into women, babe, you’d be locked down with a ring by now.”

I rolled my eyes. “If you were into women, we wouldn’t be best friends. We never would’ve recovered from prom night and we’d still be avoiding each other.”

“Did you seriously just bring up prom night?” He narrowed his eyes. “Are you drunk already? You hate talking about that night normally.”

“It wasn’t my finest moment. After a quick ten minutes in the backseat of your car, you knew for sure that you were gay. My vagina convinced you that you don’t like vaginas.” I scoffed. “My vagina isn’t that bad. I mean, it’s not bad at all. You don’t even know what you’re talking about when it comes to vaginas, so why would I care what you think?”

Jack let out a wild laugh. “God, I love you even more when you’re tipsy. Your vagina is a strange topic of conversation for the dance floor, but I’m down. I only knew I was gay because if I didn’t enjoy *your* magic vagina, I was never going to enjoy any vaginas.”

I felt my cheeks turn bright red and scrunched my nose. “You know what? You’re right. My vagina is a terrible topic for the dance floor.”

“I went too far calling it magic, right? Is that where I lost you?”

I stretched up to plant a kiss on his cheek. “No, I think it’s so sweet that you called it magic. It needs that kind of ego boost. After a year of celibacy, it’s not so sure of itself anymore.”

“Well, that’s unacceptable.” Jack looked around the bar. “There are plenty of men here to pop that regrown cherry.”

I slapped his shoulder and shook my head. “No freaking way, Jack. These guys are too young for me and I’m pretty

sure they're not looking for a single mom who lives with her sister and her sister's chainsaw loving boyfriend."

"God, babe, get out of your own way. You need to get laid, not remarried. The man you meet here is never going to know you have a kid or a sister or anything other than tits and a vagina. It's a hook up, Soph."

"You're so romantic."

Jack looked at someone over my shoulder and grunted. "Oh, yeah, he'll do. Hang on, babe."

I realized what he was doing too late. He spun me away from him and the smile on his face was pure shit-eater. I gasped as he let go of my hand and found myself falling backwards. The scream forming in my throat never had a chance to escape before I landed on a hard lap. The lap's arms wrapped around me before I could fall farther and the muscles I felt rippling against my body felt too good.

"I'm so sorry! I didn't-" I lost my train of thought in the middle of apologizing when I saw the man I was sitting on. I could practically hear my brain screech to a halt.

He was gorgeous. The first thing that I noticed were his ice blue eyes. They were surrounded by thick, dark lashes that softened the sharp angles of his face. The second thing I noticed was his sharp jaw and the shadow covering it. I had a weakness for a man with a beard, anything from shadow to ZZ Top style.

Clearing my throat, I reached up and pushed my hair behind my ears. "God. Sorry! Sorry about this. I'll just get off now."

"Your boyfriend should keep a better hold on you. The next lap you fall into might not belong to a gentleman who can keep his hands to himself." Deep voice. Check. Lap man was definitely younger than me, but I couldn't place his age.

I found myself smiling and looking down at where his hands were still gripping my side and hip. "You didn't keep your hands to yourself, though."

*****SOPHIA*****

The younger man glanced at my mouth before slowly lifting his eyes back to mine. I would've paid money to know what he was thinking at that moment because I felt his fingers flex on my hip before his grip on me vanished.

I forced myself out of his lap and smiled at him. "Such a gentleman. Thank you for the catch."

I turned around to find Jack and all but ran to where he was watching from the other side of the dance floor. I lightly punched him in the stomach when I got to him and he pretended that it hurt.

"I can't believe you did that!" I glanced over my shoulder and found the man still watching me. Jerking my head back around to Jack, I widened my eyes and whistled. "Holy hot man, Jack. You really did pick well when you decided to toss me away. He's too young, though. And he thinks you're my boyfriend."

Jack leaned into my space and pressed his lips to my ear. "Oh, he's not a fan of me. His eyes are glued to your ass."

I gasped when Jack patted my ass. "Jack Michael Henry!"

He laughed and pulled away. "I'm sorry! I couldn't help myself. I would give my bank account for that man to be gay. He's something else. Those eyes are intense."

I glanced back again but the man was interacting with two other men who'd just joined him. He'd already moved on from me, just like I needed to do from him. Brushing the whole interaction out of my mind, I rested my hands on Jack's shoulders and smiled up at him. "Just a couple more dances with me and then you can run off to your cutie in the corner."

Jack pressed his forehead to mine. "Babe, you can have the rest of my dances. You know that."

"You make everything better. Thanks for making me come out tonight. I would've just stayed home and felt bad for myself. This is much better."

"Of course, it is. Especially considering the fact that you could get laid tonight if you wanted. Your boy toy is still watching you. He's got friends with him, too. All three of them are appreciating those curves of yours." Jack spun us so I could see the table over his shoulder. "You have their full attention."

My stomach fluttered deep down when I saw the three guys watching us. Before I could make out what the other two looked like, Jack spun us again. "Hey, wait-"

"Hush, babe. I'm giving them a show for you." Jack dipped me, despite the fact that he was definitely tipsier than he'd been for the first dip. He even dipped me lower than before and it took me a few beats to realize that anyone behind me would've been able to see straight down my top.

"Jack!" I laughed as he pulled me back up. "You're terrible!"

"They want to devour you, babe. You're welcome." He grabbed a few shots from a passing shot girl and we both tossed them back. "Let's really put on a show for your admirers."

Between the alcohol and knowing the table of younger men were watching me, my blood ran hot. It seemed like a good idea to go along with whatever Jack was doing. When he turned me around so my back was to his chest, I mentally shrugged and danced on him like we were twenty-one again.

Laughing like I hadn't had the day from hell, I looked over my shoulder at Jack. "I haven't been out like this in forever."

"You need to. That job's got you all tied up. You need to get laid and get loose. Let your hair down."

"My hair *is* down."

He spun me out and then back in perfectly. "Barely."

I scoffed. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means that you've been letting life pass you by. You haven't been laid since the divorce, have you?" He moved us closer to the table of men. "I already know the answer. You haven't."

"So, what? I've been busy." I noticed he was bringing me even closer to the guys. "What are you doing?"

"Setting you up for success." He dipped me again and smiled. "That was a freebie since I'm about to embarrass you."

I tried to hold onto his arms to keep him from doing whatever he was going to do, but he was slippery when on a mission. He spun me out and instead of spinning me back in, leaned over and said something to the table of drop dead gorgeous men watching me. I couldn't hear it over the music, but I already knew I was going to have to murder my best friend. Then he pulled me back to his arms and deposited me in the same lap I'd fallen in earlier.

"Sophia here likes tequila shots, long walks on the beach, and hasn't been laid in nearly half a decade. Enjoy my best friend, boys." Jack booped me on the nose and then strode away, in the direction of his latest boy toy.

I choked on his audacity and felt my entire body burn with embarrassment. No amount of tequila was enough to make me okay with what he'd just done. I gripped the table and moved to get up but strong arms once again wrapped around my waist.

"You okay?"

I looked into those ice blue eyes and nodded. "Unless it's possible to die of embarrassment."

“Does he do this to you a lot?” Another deep voice from behind me spoke and when I turned to see him, I was once again struck by how handsome they all were.

I patted Lap Man’s arm until he let me climb off of him. “No. It seems he’s getting his revenge for me not going out with him much. Sorry he seems to be targeting y’all, though.”

The third guy at the table leaned forward and if I hadn’t been embarrassed enough already, I might’ve gasped. His eyes were somehow lighter than the first guy’s and they were haunting. The thing that made me want to lean in closer, though, was that he was covered in tattoos. They peeked out of his shirt collar and out from the sleeves of his shirt, trailing down to his knuckles. I’d always loved tattoos, despite being too chicken to ever get one. These guys, with their beards and muscles, were too hot for me to even look at. With the tattoos added in, I was going to make a fool of myself if I didn’t get away from them.

“I’m not sorry he’s targeting us.” The tattooed one smirked and one side of his full lips lifted. “Although, I wish he had better aim. I’m over here.”

“His aim was just fine.” The first guy rested his elbow on the back of his chair as he turned to face me. “You didn’t bother correcting me earlier. He’s not your boyfriend?”

I looked at the three of them, all watching me with intense gazes, and realized they had to be playing nice to keep me from being even more embarrassed. There was no way three younger men who looked like them were actually flirting with me. Knowing that they were just playing around took some of the pressure off and I was able to laugh some of my awkwardness away.

“He’s not my boyfriend. He’s my best friend who happens to be more into men who look like the three of you.” I rested my hand on the broad shoulder of Lap Man and flashed them all my best smile. “I’ll let you get back to your night. Thanks for being good sports about everything.”

*****SOPHIA*****

I'd only been sitting back at our table for a few minutes when Jack showed up with his cutie on his arm. I didn't need to hear him say it to know he was ready to take the guy home.

"Don't be mad." Jack bit his lip and leaned close. "He's fucking packing, babe. I swear to god, I'm in love."

I smiled and rolled my eyes. "Go. Have fun."

"Come with us. I'll have a car waiting to drive you home from my apartment." Jack cast a look over at the table of guys I'd been doing my best not to stare at. "Since you wasted that opportunity, I assume you're not going to find another one?"

I did look back at them then and found Lap Man staring back at me. My breath caught in my throat at the intensity I could feel radiating off him from across the room. Without even knowing I was doing it, I shook my head at Jack. Maybe I was crazy and would embarrass myself even more, but if I was wrong about the guys just being nice, I wanted to know.

"What are you saying no to?"

I smiled up at Jack and his new friend. "I'm going to stay."

Protective Jack snapped into high gear. "Are you sure? Do you have your phone? Is it charged?"

I nodded. "I'm fine. Go home and enjoy yourself."

“Text me as soon as you get home. If you go to someone else’s place, text me their address. I’m serious.” He wrapped me in a tight hug and held my face in his hands. “Do not get murdered on me, okay? I’m not taking over raising Ava and Milo. Lily would be fine, but your sister and her boyfriend? No way am I taking on those two.”

I pushed him away and laughed. “Be nice to Ava and Milo.”

“Be nice to yourself. Go home with one, or all, of those guys.” Jack pulled out his wallet and shoved a wad of cash into my tight jeans pocket. “Just in case your card doesn’t work. It stresses me out that you don’t carry any cash, ever.”

I pushed him away and scowled. “Go. You’re going to kill the mood for yourself.”

“That’s impossible. Do you see this man?” Jack wrapped his arm around the new guy and winked. “Get laid, babe.”

I waved him away. “Goodbye and goodnight.”

“Love you!”

I rolled my eyes. “Love you, too, Jack.”

I pulled out my phone as I considered my options. Staring at the black screen, I debated going back over to the guys. If one of them was interested, maybe it *would* be good for me to release some of my tension with them. If they weren’t interested, though, I wasn’t sure I’d ever recover from being the older woman who came on to younger men who didn’t want her. My ego was only built so tough. Before I had a chance to make a decision, the scent of leather and citrus had me looking up for the source and I found myself eye to eye with the tattooed guy.

“Come and sit with us.” He didn’t ask. His stance with his hands shoved into his pockets and his body slightly leaned into mine didn’t leave room for argument, either.

I licked my lips and watched as his eyes dropped to them. “Are you sure?”

Pulling his hands out of his pockets, he grabbed the back of my chair with one hand and the edge of my table with the

other. He leaned even closer to me and I saw that his eyes were solid gray. What could've been cold burned hot, though. "I'm sure."

I had to tip my head back to look him in the eye and I watched those unusual gray eyes move to my throat. Swallowing around a clump of words I wanted to say to keep myself from going over and making a fool of myself, I slid off my chair. He didn't shift away so I brushed against his chest when I stood.

He reached around me and grabbed the small crossbody I'd hung on the back of my chair. Instead of handing it to me, he tucked it under his arm and pressed his hand to the small of my back. "You seem like a runner."

My laugh sounded breathy but there was nothing I could do about it. I suddenly felt like a teenager on her first date. Looking up at him, I nodded. "Only emotionally."

A smile transformed his face into something even more dangerous. With wolf-like eyebrows, a trimmed beard, and all those tattoos, he looked like the bad boy I'd always avoided. "What's your name?"

"Sophia." I stepped sideways as a drunk guy stumbled past us and my tattooed hero pulled me into his side so I didn't get trampled. The feeling of his body heat against my side had my body reacting in big ways. I stammered as I nodded up at him. "Thanks."

"Sophia. Pretty." He pulled out a chair for me at their table and flashed me another panty-melting smile. "I'm Alex. Noah's the suit and Ethan's the one who needs a haircut."

Having three sets of eyes on me was as exhilarating as it was terrifying. With them all watching, my every move would be noticed. I had no room for mistakes.

Alex sat next to me and rested his arm along the back of my chair. "This is Sophia."

I looked at Lap Man, Noah, and then at Ethan. His hair was longer than the others and it curled out randomly all over. His beard was longer than the other two, as well. With his darker

blue eyes, the wild hair gave him a friendlier vibe. When he smiled, I saw he had a slight chip in one of his top teeth and I immediately wanted to know the story. “I don’t think you need a haircut.”

Ethan’s smile widened and he sank his teeth into his bottom lip as he leaned across the table with his hand extended. He shook my hand like a gentleman but the way his thumb stroked my hand before pulling away was anything but. That thumb had felt positively seductive. “Thank you. These two are always talking about my hair. It’s nice to find someone who has good taste.”

Noah grunted. “We’re not discussing your hair.”

Ethan nodded. “Agreed. We’re discussing Sophia.”

“Your friend left you?” Noah shot a look across the bar, like he could still see Jack. “He’s not worried about you ending up in the wrong hands?”

All of my childish nerves fluttered away at the idea of them thinking poorly of Jack. I raised my eyebrows and found my hands solidly planted on my hips. “Jack wanted to drive me home, but I said no. He knows that if the wrong hands tried to snap me up that I’d be more than capable of handling myself.”

Noah rested his elbows on the table as he shifted closer. “I have no doubt about that, Sophia. I’m perfectly sure you can handle yourself in all types of situations.”

Heat scorched my face as his heated gaze moved over my face. I looked at the table, suddenly desperate for a drink. A waiter appeared like magic with a glass of water. I took it and drained half of it in one long gulp. I was in over my head. It didn’t matter that I was older than the men sitting around me. I was inexperienced and I hadn’t so much as flirted with a man who wasn’t gay in over a year.

“Dance with me.” Noah’s demand seemed to shock Alex and Ethan, but they didn’t say anything. Sensing that I was hesitant, Noah stood up and held out his hand. “I know you can. You and your friend put on quite the show earlier.”

*****SOPHIA*****

I put my hand in Noah's and let him pull me to the dance floor. As soon as he reached the spot he wanted, he turned around and gently tugged me into his arms. I stumbled slightly and ended up fully pressed to him from chest to knee.

Noah's hand rested low on my back and he had the decency to ignore the grunt I'd made when our bodies connected. "There's something you should know about me, Sophia."

Placing my hands on his shoulders felt daring, like I was leaning into whatever the hell was happening. "What is it?"

He leaned down until his mouth brushed the shell of my ear as he spoke. "I don't lie, even by omission. I wasn't being a good sport."

I sucked in a sharp breath when his words registered. I'd accused them of being good sports by acting interested earlier. When he leaned back and met my wide-eyed gaze, I felt every second of his sharp gaze from the top of my head to the tips of my toes. "Oh."

"We can call you a car if you'd like to go home." His fingers dipped lower, resting on the top of my ass. "Or you can stay and dance with us, knowing that each of us is dying to see if that blush extends lower and just how far."

My heart thumped wildly in my chest. My lips parted but I couldn't form a complete sentence. I stammered for a beat and then snapped them shut. Glancing back at the table where Ethan and Alex were watching us, I took a deep breath. "Who... Who do I go home with? If... If I stay, I mean."

Noah smiled then and it was like watching a wolf close in on its dinner. "Any of us. All of us. If you're more interested in just one of us, I should tell you now that I'm not above shoving my brothers out of the way for a night with you."

That was a lot of information to take in at once. Brothers. Of course, that made sense when I looked at them again. They each had the same strong jaw and general build. Alex and Noah even had the same sharp eyebrows. The fact that I could have all of them, however, was harder to make sense of. I looked between the three of them a few more times before biting my lip and frowning up at Noah.

"I know I'm being blunt, but it wouldn't take you long to figure out that we're all looking at you like you're the last woman on earth. It's not every night that a woman falls into my lap and it's even less common for one so fucking beautiful to appear. I'd be a fool if I didn't try to get you in my bed, Sophia."

Maybe it was the atmosphere or the push from Jack, but having a man be upfront about what he wanted felt good. After having men rub my shoulders and stare at my tits at work nonstop, having a man look me in the eye and tell me he wanted to take me home was refreshing. Shocking, but refreshing. I let my body melt into Noah's and smiled. "Let's dance."

He moved his hips to the music and kept his grip on my upper ass. "I should've known he wasn't your boyfriend. When he dipped you and gave the entire bar a view down your shirt, it should've occurred to me that no man who's had you in his bed would willingly let another man look at you like that."

His words stoked the fire burning in me, but I tried to hide how affected I was. "You don't believe in a man not needing

to claim a woman like that?”

Noah dipped me then, keeping me at a level that let no one else see down my shirt. His eyes moved from my eyes to my mouth and back. “I believe that there are men who don’t need to claim their women. I believe there are women who don’t need to be claimed. I just don’t believe you inspire that kind of openness in most men. I believe you’re the kind of woman a man feels possessed to claim.”

I locked my arms around his neck and when he pulled me up again, our faces were even closer. “That’s crazy.”

He slid one of his hands up my back and gripped the back of my neck. “I could show you.”

Our gazes locked and the room around us faded into the background as seconds ticked by. I wanted him to show me. I wanted to know what it felt like to have Noah feel possessed to claim me, if even for just one night. I was scared, though. I wasn’t sure I could handle him.

“Looks like my time’s up, Sophia.” Noah leaned closer and pressed a kiss to the corner of my mouth before slipping away.

I turned to see where he was going and found myself face to face with Ethan. He easily swept me into his arms and moved me around the dance floor like a pro. He led with confidence and left me breathless when he pressed his thigh between my legs. The music had turned sultry and we were hardly the only couple on the dance floor moving against each other the way we were. Ethan just did it better than anyone else.

He ran his hands up my sides and back down to my hips. We moved together silently, our breath mixing as we watched each other. It stopped feeling like dancing when I felt him harden against my thigh. If he was embarrassed by his body’s reaction to mine, he didn’t show it. My lips parted as my breathing grew heavier. His thigh brushed against the seam of my jeans and I rode that friction shamelessly.

“Come home with us, Sophia.” Ethan’s eyes were all over me, taking in every breath and expression.

The feeling of someone pressing into me from behind should've sent me screaming, but my body already recognized Alex's smell. He gripped my waist and pressed his face into my hair. "There are two cars outside, Sophia. One waiting to take you to whatever address you give them and another waiting to take us to our home."

"Yes." I saw Ethan's surprise and then his hunger. That one word from my lips had both men rushing to disentangle themselves from me. Noah met us at the edge of the dance floor with my purse in his hands. I flashed a nervous smile at him and held out my hand. He tried to hand me my purse but I gripped his arm instead. "I've been invited over."

He licked his lips and nodded. "Let's go."

*****SOPHIA*****

Two blacked out SUVs sat just outside of the bar. A driver stood at the back door of each one, dressed in matching black suits. The one in the front nodded at the guys and opened the door for them. Noah motioned for me to climb in first but I felt rude just ignoring the drive so I hesitated.

“Hi. Thank you for picking us up.” I smiled and then raised my eyebrows when all four men stopped and stared at me. I looked around at them and hesitated. “What?”

The driver ducked his head but I could see him smiling. “Of course, ma’am.”

Ethan patted the man on the shoulder. “We’ve been keeping the wrong company, Pat.”

I climbed into the SUV and turned to Noah, who climbed in right after me. “What’s that about?”

He leaned across me to grab my seatbelt and hesitated with his face just inches from mine. “You get used to something for so long and it just becomes normal. Most people just treat Pat like he’s not there.”

I made a face. “Gross.”

Noah nodded and leaned in closer. “The fact that you look like a fucking dream and are also kind is unfair.”

From that close I could see flecks of darker blue in his eyes and I could smell him without anything else around to muddle his clean scent. Soap and something that I imagined was purely him teased my senses. Then his words registered and I laughed.

“What?” He finished buckling me in and sat back in his own space.

“Sorry. It’s just been a while since I’ve been complimented and I’ve *never* been complimented quite like that.”

Ethan and Alex were in the seats behind us and Ethan leaned forward. “Maybe you’re keeping the wrong company, too, if you haven’t been told how stunning you are lately.”

I looked down at my lap and cursed my pale skin that showed every blush. “Thank you.”

“We’ll show you.” Noah gripped my thigh and squeezed. “Over and over again.”

My pulse went crazy. I wasn’t thinking about what I was doing. I didn’t want to be reasonable and think about the age gap or the fact that I was going home with three brothers. “Yeah, okay.”

Too soon, Pat stopped in front of The Star. Luxury apartments in the middle of downtown Dallas weren’t cheap and I’d heard tales of how amazing they were. The Star was the best of them. I took in the towering building and the doorman stood just outside of the ornate front doors. I was a long way from my house with the bike and wood scraps littering the yard.

Ethan helped me out of the SUV and tucked my hand into his elbow. Nodding at the driver, he smiled. “Have a good night, Pat. Go home to your wife.”

I lifted my hand in a wave. “Thanks for the ride.”

Noah walked ahead of us and I watched as the doorman pulled open the door with a flourish I’d only seen in movies about New York from the nineties. The guys led me across a marble floored foyer that was beyond fancy and then into an elevator. I’d watched Noah swipe a card over a discreet reader

and I figured out why when the elevator climbed higher and higher and finally opened into their apartment.

Alex walked across the open floor plan, his steps echoing in the massive space. More marble made the space feel like an extension of the entryway and I almost would've believed it was a really fancy office rather than a home. Everything had been building up to that point and I suddenly felt like running away. I didn't know who the guys were but it was clear that they were wealthier than I would ever be by leaps and bounds.

"Come here, Sophia." Alex's tone was demanding and I found myself walking towards him without thinking it over. He gripped my hips and pulled me close. "Do you need something to drink?"

I nodded. What I really needed was a second to calm down. Things had seemed easier in the bar where the lights were lower and Jack's encouragement was fresh in my head.

Ethan walked past us and pulled a glass bottle of water out of the fridge. "Are you okay? There's no pressure, you know? If you change your mind, we'll call another car for you and have it here in minutes."

I drank a long pull of the water and put the bottle on the counter behind Alex. His grip on my hips didn't change and there was patience on his handsome face. They were more respectful than most of the men I'd dated in my life. Knowing that they'd still call me a car and take care of me put me at ease. The bar was low, sure, but it let me relax enough to wrap my arms around Alex's neck and lean into him.

"I don't know how this works." I pressed my lips to Alex's jaw and felt his chest vibrate as he groaned. Leaning back, I glanced up at him and found those gray eyes trained on me. "But I want to stay."

Noah settled on a barstool at the kitchen island and slowly unbuttoned the buttons at his wrist. "If you don't like something, let us know. If you do like something, let us know. Just keep talking to us, Sophia."

I shuddered. I'd never been a vocal person during sex. Sex had never been anything I was encouraged to comment on. I just typically accepted what I got and went about my business. I could get myself off later, I'd always figured.

"We'll make it worth it." Alex slid his hands around to my ass and squeezed as he lifted me off my feet.

I gasped and started to shake my head to tell him to put me down but Alex slanted his mouth over mine and I lost my train of thought. Wrapping my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist, I forgot to worry about my weight.

Alex kissed me slowly at first. He pressed his soft lips to mine in slow, lingering kisses. I cupped his head and pressed myself to him harder, needing the feel of his hard chest against my breasts. With a low rumble of a growl he cupped the back of my head and stroked his tongue past my lips. He tasted like spice and citrus as I eased my tongue over his, testing the waters. I hadn't been kissed like that in a very long time and I was worried that I didn't know what I was doing.

My worries faded to nothing when Alex's hand cupping my ass squeezed tighter and I realized that the pole I was feeling between my legs was actually his erection. My eyes flew open but fluttered closed when he gently bit my bottom lip. I felt a renewed sense of need that pushed me to get what I wanted. I worked my hips against that steel pole and explored Alex's mouth. Biting his lip and sucking his tongue, I did things I'd only ever read about.

I was on another planet. I was going to have to send Jack flowers. Giant flowers. Giant, hard flowers...

Alex lifted his mouth from mine and grunted. "Did you just call me Jack?"

I kissed across his jaw and nibbled his ear. "No. I was thanking Jack for encouraging me to do this."

He walked me backwards until my back pressed against cold metal. The fridge. "How about you thank *me* instead?"

*****NOAH*****

I hadn't wanted to meet my brothers at the bar. I had other things to do and the last time we'd all three gone out together, we'd ended up inside a jail in a little village in Russia. It'd taken a lot of sweet-talking and palm greasing to get out of that one. We'd been three years younger, but I still got an itch at the back of my head at the memory. The moment I spotted Sophia, my mood had shifted.

I'd noticed her the moment she walked in. Her ass filled out her jeans like they'd been stitched exactly to her measurements. Her breasts tested the limits of the top she wore and it seemed like every man in the place had instantly become aware of her. Even in the dim bar lighting, I'd been able to tell her hair would be silky to the touch. Deep red and in thick waves down to her shoulders, I wanted to fist that hair more than I wanted my next breath.

She hadn't noticed me until her friend dumped her into my lap. The moment those big green eyes lifted to mine, I'd had an insane urge to pick her up and carry her out of the bar right then. Seeing her desire flash across her face so clearly hadn't helped the situation arising in my pants. Instead of staying, she'd run back to her friend and he'd spent their time on the dance floor torturing me.

Then it was Alex who was torturing me by taking his sweet ass time with her. We'd got her home with us and I still

couldn't get my hands on her. She was skittish, I could tell. None of us wanted to scare her away but it was clear that we were each dying to get our hands on her.

We hadn't shared a woman in years and we weren't as smooth as we once were. I hadn't shared one of the women I was sleeping with in so long that I no longer had the patience needed for it. I wanted to grab Sophia from Alex and smear all that pretty red lipstick myself.

I stood up and Ethan held his hand up, silently telling me to wait. I didn't want to wait, though. I made a frustrated noise and jerkily rolled my sleeves up. I needed to taste her and find out if she was as sweet as she smelled.

Alex worked his hips against Sophia and she was making these breathy little gasps that amped up my need. Ethan's patience was running thin, too, and I watched as he squeezed Alex's shoulder, signaling him to stop hogging Sophia.

Alex groaned as he untangled himself from her and stepped back. Staring down at Sophia, where she leaned against the door on unsteady legs, he gripped her chin and pulled her in for one more kiss before letting go. "It's going to be hard to share you."

She looked around at the three of us and I watched the way her throat moved as she swallowed. Her hands pressed into the fridge behind her and a shy smile stretched across her red, pouty lips. "I'm assuming you three have done this before."

I stepped closer. "We have."

"I haven't." She shifted her gaze from Ethan to me and I felt a jolt of energy from her expression alone. "As long as no one pees on me, I'm open to learning tonight."

Ethan's surprised laugh made me want Sophia even more. It wasn't easy to surprise him, not when he was the one always making everyone else laugh. "Okay. No pee. That's not an issue."

"Have you ever been with two men at the same time, Sophia?" Alex pressed his hands against the countertop a few

feet from her and I could see he was fighting his own raging desire to grab her.

Sophia took a deep breath and straightened her shoulders. “No. I’ve never had sex that wasn’t deemed normal by the Catholic church and it’s been years since I’ve even done that. I don’t get out much.”

My mouth went dry. “Come here, Sophia.”

She bit her lip and walked to me. I could see the way her hands shook as she pressed them into her hips and stared up at me. “You’re bossy.”

I nodded. “Will that be a problem?”

She considered her answer for a few seconds. “No. I... I don’t hate it.”

Deciding to test her, I flashed a dark smile and nodded at her chest. “Take your shirt off.”

The way her eyebrows narrowed slightly before relaxing made me wonder who she was in her real life. I had a feeling she’d tell me to kiss her ass if I bossed her around in any other way. A strong woman letting herself go for me happened to be a weakness of mine. Another weakness was a perfect set of tits that bounced and swayed with any movement.

Sophia gripped the bottom of her shirt and pulled it over her head. She kept her eyes on mine, challenging me without saying a word. When I dropped my eyes to her chest, I saw the way her skin reddened but she kept her hands at her side, letting me look my fill. In a white lace bra, her breasts begged to be marked. She had pale, creamy skin and I wanted to see my bite mark on the top swell of her breast.

Taking her shirt from her hand, I slowly folded it, punishing myself by dragging it out. Glancing down at her legs, I nodded. “And the pants.”

She hesitated for a moment before unbuttoning and unzipping her jeans. She tucked her thumbs inside the waistband and pushed them down her hips until I hooked my finger under her chin and lifted her face to mine.

“Slowly. Bend at your waist as you do it. Let my brothers see you.”

A shudder wracked her body but she did as I said. Alex and Ethan stood behind her, their eyes tightened in desire and probably pain as they watched. When Sophia stepped out of her jeans and stood back up, I took them and folded them ever so carefully before allowing myself to see her.

Her panties were neon pink lace and so far from what I expected. I'd expected a woman who looked like her to be in a matching set and the fact that she wasn't just made me want her even more. Her body was a perfect hourglass, with a small waist and hips that demanded attention. Her thighs were full and her legs shapely, all the way down to her ankles. There wasn't a single part of her that was flat. She was soft, completely feminine, and had the most beautiful face to complete the package. I couldn't remember seeing a woman more beautiful.

I realized I'd been silent for too long when Sophia put her hands on her hips again and narrowed her eyes at me. “Well? This is it.”

I closed the gap between us and gripped the side of her neck, using my thumb to press just under her chin and lift her face to mine. Her eyes were wide as she looked at me. “You're fucking beautiful. I want to do things to you that would probably scare you.”

That stubborn tilt to her head reappeared. “I don't scare easily.”

I reached around and gripped the hook of her bra. “No?”

She held her breath when I unhooked it but that breath came rushing out when I slowly dragged the straps down each arm with my fingers trailing over her warm skin. When the bra hit the floor, she glanced at it. “You're not going to fold that, too?”

Ethan and Alex both moved closer. She was right there with us. Her sass while showing her tits to me for the first time proved that. I leaned down and grabbed the bra and let her

nipples brush over my face when I straightened. Her whimper tugged at me and I wasn't so patient with folding her bra. It joined the rest of her clothes but it hung off the countertop in a clear display of my slipping control.

“Now the panties.” I shook my head when she tried to bend over and remove them. “Ethan can do it.”

I kept my eyes on her as Ethan knelt behind her and slowly pulled her panties down. I could tell by her breathing each time he touched her. I could smell her arousal and knew we were all dying from neediness. We'd given her time to run and she'd stayed. It was time to stop teasing.

*****ETHAN*****

Noah led Sophia down the hallway to his room and I followed behind with my eyes glued to Sophia's ass. Long legs and curves for days, she was my ideal woman. I would've happily followed that ass off a bridge without caring.

Sophia glanced back at me and Alex, like she was making sure we were still following her. Her smile was playful when she noticed our eyes on her ass. Then she swayed those hips a little harder and I wanted to scream.

Inside Noah's room, he led her to the sitting area next to his floor to ceiling windows. He sank into what I knew was his favorite chair and patted his lap. "Let's do this the right way."

When she tried to sit across his lap like she had in the bar, he gripped her thighs and easily maneuvered her so she was straddling him. She gasped but it turned into a moan when he pulled her flush against him.

"*This* is how you sit on my lap." Noah glanced at me and Alex before he gripped the back of Sophia's head and pulled her mouth to his. He was intense when he wanted something and it was no different with Sophia. He kissed her hard and left her no room to wonder who was in charge of their kiss.

Alex stood behind Sophia and gently ran his fingers down her back. I stood to her side and leaned over to kiss her shoulder. We eased her into the sensation of three men

touching her at the same time. While Noah took her mouth, Alex gripped her waist from behind and I ran my hand from her hip to her inner thigh. The closer we got to her core, the more restless she became. She rocked her hips over Noah and kept breaking the kiss to pant with need.

I watched as Alex cupped her sex and dipped my fingers forward to press against her clit. That was all it took for Sophia to come for the first time. She threw her head back and gripped Noah's shirt as she rolled her hips faster. Watching her come so easily made me want to do it a hundred more times.

Noah wrapped her thick red hair around his fist and pulled her head back to look at him. "You're just getting started, Sophia."

Alex licked his hand clean and swore. "On your hands and knees on the floor, Sophia."

Noah helped her off and we watched as she settled on the thick carpet like Alex wanted and I saw her eyes widen as she realized what he wanted. She tried to move but Axel gripped her ass and growled. "Stay."

She froze and remained perfectly still as he crawled under her and stared up at her core. Every inch of Sophia's body turned red when Alex wrapped his arms around her thighs and pulled her sex down to his mouth. Sophia struggled against his hold and then stopped moving when his tongue touched her sex. "I'll suffocate him."

Alex let out a dark laugh. "Do it."

I yanked off my clothes and saw Noah do the same. He gave up his precious folding and moved to stand directly in front of Sophia's face. The urge to shove him out of the way was strong but I liked watching, too, so I stood back.

"Suck me, Sophia. Take me into that pretty mouth and let me smear that lipstick."

Sophia went up on her knees and moaned at what Alex was doing to her. She was determined, though. She gripped Noah's thighs and stared up at him as she took his dick into her mouth. When Noah pulled out a few seconds later, it was clear

she knew what she was doing. He was already breathing heavily and swearing her name. When he pushed deeper, she gagged but she followed him as he tried to withdraw, keeping him lodged deep in her mouth.

“Fuck, Sophia!” Noah took two handfuls of her hair and pulled out. Bending down, he took her mouth in a heated kiss. She broke away and cried out, nails digging into Noah’s legs and face pinched as she came hard.

“Alex!” She whimpered his name and didn’t seem to notice how much her sounds turned us on. She had no idea how fucking sexy she was.

Noah cupped her face in his hands and slowly pushed his thumbs in her mouth to open it. His face was hard as she looked up at him. “You’re not giving out on us already, are you?”

Her eyes narrowed and she bit down on his thumbs. As soon as her mouth was free, she leaned forward and took his dick to the back of her throat. Her cheeks hollowed and she sucked hard enough to make Noah growl her name. Sensing she’d pushed him enough, she smiled around his dick and batted her eyelashes.

Noah let out a strangled laugh. “Cute.”

Alex moved out from under Sophia and his face glistened with her wetness as he ripped his clothes off. He positioned himself behind her and gripped his dick. He rubbed his tip through her wetness and then shifted his hips to line himself up with her core.

I could see the moment he pushed himself inside by the way his jaw went tight and his eyes took on the look of a feral animal. Sophia’s muffled cries around Noah’s cock grew louder with each thrust of Alex’s dick, until his thighs pressed into her ass and she was fully impaled.

Alex broke out in sweat and gripped Sophia’s ass in a white-knuckled grip, but he didn’t move. The veins in his arms stood out and he ground his teeth hard. “*Tight.*”

Noah pulled out of her mouth and we both stood back and watched Sophia. Her head dropped forward and she moaned broken sounds that might've been words, but it was impossible to tell. She braced her hands on the floor in front of her and she slowly started rocking her hips back and forth, fucking herself with Alex's dick while he remained frozen.

Alex growled and his control snapped. He took control, fucking Sophia in long, hard strokes. Her tits swung under her and her ass bounced with each hard thrust. Her cries grew louder and clearer.

“Yes! Fuck me, Alex! Please, don't stop!”

ETHAN

Precum beaded at the tip of my dick and I took Noah's spot in front of her. Sophia's eyes were unfocused as she looked up at me but her mouth opened and she stuck her tongue out to lap at my tip before taking me in completely. I realized painfully fast that Noah hadn't been exaggerating. Her mouth was a hot vacuum that tried to suck the come from my very soul. It was somehow both the best thing I'd ever felt and painful enough to keep me from passing out from pleasure.

Alex reached under Sophia and the moment his fingers settled over her clit, she came even harder than before. Her body shook between us and I growled out as she took my dick even deeper. I felt my dick wedge into her throat and I shouted her name and forced myself to pull out so I wouldn't come instantly.

Sophia sucked in a big breath and then screamed. She collapsed forward and sank her teeth into her arm to silence herself. Alex held her hips up and slammed his dick into her a few more times until his thrusts grew shaky and he buried himself in her once more. His voice was barely recognizable as he shouted her name and came hard.

I knelt beside Sophia and stroked her hair out of her face as she slowly came down. Noah moved to stand next to Alex and I watched his face after Alex pulled out. His eyes grew even

hungrier and he leaned forward to stroke Sophia's ass in reverence.

Alex sank onto Noah's bed and struggled to regain his voice. Sophia blinked her pretty eyes open and a lazy smile tipped her lips up at the corners. I traced the lines of her face with the tip of one finger and did my best to remain patient.

Noah slid two fingers deep into Sophia's pussy and then dragged the mixture of come up to circle her ass. He watched her face closely and teased her. "Have you ever taken anyone here?"

Sophia tried to shake her head but with the side of her face still pressed into the carpet, she was forced to speak. "No."

"Is it off-limits?"

Her eyes met mine and she still managed to blush. "Um... No."

All three of us moaned at her answer. Noah dipped his fingers into her sex again and then slowly pressed one of them into her ass. Sophia tensed, but he dropped his other hand to her clit and stroked her. He continued while Alex and I watched silently, only breathing when we had to. The idea of Sophia taking one of us in each of her holes was too alluring.

Sophia had another, smaller, orgasm and then pushed herself back up on her hands and knees. She looked over her shoulder at Noah and licked her lips. "Fuck me."

He added another finger and pumped into her ass faster. "How?"

She moaned. "Please, Noah."

"Tell me where you want me to fuck you, Sophia." He pumped her ass harder. "Ask me to fuck you."

She was quiet for a moment before looking back at him again. "Fuck me in my ass, Noah. Please. I need to feel you fuck my ass."

Noah pulled his fingers out and grabbed Sophia around the waist. She laughed when he tossed her on the bed and immediately went up on her hands and knees, prepared for

him. Noah confused her, though. He nodded to me and I laid down across the bed and pulled her on top of me.

I cupped her breasts and lifted my mouth to suck on her hard nipples. Nipping at them, I kissed my way up her throat. “Put that golden pussy on my dick, Sophia.”

She did just as I said and slowly sank herself onto my full length. She moaned and tried to press herself up so she could ride me, but I wrapped my arm around her and brought her chest down to mine. I struggled to stay still when her pussy pulsed around me so perfectly. She was so goddamn hot and tight that I wanted to offer her my inheritance and beg her to never go anywhere.

I gripped her hair and brought her mouth to mine. Just before kissing her, I met her gaze. “Noah’s going to fuck your ass, Sophia. Grind your clit into me and try to stay relaxed.”

Her eyes widened but when I kissed her, she gave herself fully. I kissed her soft and slow until I felt Noah settle behind her. When she started to tense, I stroked my tongue into her mouth. I could feel Noah pressing into her ass and I fought to stay in control as her core tightened around me even more. She started making tiny movements that rubbed her clit into me and panted into my mouth. I tightened my grip on her hair and nipped at her lips, doing everything I could to distract her from any discomfort she felt.

When Noah was finally full inside her ass, we all exhaled together. Noah gripped her hips and we helped her sit up as much as she could. Alex stood next to us on the bed and he stopped to cup Sophia’s face and kiss her before straightening and easing himself into her mouth. That moment, with all three of us deep inside Sophia, stretched as far as we could handle it. There was magic to her taking us all that way.

We couldn’t contain the need to take her for long, though. Noah moved first, easing himself out and then back into her ass a few times before moving faster. Alex held her head in his hands while fucking her mouth. I waited the longest to move. When I did, Sophia’s nails bit into my chest and I felt her core tighten and pulse.

“She’s close.” I reached up and gripped her breasts. “Fuck, Sophia. Your pussy is so fucking perfect.”

Noah pumped himself into her ass faster. “I’m not going to last long. Too good.”

Sophia screamed around Alex’s dick and surprised us all by bucking her hips between us. She silently demanded more and when Noah and I both fucked her faster, she grabbed my hand and pulled it up to her throat.

I held her throat and gently tightened my grip. My blood was lava in my veins and when Sophia’s core clamped down on my dick, I lost it. I came harder than I could ever remember coming and the feeling of my come flooding her core sent me to another level of pleasure. I had to force my fingers from around her throat so I didn’t hurt her.

Noah came with a feral cry, pinning Sophia’s body between us. Alex came at the same time and I could hear him chanting her name as he did. As soon as he pulled out of her mouth, she slumped forward on my chest and I wrapped my arms around her, holding her against me. When I could breathe again, I opened my eyes and met Noah’s gaze. I could read in his expression that he was thinking and feeling the same thing I was.

Sophia didn’t feel like another easy fuck.

*****SOPHIA*****

The sound of a door shutting startled me awake. I blinked my eyes open and instantly felt a mix of leftover pleasure and exhaustion. I'd used muscles that I wasn't sure I'd ever used and I was sore. I was also pinned beneath Ethan's heavy arm and Alex's heavy leg. My cheeks burned at the image we presented. All of us naked and still covered in fluids that I wasn't willing to even think about, we looked like the cover of a very dirty porn. I wasn't sure where the bedding had gone but with them surrounding me, I had no worries of getting cold.

I lifted my head, expecting Noah to be gone, but he was still passed out on the other side of Ethan. Seeing that we were all still in bed, my heart jumped at the thought of someone else in the apartment. Oh, god. I started to panic as I realized that I knew nothing about the guys I'd gone home with and the person who'd just shut the door could've been their girlfriend or parents. I was a thirty-seven-year-old woman. I was past the stage of my life where parents walked in on me with their sons.

I struggled to crawl out from under Alex and Ethan but I finally sank off the end of the bed, into the floor, and barely managed to not cry out when every part of my body complained about the movement. I stood up and looked around for my clothes. When I didn't spot them, I had a vision

of stripping naked in their kitchen. I cursed myself even as I grabbed one of their shirts and tugged it over my head. Taking a second to appreciate the way their shirt hung off of me, I looked at the guys once more and sighed.

They'd proven to me that I wasn't quiet during sex if the sex was good enough. They'd given me dozens of orgasms and had the stamina of...guys their age... I shivered and pushed my hair out of my face. I found myself lingering when I thought about the fact that I'd never see them again. They'd given me the best, wildest night of my life and it was hard to give that up.

Rolling my eyes at myself, I silently made my way out of the bedroom. Even if I did stick around, there was no way the three of them were expecting me to stick around so they could give me even more orgasms. I was too old for them and we'd had a good night together. There was no reason to stick around and make it awkward.

Thankfully, there was no one else in the kitchen as I hurriedly pulled my own clothes back on. When it came time to put my shirt on, I hesitated, though. I pulled the larger shirt tight around my body and then shook my head. I was a grown woman. I didn't need to steal a man's shirt. When I was fully dressed, I found my purse and grabbed a pen and an old receipt out of it. Quickly scribbling out a short note to say thanks and goodbye, I left it on the island and then went to make my quick exit.

Only when I turned around, there was an older woman standing on the other side of the massive room, watching me with a wide-eyed expression. I slapped my hand over my mouth to contain a scream and nearly jumped out of my skin. The woman held up her hands and hurried closer.

"I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to scare you. I'm just cleaning. I didn't expect there to be anyone else here." She rushed around me and opened the fridge. "Would you like something to eat? I can cook something before you leave."

I shook my head and felt my hair move as one unit. Wincing at how I must look, I laughed awkwardly and started backing

away. “No, thank you. I’m just going to go. I have...an appointment.”

“Oh, of course! Well, let me help you out. Unless you have the code to the elevator or a card, it won’t let you out.” Something about her face was familiar, but I chocked it up to her resembling the guys in some way, even if I couldn’t place why. She was pleasantly plump and had the kindest eyes, but she was catching me in an awkward position, so I couldn’t appreciate her kindness. “I tell the boys all the time that it seems like a safety hazard, but do they listen? No.”

Boys. The alcohol from the night before threatened to make a second appearance. I stumbled and caught myself just before I crashed into a very expensive looking side table. “Boys?”

She took one look at my face and giggled. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t call them boys still. They’re perfectly legal, honey.”

I covered my mouth again and pressed a fist into my stomach. “I really have to go.”

A few beats later, I was inside the elevator on my way down to the exit, but the woman had joined me. I leaned heavily against the wall, trying not to have a complete freak out. Boys. Perfectly legal. Just how old were they?

“Should I wake up the boys and have them call a car for you, honey? You don’t look so good.” She scoffed. “I mean, you’re beautiful. You just look sick. Is it because I called them boys again? I am so sorry. They’re not boys, I promise. They’re in their mid-twenties. And if you saw the way they carried themselves, you’d think they were even older. Although...I guess you did see the way they carry themselves. Aren’t they such great bo-men?”

I found my phone in my purse and shook my head, desperate to get away from her. “I can handle it. Thank you, though. I think... I think I just need some fresh air.”

“Of course. These elevator rides always make me sick, too. I wish they didn’t have to live on the top floor. Me? I live on the first floor of my house. Maybe when I was younger, I could’ve handled this elevator every day, but I have an issue with the

crystals in my ears now that I'm a little older. They say sixties are the new fifties, but I don't know about that."

The doors opened and I sprinted out. "Thank you! I have to go!"

She rushed after me, still talking. "My name is Mary, dear. Maybe the next time you come over to see the boys, we can have tea and get to know each other."

I was legging it down the sidewalk, doing my best to get away from their building, but Mary wasn't giving up. I called to her over my shoulder. "If I see them again, that would be nice. Thank you!"

She just jogged faster. "What do you mean? Of course, you'll see them again. My boys will call you if they know what's good for them. You're the most put together woman I've ever seen them bring home. Not that they've brought anyone home in forever. They don't live at home because they're grown up now. Oh, goodness. I just think it has to mean something that you're not a mess. I bet they'll be calling you before you even get home."

SOPHIA

I spun around so fast that Mary ran into me and we both went down hard. I landed on my elbow and hip, but Mary managed to scrape both hands and knees. My heart lodged in my throat when I saw tears form in her eyes. Immediately, I took her hands in mine and looked them over. “I’m so sorry, Mary. Here, let me help you back to the building.”

She forced a laugh and let me help her up. “I’m fine. You’re going to be late for your appointment.”

I sighed and met her light blue eyes. Light blue just like *her* boys. Was that the only thing nagging at my brain? She looked so familiar but it had to be the eyes. “Truth?”

She nodded. “I was just trying to escape. I do have to get home to my daughter, but she’s with my sister, so I’m sure she’s mostly okay.”

“You have a daughter? That’s great!” She noticed my expression and laughed. “I have three sons in their mid-twenties who haven’t once mentioned kids or settling down. At this point, I’m accepting any kind of kid. I just want a grandbaby.”

“Mary...” I grunted. “I think there’s been a misunderstanding. I’m not their girlfriend. I just... I mean, I just spent the night with them. I don’t normally do things like that, but-”

“So, they must’ve been something special to you, too.” She wasn’t backing down.

“It was a one-night stand, Mary. I’m really sorry for getting your hopes up.” I rubbed my hand down my face and felt gritty mascara smeared under my eyes. “Look at me. You don’t want me as your daughter-in-law anyway. Trust me. I tried doing the daughter-in-law thing before and it didn’t end well.”

Mary grinned brightly as she looked ahead and then glanced back at me. “There are worse things to try twice, honey.”

I opened my mouth to tell her that I was never going to try that particular thing twice but the feeling of the air pressure changing around us had me lifting my head. Coming out of their building in just a pair of low-slung pants, Noah’s eyes were on me and they were narrowed dangerously.

“Oh, look. Here’s my Noah now.” Mary patted my arm and reached up to pat my hair. “I guess it’s fine since he probably made it that way...”

My entire body felt like I’d been put in an oven. Their mother was crazy. I would’ve loved every bit of her if she wasn’t focusing that crazy on me.

“What the hell happened? You’re both bleeding.” Noah’s voice was even deeper first thing in the morning and when I glanced up at him, the styled hair from the night before was gone. His hair looked worse than mine, if possible. Only, his made him charming, which wasn’t fair.

Mary *tsked* at her son. “Noah, watch your mouth when you’re speaking to a lady. I was walking your friend out and we had a spill. Help us up to the apartment and give us some first-aid. I think your friend here needs mouth-to-mouth.”

Noah’s cheeks pinkened. “Mother. Really?”

I held up my hands and took a step backwards but his gaze shifted to mine and the hard stare he shot me had me freezing. “I was going to let you take care of your mother. I have an appointment...”

“No, she doesn’t.” Mary giggled at me. “You’re not getting away that easily.”

“Both of you need to have those cuts cleaned up. There’s no telling what you picked up from the sidewalk. Come on.” Noah nodded at me. “Don’t make me pick you up and carry you inside.”

Mary clapped her hands. “Oh, Noah! This is just like that book we read in book club a few years ago. The one they turned into a movie with that beautiful Irish actor. Something about gray... Oh!”

I was going to dig the hole I needed to open under me if I didn’t escape the two of them fast. “*Fifty Shades of Gray*.”

Noah shot me a look like he was demanding to know why I’d help his mother out with the title, but I was wondering the same thing myself. “Mom, stop. Please.”

I nodded. “Yes, please. I’m only so strong. This is officially the most embarrassed I’ve ever been and I’d like to run away now.”

Mary gasped. “Do not be embarrassed... What’s your name?”

I squeezed my eyes shut. “Sophia.”

“Do not be embarrassed, Sophia. You’re a modern woman. You have needs and going home with three very eligible bachelors is perfectly fine. If anyone looks at you differently because of that, they can sit on a corn cob. Do you understand me?” She turned to her son. “Did you say anything to make her think this was embarrassing?”

Noah held up his hands and stared up at the sky. “You’re killing me.”

“If I find out that you or your brothers said anything to make Sophia think less of herself, I’ll pull you over my knee and spank you. You’re not too old.”

“Jesus, Mom!”

I had to get away. Panic and horror would be my excuse if I was asked about my choices later, but I was being pushed to

my limit. I gasped and pointed behind Noah. “Is that the president?!”

As soon as they were both looking in the direction that I pointed, I sprinted away. I’d never run track before but when I felt the wind whipping my tangled hair back and forth, I thought I could’ve been a track star. I never looked back. A cab was stopped at the sidewalk ahead of me and I dove inside, stealing it from a man in a business suit.

“Go!” I pushed the business man’s hands out of the way and slammed the door shut before lying flat across the seat. “If you pull away from this curb ten seconds ago, I’ll tip you a hundred!”

I was rocked into the back of the seat and then into the floor as the cab took off and then skidded to a stop to make a turn. Wedged in the floorboard of a cab, I used my time on the long drive home to think about my choices. The driver, a nice man named Lazalo, stopped once we were out of the city and helped me out of the floor. That just gave me time to look at my cell phone finally and I realized that I’d never texted or called Ava or Jack the night before. I had dozens of calls from both of them.

I shot a text to both of them letting them know I was fine and that I’d call them as soon as I could. Then, I let my head slump back on the headrest and my eyes met Lazalo’s in the rear-view mirror.

“You okay, lady?”

I groaned. “Have you ever been walked out of a one-night stand by the other person’s parent?”

His eyes crinkled as he laughed. “I can’t say that I have.”

“Good. Make better choices than me, Laz.” I rubbed my face and out of nowhere, a laugh bubbled up and out of me. Once the first laugh escaped there was no stopping it. I cackled as Lazalo joined me and neither of us stopped until he parked in front of my house and I saw Ava, Milo, Lily, Mrs. Johnson, and my favorite neighbor, Mr. Jimmy, all standing in the driveway with their hands on their hips.

“Oh, man. This all for you?”

I pulled the wad of cash that Jack had given me the night before out of my pocket and passed it to Lazalo. “Circle the block a few times?”

“Too late, Ms. Sophia.”

Sure enough, Ava was already yanking the door open and shoving her head inside. “Do you have any idea how worried we were?!”

SOPHIA

“**M**om! Aunt Ava said you were in big trouble. What’d you do?” Lily wrapped herself around me and then sniffed. “You smell like a boy, Mom. Gross.”

Ava watched Lily free herself from me and run inside before narrowing her eyes at me. “You smell like a boy? What the hell were you thinking? You scared the shit out of us. You could’ve been murdered, Soph! You could’ve been cut up into little pieces and littered around the river! I would’ve had to identify you piece by piece!”

Mrs. Johnson scowled. “Disgusting. Tell your sister to stop being so gross, Sophia.”

Ava flipped the older woman off. “Why are you even here? You weren’t helpful at all. You just kept muttering *slut* under your breath.”

Milo held his hand up for me to high-five it. “Nice move getting laid, Soph! It’s good for your creative juices. I have some ideas I want to run by you, so this is perfect.”

“Milo!” Ava tugged Milo back by his shirt and then pushed him towards the house. “Go inside and make Lily some eggs.”

“We don’t have any eggs. You used them all in that painting you made last night.”

I swore. “Ava! I told you that if you use the groceries for your art projects, you have to replace them.”

“Oh, and when was I supposed to replace them? Between sleeping and worrying that you were deader than dead? I guess I should’ve done the shopping while filing a missing persons report?” Ava turned to Mrs. Johnson. “Why are you still here? Get out of here, lady. This is family business.”

“Jimmy isn’t family!” Mrs. Johnson jabbed her elbow into Jimmy’s side. “Jimmy doesn’t have family because he’s a no-good communist!”

Mr. Jimmy held up his hands. “Paint your house red during the Red Scare and suddenly you’re a communist.”

“Don’t talk to Jimmy like that. *We’re* his family.” I tried to shove my fingers through my hair but my hair wasn’t having it. “Can we continue this after I shower?”

“*Slut.*” Mrs. Johnson shook her head and wagged her finger at me. “This place is a zoo!”

“Milo! Get your chainsaw! This lady called Soph a slut!” Ava laughed maniacally. “You’re going to get it now.”

Milo poked his head out of the house. “Which one, baby?”

Ava shrugged. “I don’t care, Milo. Just get one.”

“What am I using it for? If it’s big, I’ll get Jason. If it’s medium, I’ll get Michael. If it’s-”

“It’s for chopping up mean old ladies, Milo!” Ava threw her hands up and groaned. “Forget it. Just...forget it, Milo. She’s already halfway home.”

“What? I’m not chopping up people with my chainsaws, Ava! Do you have any idea what that kind of thing would do to them? God, Ava, it’s like you don’t even care about them.” He disappeared into the house again, leaving Ava and I standing there with Mr. Jimmy.

Mr. Jimmy cleared his throat. “I was a communist.”

Ava and I both stared at him with slack jaws.

“Well, it was before the internet. I met a nice man who told me a bunch of bullshit. To be fair, I wasn’t exactly listening to the things he was saying. He had this noncancerous tumor on his tongue... It looked terrible, but it felt like heaven.”

Ava and I both fell into a fit of laughter. By the time we’d stopped my sides hurt and I had tears running down my cheeks. Ava recovered faster than me and she was invested in knowing more. “So you became a communist for a man who gave good head? I thought it was bad when I pretended to like magic for my boyfriend before Milo.”

“You can imagine my surprise when I found out the truth. I had to paint white strips on my house and pretend like that had been the plan the whole time.” He turned his gaze on me. “Back to you, though, missy. You look like me after I participated in my first gay rodeo.”

“I didn’t know you used to ride bulls, Mr. Jimmy.”

He was eighty if he was a day old but that didn’t stop him from wagging his white eyebrows at us. “I didn’t.”

After another round of laughing and cheering him on, they both refocused on me. I blew out a big breath and studied my nails. “We met at the bar and then they took me to their apartment. I didn’t look at my phone until I was already on my way home this morning. It just slipped my mind.”

Ava made a confused sound. “They? Are you telling me that you went home with someone with they/them pronouns or that you went home with more than one person?”

I groaned. “More than one person.”

She gasped. “Two men?! You went home with two men?”

When I didn’t respond, Mr. Jimmy whistled. “More than two?”

“Three. I went home with three men.” I let out a panicked scream when Ava did. Even stomping my feet and shaking my head didn’t make Ava and Mr. Jimmy less curious, though.

“You went home with three men?! How? Why? What?”

Mr. Jimmy cleared his throat. “Well, let’s not jump to conclusions.”

I made a face. “Jump away. I had sex with all three of them. They’re brothers.”

Ava ran around in a circle, screaming. “What?! Oh, my god! My sister, the nun, had sex with three men at the same time?!”

“I’m impressed, girl. If I could’ve found three brothers who wanted to take me home back in my day, I would’ve been more into family!”

I found my hand up and realized I was high-fiving Mr. Jimmy. “I need to hang around Milo less.”

“Wait, Soph. Tell us everything. I mean it. I need to know every little detail.” Ava threw her arm over Mr. Jimmy’s shoulder. “*We* need to know every little detail.”

“You want me to tell every single detail of my night of sex to my little sister and senior neighbor?” I took Mr. Jimmy’s hand and smiled. “Of course, you’re more than that, but I had to say it like that to really get the point across.”

“Yes, that’s exactly what I want. If you don’t tell us, we’ll write you out of our wills.” Ava looked over her shoulder and spotted Mrs. Johnson coming closer. “Oh, god, why the hell is she coming back? Mrs. Johnson, don’t come any closer! Sophia is about to tell us the story of how she slept with three men at the same time last night! We wouldn’t want to traumatize you.”

I slapped Ava’s arm. “Stop screaming that! What if Lily hears?”

“Then she’ll know her mom is in touch with her sexuality.” Ava brushed me off and kept going. “Or maybe you want to hear all about it, you skank!”

Mrs. Johnson let out a frustrated scream. “I’m calling the cops!”

“If they send more than three men out, they’ll have to be okay with taking turns! My sister is a badass but she’s only one woman!” Ava winced when I pinched her arm. “What?”

I glared at her and waited for the understanding to cross her face. “Yeah, jerk. You just said that. I’m not telling you anything.”

Mr. Jimmy sighed. “Well, poop.”

The cops never showed up, thankfully. I did however give in and tell them about my night before going inside and beginning the process of acting like it never ever happened.

SOPHIA

“Looking good, Sophia.” Randal Barnes walked into my office first thing Monday morning with a broad smile showing off every one of his teeth. He was dressed in a cream suit that made his caramel colored skin look amazing. He’d taken his two weeks of vacation in Mexico and if I said I wasn’t jealous, I’d be lying. “What’s different about you?”

Randal had been my assistant for six months but if he didn’t find a better job before I moved up in the business world, I was taking him with me. He was amazing at his job and could read me like a book when it came to anticipating what I needed. He was a few years younger than me and had three little boys at home. We’d been talking about getting the kids together for a play date but after working ten hour days, we were usually too tired to make any real effort.

I sat up straighter and smiled to hide my frustration at being back at Anderson Inc, without a promotion. “Absolutely nothing.”

He searched my face and then rushed to close my office door. “That asshole. Sophia, you deserved that promotion!”

I nodded. “Yeah, I did. *We* did.”

“This isn’t right.” Randal shook his head and offered the same thing he’d offered a dozen times before. “I can ask Rita for help, Sophia. This is her bread and butter. Let her help.”

“I’m not letting you drag your wife into this.”

“She lives to sue asshole employers who mistreat their female employees, Sophia. This would make her year.”

I shook my head and brought that conversation to a close. “No. There’s no need for that. At least, not yet. If it gets more obvious, Randal, I’ll do something.”

He nodded, understanding that I was through talking about it. “Well, I wasn’t kidding about you looking great. Did you get a haircut or something?”

I shrugged. I was considering the weekend a big blank space in my mind because nothing had happened. At all. If my body was still achy in certain places, that was because of something different. “Nope.”

He studied me for a bit longer and then shrugged. “I don’t believe you, but that’s fine. What’s up first this morning? I didn’t fill out your schedule on Friday because I was hoping you’d have the correct job this morning.”

That was one of the things that made Randal amazing. He slipped from personal to business seamlessly. “I think we should spend this morning reviewing-”

James Flannery opened my office door and walked in without knocking. He cut his eyes at Randal and frowned. “I’ve been trying to page you, but it seems your assistant wasn’t at his desk.”

I stood up and walked around my desk to stand next to Randal. “No, he was here, with me, working. What can I do for you? I didn’t expect to see you on this floor after you chose Bill Trent as your replacement.”

“I’ll be around to help Bill out for a couple of weeks.” His frown deepened and I hoped he was thinking about how he wouldn’t have had to stick around if he’d chosen me. “Mr. Anderson has called a meeting for all managers and heads of departments.”

Annoyance bit at me, but I was back under the giant Anderson thumb and my time wasn’t my own once more.

Whatever work I could've gotten done with Randal would have to wait. "Now?"

James nodded. "We need to get moving."

I grabbed my phone from my desk and nodded to Randal. "Start pulling up the files for businesses A through E, please."

While walking to the elevator, James cleared his throat. "It's complicated, Sophia."

I narrowed my eyes but kept my head straight. "Oh?"

An intern tried to join us when the elevator doors opened but James held up his arm and shook his head. "Take the next one."

I crossed my arms under my chest and leaned in the corner of the elevator. "That was rude."

"Look, Sophia, I understand that you hate me. I didn't have a choice, though. If I could've chosen, I would've picked you. You're made for the job. And if you'd gotten the job, I could've been setting up my office on the executive floor right now."

"Are you fucking serious, James?" I straightened to my full height and felt my blood boil. "You're admitting to me that my promotion was blocked?"

"If you try to tell anyone else, I'll tell them that you're crazy. Just because I'm willing to admit it to you doesn't mean I'm trying to blow up my spot in this company. It's fucked, what he's doing to you." Shaking his head, James held out his hands. "I have a family to feed, though. The executive job is going to send both of my kids to college. I like you, Sophia, but not enough to risk my own space here."

I ground my teeth. "Why are you even telling me this?"

"It doesn't have to be like this. Just play along with what he wants, Sophia. He'd take care of you." He said the last sentence quietly, like he didn't like having to say them, like he knew how wrong it was and didn't want to say it too loud.

I slowly shook my head and took a deep breath. Inspecting my perfectly manicured nails, painted a professional beige

color, I tried to contain the rage pulsing through my body. “James, imagine saying the same thing to your daughter.”

He bristled. “Sarah would never... She won’t...”

“Exactly. So, do me a favor. The next time you think you’re doing me a favor by admitting that you cheated me out of the promotion I should’ve gotten years ago, think twice. You wanted to clear your conscious by telling me this, but it’s not my job to make you feel better about you fucking me over, James. I hope that your daughter never has to work for a man like you or Gerald.”

He stammered, going red in the face, but the elevator doors opened and I walked out. My hands shook and I could tell the expression on my face was verging on homicidal so I stopped just outside of the large conference room that Gerald held all his meetings in. There was a station set up for coffee and pastries so I forced myself to stand there and study the items while I regained my composure.

Tiffany walked out of the conference room and smirked when she saw me standing there. “Counting calories?”

“Nope. Just giving myself time to calm down so I don’t lose my shit on anyone saying the wrong thing to me.” I sent an obviously fake smile her way and manhandled a croissant. Tearing a big bite out of it, I chewed it angrily. “Yum. Calories.”

She scoffed and hurried around me towards her desk. I was glad she’d walked away because I was almost choking on the size of the bite I’d taken. With a slight cough, I grabbed a bottle of water to wash it down. Thankful that no one had witnessed the interaction, I made my way into the conference room and found one of the only available seats that didn’t require I climb over someone, one right at the front. I’d just sat down and crossed my legs when the door at the front of the room that connected to Gerald’s office opened and Gerald walked in. He was all smiles as he stepped to the side and gestured to the men entering the room behind him.

My stomach rolled and I grew light-headed as I came face to face with Mary’s *boys*.

*****SOPHIA*****

“Today is a big day for Anderson Inc., everyone.” Gerald flashed a too-white smile and seemed to grow even larger than normal as he gripped Noah and Ethan’s shoulders. “The Anderson sons have returned home and are coming on board.”

I was going to throw up. I gripped my seat so tight that the modern metal frame bit into my skin but I didn’t feel it. My entire body was hot and buzzing. I somehow had too much spit in my mouth and none in my throat. I just stared at the guys I’d spent Friday night with and a replay of the things we’d done flashed through my head, only they no longer felt bold and sexy. My vision grew blurry and I realized I wasn’t breathing. I opened my mouth to suck in oxygen but I was panicking so intensely that I couldn’t remember how to breathe and my body’s preservation skills weren’t activating.

“My sons have been traveling the world and learning through adventures that most of us don’t get to have. They’ve got a fresh viewpoint that’s going to lead this company into the future for many more generations.” Gerald’s voice was so loud in my ringing ears. “They understand the meaning of work, but I don’t want anyone here thinking they haven’t earned their positions. They’re going to intern in each department and work this company from the bottom up.”

It was James' voice that spoke out first. "Let me be the first to welcome them to the team, sir."

In the immediate rush of cheers and clapping, I found my breath. I sucked in mouthfuls of oxygen and shot a desperate glance towards the door.

"Alright, alright. Let's not boost their egos up just yet." Gerald's laughter was fake but no one would've ever called him out on it. "I decided at random where they should start their internship and they'll be working with Sophia Bennett."

My eyes shot forward at the sound of my name and my gaze crashed into Noah's like a freight train going off the rails. It was loud and messy in my head, dragging through me and leaving destruction in its wake. I tore my eyes from those ice blue orbs that threatened even the small foothold I'd made at Anderson Inc..

"That leads me to my next piece of exciting news. Bill Trent has been promoted to Managing Director of Acquisitions." Gerald motioned Bill forward. "Bill has proven over his two years at this company to be a dedicated employee and a fierce leader. I have the utmost faith in him getting his new department in order."

My professional brain took over for a moment and anger surged to the forefront of my brain. My department wasn't out of order. Since I'd taken the job of Head of Research in Acquisitions, things had run smoother than ever before. I had provided the data during my interview for the job of Managing Director. Gerald knew that.

"Since Bill will be busy with his new position, Sophia will guide my sons through their first department." Gerald met my eyes then and if he could see the rage brewing inside me, he didn't show it. "You're a seasoned employee, Sophia. You've been here for how long?"

My voice sounded like gravel when I spoke. "Five years."

Gerald clapped his hands together. "We're lucky to have such a dedicated employee, Sophia. Five years is a long time to dedicate your life to a company these days."

There was an awkward moment of the others in the room not knowing how they were supposed to react. I knew what they were all thinking. They'd just heard the numbers. Bill Trent had been with the company for two years compared to my five. They were all wondering what the hell was wrong with me that I didn't make the natural move from my job to Bill's new job. I could feel the stares and I wanted to scream.

Instead, I forced my back straight and lifted my chin. Ignoring the mess that was waiting for me, I forced a smile and met Gerald's gaze with fire in mine. "I was just speaking to James in the elevator on the ride up here about how much Bill deserves this promotion. I'll be the first to congratulate Bill and I'll also be the first to tell him to watch out for you, Mr. Anderson."

Gerald's face held that same fake smile but I could see the stiffening of his shoulders. He let out an easy laugh. "Watch out for me?"

I stretched my smile wider. "Of course. You're always taking our amazing bosses away to the executive floor. Bill, you better be ready to fight him off. We need your leadership down in Acquisitions."

Bill laughed and held up his hands. "If the big man wants me up here, who am I to say no?"

Everyone laughed as a few other men jokingly held up their hands and volunteered to be stolen by Gerald. Gerald walked over to me and lightly patted my shoulder. "I promise to come down and personally lend a hand if I have to steal anyone else away from your team."

The energy in the room turned playful and went off track as a few of the executives teased Gerald about the idea of him going downstairs to work. With Gerald's attention away from me and everyone else focused on him, I silently slipped out of the room. With my heart racing and my breakfast in my throat, I got in the elevator and jabbed at the button for the eighteenth floor. It was the records floor, but since focus had shifted to storing everything to the cloud, the entire floor was a graveyard.

One lone security guard sat at the front desk to make sure no one messed with anything, but I'd met Steve on my first day and we'd bonded over our love of Halloween. We'd been the only two people dressed up so we'd naturally navigated to each other. He was thirty years older than me but I considered him a friend.

Steve read my expression when the elevator doors opened and he quickly sat back down. "One private floor for the lady. I hear the back office is especially great for throwing fits of rage."

I patted his desk and walked on shaky legs to the room I always went to when I needed to lose my composure. Steve and I had an understanding. He didn't stop me from sneaking in to lose my shit and I sent him every Halloween costume tutorial that I found about Billy from *Hocus Pocus*. Steve was great at privacy but shit at the internet.

I closed the door behind me and let out a frustrated scream as soon as I did. I grabbed the stack of files next to me and threw them across the room. The next one felt even better. I ripped at the file folders and growled out my anger and resentment until I was breathing heavily and the room was destroyed. Unfortunately, with all the anger gone, I was left to face the crushing panic about the guys being Gerald's sons.

I sank to the floor and started gathering the files to restack them. It was my process. Everything got put back in order, just not the correct order. I'd trashed and organized the same files for two years. Normally, it felt a lot better. Normally, I didn't have to face a one-night stand at work.

I was almost finished when a soft knock on the door startled me. Before I could say anything or climb to my feet, the door opened and Alex walked in.

*****ALEX*****

I took in the sight of Sophia on her knees in the middle of a mess and reconciled the image with the goddess I'd fucked just a few days earlier. The Sophia on her knees in an abandoned floor of The Anderson Building was dressed modestly, like she thought the clothes would hide her body, and she looked like she'd just gone ten rounds with Foreman.

I closed the door and leaned against it, wondering how she would react. She was an enigma. She'd been soft and submissive in Noah's bedroom, but I'd just watched her stare at my father like she would've loved nothing more than to castrate him. There had been no sign of the shy woman who took orders with a smile on her face.

"So." I kept my face neutral, unsure of what to expect from her. "We meet again."

She stood up and clutched a stack of ruined folders to her chest. "Did you have any idea?"

I shook my head. "Nope. We were just as surprised as you were, Sophia. I have a feeling we were happier about the surprise than you were."

"This is a nightmare." She dropped the folders to the floor and wrapped her arms around herself. "Happy? You're happy about this? Did you really just say the word happy to me?"

I watched every move she made as she planted her hands on her hips and walked in tight little circles on top of the folders she'd just dropped. The pencil skirt she wore with the matching jacket might've hid her skin, but when she moved, the skirt hugged her ass in a way that made my pants tight.

"I'm going to have to quit." She turned on me. "The orgasms were great, but they weren't anything I'd give up my career for. I really wish I'd known who you were before I went home with you."

I couldn't help smiling at her. The motion felt foreign after being around my dad all morning. "That's unfortunate. I guess we should've tried harder."

She stopped and I saw her eyes dance over me, as if she was seeing me for the first time that day. For every bit of discomfort I felt at being in something remotely close to a suit, she made it all worthwhile when she licked her lips and blushed before looking away. "You can't say that."

"Say what? That we should've made you come harder?" I bit my lip and shrugged. "Sorry."

She spun away from me and ran her hands over her hair, putting the pieces that were sticking out wildly back into place. "This is my job, Alex, and I'm a professional. I... This can't happen."

I pushed off the door and walked closer. I could see goosebumps break out across her arms when I stopped just a few feet away. "*This* is your job?"

I knelt behind her and dreamed of having her over my face again while picking up the files she'd dropped. She dropped to her knees and started grabbing the files faster than I could.

"This is part of my job, yes. I have to break things to be able to handle this job sometimes. No one knows and no one suffers because of this. I don't even know how you found me. Did Steve let you by? This place is... It's a secret." She sat back on her heels and tilted her head at me. "How *did* you find me?"

“You’re not the only one who knows a security guard, Sophia. I tattoo one of the guys who works security and he found you for me.” I shrugged, unapologetic for hunting her down. “Noah and Ethan are probably shitting themselves right now out of jealousy.”

She studied the tattoos that crept out from the high collar of my shirt and then dropped her eyes to my hands. I watched her throat bob when she took in my hands and drank in the way her chest rose and fell faster when I fisted my hands. “You tattoo people?”

I stood up and looked down at her. She was a test of my self-control with her big green eyes looking up at me. I offered her my hand to keep myself from enjoying the view for too long. “I do.”

She took my hand and gasped when I tugged her into my chest. “Alex...”

I wrapped one arm around her waist and trailed my knuckle over her cheek and down her neck. “You don’t have any tattoos.”

She braced her hands against my chest but she didn’t push me away. “No.”

“I have a studio just outside of the city. It’s private. You should let me tattoo you.” Just the idea of leaving my mark on her beautiful skin had me hardening against her stomach.

She finally pushed me away and shook her head like she was trying to clear it. “We’re going to need to set ground rules if this is going to work.”

“I’m assuming you’re against fucking in the office.”

Sophia’s eyes narrowed. “Get your brothers and meet me in my office in fifteen minutes.”

“I won’t lie; I like it better when I’m the one giving the orders.” I laughed after seeing her eyes flash like she wanted to murder me. “I’m kidding. If you’re the one giving them, I have a feeling I’d like that just the same.”

She pointed to the door. “I’m serious, Alex. I need to finish up in here and then I’ll meet you in my office.”

I could see that she was serious so I nodded and gripped the door handle. “Sophia?”

She stood there with her hands on her hips, head down, and blew out a big sigh. “Yeah?”

“I’m glad you didn’t get to sneak away so easily after all.” I pulled the door open. “It was much easier finding you this way.”

After closing her into her room I made my way back to the elevator. Pulling out my phone, I sent a text to Noah and Ethan to meet me in Sophia’s office.

Her security guard buddy, Steve, scowled at me as I got closer. “If you upset her, I have people I can call.”

I held up my hands. “I have no interest in upsetting her. Like I told you, she’s a friend.”

“A friend. Sure. I saw the look on your face when you were walking up to me just now. You’re interested in her.” Steve somehow scowled even harder. “She doesn’t need anyone messing with her. She’s a good woman.”

I started to respond but stopped myself. I didn’t know what we were doing with Sophia. It felt like we had unfinished business but I didn’t know how long that lasted. I didn’t want to mess with her, though. The little snippets of her that I’d seen on Friday night had been special.

Finally, I nodded at Steve. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

SOPHIA

Randal was standing in front of his desk when I got off the elevator. As soon as he saw me, he came rushing over. “Sophia, there are three men in your office right now. I told them to wait outside, but they ignored me. I don’t know who they are but I think I want to kick their asses.”

I held his elbow and walked him into my office with me. Having the guys in my space was hard but if they thought they were going to push my staff around, they were dead wrong.

They were lounging in my office like it was their own. Noah was even sitting behind my desk, in *my* chair. Someone had definitely messed with the thermostat and the picture of my family was moved, like they’d been looking at it.

“Let’s get a few things straight right now.” I heard the shake in my voice and clenched my jaw. “This is my assistant, Randal. Randal runs this place and if you ever disrespect him again, I’ll send you three back up to your father and be done with you. If he says you wait outside, you wait outside. Understood?”

Alex shoved his hands in his pockets and looked at me through his lashes. “Yes, ma’am.”

Ethan smiled at me and then looked at Randal. “Sorry, man. It won’t happen again.”

Noah remained silent. He looked at me with too much familiarity for a professional setting and it made me want to hit him.

“Randal, these three are Mr. Anderson’s sons. Alex, Ethan, and Noah.” I glared at Noah. “They’ll be interning with our department for a little while. I’m sure the four of you will be working closely together this week.”

Randal took my hand and pulled me out of the office. “What the hell is going on?”

I glanced back at the guys and found the three of them glaring at Randal. “It’s a long story. I’ll tell you later. Right now, I need to let them know how things are going to work. Did you have time to pull all the information on those businesses?”

“You know I did. It’s waiting for you in your email.”

“You’re the best. Do me a favor and take an early lunch.” I pinched the bridge of my nose. “I will name my firstborn child after you if you pick me up some ibuprofen while you’re out.”

“It’s nine-thirty, Sophia. That’s a very, very early lunch.” He pressed the back of his hand to my forehead. “Are you okay?”

“Do all assistants touch their boss so much or is that just a personal thing with you, Randal?” Noah had decided to leave my chair to be an asshole, it seemed.

Randal bristled but I put my hand on his arm. “Go surprise Rita. Don’t come back until the end of your normal lunch hour. Forget the ibuprofen. I have a feeling I’m going to need something much stronger.”

Randal nodded. “I keep a few things in my desk if you need them.”

As soon as he walked away, I turned on Noah and pushed him back inside my office. Closing the door as gently as I could while furious, I pressed my forehead against it for a moment before turning on the guys. Noah first.

“Randal isn’t just my assistant. He’s my friend. He’s a hard worker and is married with kids and I won’t have you making

him feel uncomfortable or like he's doing something wrong. Be nice to him or get fucked." I stalked to the other side of my desk and sank into my chair. My feet already hurt and the headache behind my eyes was growing by the minute. "This entire situation is beyond fucked up."

Noah sat across from me and the expression on his face was unreadable. "Do you want to know the last time I chased a woman down the street, Sophia?"

His question caught me off guard. Shaking my head, I reached out and grabbed my family photo. I took the time to straighten it and finally shrugged at Noah. "No."

"Too bad. The answer is never. I have never chased a woman through downtown Dallas before this weekend."

I tapped my fingers on the desk. "I don't know what you want me to do with that information."

He leaned forward. "Our mom likes you, by the way."

"No. This is not happening." I ran my hands through my hair and felt so many pieces slipping free that I just yanked the clip out and tossed it on my desk. "Ground rules. There was no Friday night, Saturday morning. Okay? It never happened. I'm a professional and I'll do what's required of me, but we're not talking about anything other than work."

"Are you married?" Ethan sat down in the chair next to Noah. "Dating?"

I ground my teeth together. "No. And no."

"So, what's the issue?" Alex moved closer, completing their little half circle of off-limits younger men.

"The issue is that you're my boss's kids. I'm a decade older than you. There are three of you. I'm busy." I counted things off with my fingers and then hesitated. "What is even happening here?"

"After I chased you down the street I was worried about how long it would take a PI to find you. I wasn't finished with you." Noah stretched his long arm across my desk to grip my

hand. I hadn't even realized I'd been nervously tapping my fingers. "*We're* not finished with you."

My jaw dropped. "Excuse me?"

Ethan rolled his eyes. "What my brother is trying to say is that we want more. There's something about you, Sophia."

"You're...what? What are you getting at?" I looked at each of them and shook my head. "You're not finished fucking me so you think you'll just storm my office and I'll drop to my knees?"

Alex smirked. "To be fair, you did."

I scoffed. "I was picking up folders, asshole."

"We don't have all the answers yet, Sophia, but we like you. We want to get to know you better." Ethan shrugged. "There's nothing wrong with us getting to know you."

"This is my career you're messing with."

Noah looked at his brothers and then back at me. "We aren't going to do anything inappropriate in front of anyone else."

I laughed. "And when it's just us in here and I'm trying to get work done?"

"Depends on if that door locks and how quiet you can be, I guess." Noah smiled then and my stomach fluttered. "On the list of issues you named off, you never mentioned that you didn't want us."

I opened my mouth and the words jammed in my throat. No matter how much I tried to force them out, I couldn't do it. If anything was obvious since seeing them again, it was the way my body reacted to them. All the panic and fear I'd felt at seeing them with Gerald vanished as soon as Gerald vanished.

"Exactly." Sitting back in his chair, Noah gripped the carved arms of it and studied me. "Why *did* you sneak out?"

I huffed. "You think I snuck out? After that situation with your mom? No, I *wanted* to sneak out. What I ended up doing was meeting your mother and discussing shame and its complicated relationship to sex for women. That wasn't

sneaking out. Oh, my god. I'm just now putting together that Mary Anderson, the wife of my boss, caught me failing to sneak out of her sons' apartment."

"Well." Ethan's grin was shit-eating. "Want to come over and try again?"

*****SOPHIA*****

“Let’s go over ground rules, for real.” I took a deep breath and tried to remember that I was a grown woman who could face anything. “This is a professional office setting and you three need to act like it. Keep your hands to yourself and respect the people who work here.”

“Alternative rule. We keep our hands to ourselves when people are around. If we’re alone with you, we do what we want.” Alex laughed at the incredulous look on my face. “We’ll definitely respect the employees, though. Right, Noah?”

“I’ll play nice with Randy.” Noah stood up and walked around to my side of the desk. “You were talking about pain medicine. What hurts?”

I tried to slide away from him in my chair but he caught me. “The next rule should be that y’all stay on the other side of the desk.”

“Answer me, Sophia. What hurts?” Noah cupped my face and frowned as he rubbed his thumb over my forehead. “You’re squinting a lot. Headache?”

My shoulders sank and I nodded. “It’s been a long day already.”

“Let’s focus on the rules later then. For now, we’ll agree to not manhandle you in front of others.” With one more frown, he stood up. “I’ll be right back.”

I rested my elbows on my desk and my chin in my hands. Staring across at Ethan and Alex, I raised my eyebrows. “What’s he doing?”

Ethan shrugged. “Who knows?”

“Noah’s focused. Once he sets his mind to something, it happens.” Alex took the chair next to his brother. “I’m betting he’s in search of a way to make you feel better right now. For his next trick, he’s got his mind set on you, though.”

I shot him a dirty look. “Stop it.”

“You’ll get it eventually.” He nodded at Ethan. “This one isn’t much better. He’s just charming about getting what he wants so people don’t see it coming.”

Noah strode back into my office and toed the door closed behind him, sealing us away from the rest of the office. He unloaded a pile of things on my desk and gestured at it. “Pain meds, caffeine, a sandwich, and a book about chicken soup for women’s souls.”

A surprised laugh came out with a snort. “Where did you get this stuff?”

He pushed the items closer to me. “Don’t worry about it. Just take the medicine.”

I thumbed through the chicken soup book and then shook my head while pouring a few ibuprofen into my hand. I couldn’t imagine who was holding onto that book. It was over two decades old. If they were, though, it clearly meant something to them and Noah had to take it back.

Before I could open the can of coke, Noah did it for me. I looked up at him while I took the medicine and searched his face for any kind of sign that would tell me he was joking. There was no way he was actually trying to take care of me. He was Gerald Anderson’s son. He would’ve been raised with a silver spoon in his mouth. Kids like that didn’t grow up to be the caretaker type usually.

“What?” He leaned against my desk and began unwrapping the sandwich. “You’re staring.”

I went to answer him just to have him push the end of the sandwich into my mouth. I glared at him while chewing and as soon as I swallowed the first bite, he shoved another one in my mouth.

“Your hands have been shaking the entire time we’ve been in here. While I’d love to assume that we’re breathtaking enough to leave you shaking, I know better. Your blood sugar could be low.” He held out my hand and grunted when he saw it was still shaking. “Eat more.”

I couldn’t admit that they did affect me enough that my hands shook so I ate the sandwich and drank the coke. By the time I was finished, I did feel a little better. “That’s enough. Thank you, but I don’t need you to take care of me. This a great place to start setting boundaries. If you wouldn’t treat another coworker the same way, don’t treat me that way.”

Alex sucked in a breath through his teeth in a dramatic way. “Oof. That’s going to be an issue. If Noah is going to treat you the way he treats everyone else, you’re going to hate him immediately.”

“Fuck off, Alex.” Noah leaned in closer to me. “You may be our boss for now but you don’t get to control the way I treat you.”

“I’m not your boss. Don’t even joke about that. It makes me feel even worse about this weekend.” I grabbed my hair clip and tried to pin my hair up. “I wish to god I’d known who fathered you three before I went home with you.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Noah frowned and gripped the arm of my chair so he could pull me closer. “While we’re getting things clear, you need to let go of whatever freak out you’re having over who our father is. It’s irrelevant to any conversation about us. No matter how much our mom made us sound like little boys, we’re grown men, Sophia. I think you know that, though.”

I laughed. “Gerald Anderson being your father is definitely relevant. There are layers upon layers of wrongness to what happened this weekend because of that fact. We could go through this a hundred times and I’m not going to change my mind about that.”

“If you’d run into one of us today under different circumstances, would you have been so adamant about staying away from us?” Ethan shot a look at Noah and then softened his voice when he looked back at me. “Honestly. Would you have wanted to run from us?”

The smart thing would’ve been to say yes immediately. I wasn’t a huge fan of lying, though, and my mouth didn’t want to form the lie. I tried. I couldn’t even make my head nod up and down.

“Exactly, Sophia.” Ethan stood up and stretched. “Can we shelf all of this for now? Noah isn’t going to budge and he seems to have met his match in stubbornness with you.”

I scoffed. “I’m not stubborn.”

Noah smirked at me. “Me, either.”

Alex and Ethan exchanged a look that made me want to demand an explanation for, but I kept my mouth shut. Instead of being nosy, I pushed myself back to my computer and logged in. Pulling up the email from Randal, I tried to make a game plan in my head for what I was going to do with the guys.

“Work time. Okay.” Ethan clapped his hands together and grinned. “Acquisitions. Pretend that we don’t have a few business degrees between us and explain your job to us. Please.”

I took in a deep breath and blew it out slowly. Work. I could talk about work and keep things in control. “Perfect.”

I should’ve known it would not be perfect.

SOPHIA

Noah sat back in my desk chair and steepled his fingers together as he smirked at me. “You created this? So, you’re fucking sexy, come like an angel, *and* you’re brilliant?”

My cheeks heated and I straightened from where I’d been leaning against my desk. “Noah.”

Ethan stood on the other side of Noah. “No, he’s right. This is amazing. How did you manage to talk the city into providing these records?”

Forgiving Noah’s comment, I shifted forward, eager to talk about my project. I moved the mouse to a different tab and grinned. “That’s the thing. All these records are public. Obviously, in rural areas, things aren’t updated often and some communities haven’t moved things online yet, so that’s an issue. Some of the companies I’ve found that go on to bring in small fortunes have been from those communities, so it’s not a fool-proof program.”

Noah’s hand moved to my inner knee and trailed higher. “Your brain is sexy, Sophia.”

I was frozen, trapped in the fire that their touch stoked. I slowly dragged my tongue over my lips. “Noah...”

His knuckles dragged up my thighs until they pressed against my panties and I felt the damp silk press into my hot

flesh. He hummed just under his breath. “You’re soaked. Tell me, Sophia, is this because of us? Or does work just get you off?”

Alex pressed into me from behind. “The work *is* sexy.”

A knock on my office door startled me out of standing there like an idiot. I pushed away from them and strode to the door to open it. I must’ve looked like a deer in headlights because the moment Randal looked up at me, his jaw set and he stepped inside, putting himself between me and the guys.

“Are you okay?” He asked under his breath.

I nodded. “Fine. How was your lunch?”

He narrowed his eyes but went with me. “It was good. Rita was happy to see me. Thanks for that.”

I forced a smile and glanced back at the guys, just to see them watching me with heated gazes like they were waiting on me to dismiss Randal and finish what they’d started. “I have to run upstairs. Do me a favor and make sure they don’t follow me.”

Without waiting for an answer, I strode out of my office and headed straight to the elevator. I wasn’t going to be able to work that closely with the guys. Already I’d let Noah get his hand up my skirt, but more importantly, Noah already felt comfortable enough putting his hand up my skirt. I hadn’t worked my entire professional life to lose it all for a handsy guy with a hot body. Or three handsy guys with hot bodies and hot faces.

In the elevator, I had too much time to stare at my reflection in the mirrored walls. My hair was messy and I looked wide-eyed and pouty. I narrowed my gaze at myself and hastily fixed my hair and straightened my skirt. I narrowed my eyes even more to try to rid myself of the Bambi look. I had never approached a meeting with Gerald Anderson with anything less than a steel backbone. I wasn’t going to start because his sons showed up.

Tiffany took one look at me when I approached Gerald’s office and held up her hand. “Mr. Anderson doesn’t have an

appointment with you, Sophia. You need to go back downstairs and make an appointment. He's a busy-"

For the first time in my career, I ignored all sense of decorum and blew past her. I let myself into Gerald's office and ignored Tiffany's demands for me to leave. I left the door open behind me and went right over to the chair I'd sat in the Friday before. Looking up at Gerald, I crossed my arms under my chest and nodded at him, letting him know without saying anything that I wasn't leaving until he spoke to me.

Gerald didn't seem all that surprised by my entry. He never missed a beat of his conversation, even when Tiffany stalked in. He only hung up when it was clear that Tiffany wasn't leaving until I did. While looking at me, he barked at her. "Go back to your desk, Tiffany. And close the door."

She huffed and slammed the door shut as she left. If Gerald was annoyed by her reaction, he didn't show it. He just continued to stare at me.

"I can't train your sons." There. I'd said it.

"No?"

I shook my head and gave him the story I'd built up while storming up to his office. "I'm busy, Mr. Anderson. My workload is completely full and training your sons would impede my ability to get that work done."

His eyebrows raised slowly. "Is that right?"

I nodded. "I'm very sorry to turn down this opportunity, but I won't be able to get all of my work done with them around."

"So you barged in here to tell me that you won't be doing the thing I asked you to do." He stood up and came around his desk the way he always did. "Could this attitude have something to do with you never receiving the promotions you apply for, Sophia?"

"It's because I have so much work and want to do it well that I'm unable to do this, Mr. Anderson. It's not my job and I don't want my actual job to suffer." I fought the urge to cringe when he walked around me and placed his hands on my shoulders.

“Sophia, you’re the only person available. There’s only one way you’re going to get out of working with my sons.” He lightly rubbed my shoulders. “You’re so tense, Sophia. That’s not good for productivity.”

I ground my teeth together and pressed my fists into my thighs to avoid lashing out. “What’s the one way to get out of this?”

“You work under me.” He leaned even closer to me and I felt his breath on my neck. “Directly under me.”

I stood up and walked towards the door. “No.”

“What’s the issue? You’ve proven to have great secretarial skills throughout the years and I’d be lucky to have you working so closely with me.”

I could still feel the ghosts of his hands on my shoulders and I hated every second of it. “No, thank you. If you won’t make other arrangements for them to intern with someone else, I’ll manage.”

Gerald cleared his throat and waited until I looked back at him to make his point clear. “I’m only lenient with my employees so many times before I get angry, Sophia. Don’t ever come into my office uninvited again.”

Without responding I walked out and didn’t look back. There was no way in hell I was working under him. Each time I was alone with him I felt like he crossed more and more lines. I had no proof because he kept things subtle enough that HR wouldn’t be able to do a single thing.

I was stuck with the guys.

SOPHIA

“Wait. Let me get this straight. Your Friday night hookups are your boss’s sons? And now you have to be their boss?” Ava threw her head back and laughed. “This is too good!”

I narrowed my eyes and gave Ava the sign to zip her lips when Lily came back to the table. “Did you find John Cena?”

Lily held up her stuffed seal and grinned. She’d lost her front two teeth a few weeks earlier and her grin was officially the cutest thing I’d ever seen. “He was hiding in the dryer again.”

Milo leaned over and patted John Cena on the head. “Stay out of the dryer, young man. That’s no place for a guy like you.”

“John Cena was swimming in a puddle of paint when I got home so he had to go for a swim in the washing machine.” I took a bite of mashed potatoes and waved my spoon at Ava. “Your new painting is good, by the way.”

“Don’t change the subject. I need to talk about your boyfriends. What are you going to do about them?” She bounced in her seat. “Besides date them *all* over that office building...”

Lily perked up. “You have boyfriends, Mom?”

“I don’t.”

“She does.” Ava laughed at my angry face. “Your mom has three boyfriends who like her very much. It’s cute.”

“I want to meet them, Mom!” Lily bounced in her seat just like her aunt. “Do you kiss them?”

A knock on the front door saved me from having to answer any of her other questions. “I’ll be right back. No more talk about boyfriends.”

“Oh, there’s going to be a lot more talk about boyfriends!” Ava was having a great time at my expense. “I may even need that diagram about how things worked the other night.”

I flipped Ava off when Lily wasn’t looking and went to the front door. I was half-expecting Mrs. Johnson to be standing there with more complaints so when the doorknob twisted and the door opened before I got to it, I was getting ready to tell her off. Instead, my ex-husband was letting himself into my house, a house we’d never once shared together.

“What the hell, Davis?” I let out an exasperated sigh. “You can’t just let yourself into my house.”

Davis ran his hand through his short hair and smiled at me. He had a charming smile and eyes that had once won me over but right then, that smile made me want to punch him. “The door was unlocked.”

I stiffened when he wrapped his arms around me and hugged me too tight. “Davis, that isn’t... Okay, that’s enough hugging.”

He pulled back enough to kiss me on my forehead and then looked me up and down. “You look good.”

I pulled away from him. “Why are you here?”

“I wanted to stop by and see Lily.” He moved around me to make his way to the dining room. “Seeing you is an added bonus for sure, though.”

I trailed behind him, considering the pros and cons of kicking his knees out from under him, but by the time I caught

up to him, he had Lily in his arms already. I sat down and shared a look with Ava. “Look who let himself in.”

Milo did a handshake with Davis that lasted too long and made me feel like punching Milo, too. “Welcome, D-Man. How’s it hanging?”

Davis sat in Lily’s seat with her in his lap and rested his arm on the back of my chair. “Better now that I’m seeing my girls.”

Ava snorted. “Not your girls, but okay.”

“I wasn’t talking about you, Ava.” Davis twirled a piece of my hair and laughed when I swatted his hand away. “There’s my feisty girl.”

“Dad, guess what?” Lily clutched John Cena and slurped at her milk. “Mom has boyfriends!”

Davis’ arm dropped from behind me and I could feel his stare burning into my face. “What’s that?”

Ava loved a chance to stick it to Davis so she leapt at the chance. “Oh, yeah. Soph has new boyfriends. She met them the other night. I still haven’t gotten all the details because they were too hot to tell all in one gossip session.”

I gulped at my water and looked at Milo, hoping he would get my silent message for him to control Ava’s mean side. He just smiled back at me, though, and shot me a thumbs up, completely unaware.

“I want to meet Mom’s boyfriends!” Lily spilled a mouthful of milk on John Cena and pouted. “Mom, John Cena spilled milk on himself.”

“If he starts to smell, he can go swimming in the washing machine again, sweetie.” I ran my hands through my hair and shoved everything behind my ears. “Have y’all seen that new Julia Roberts movie?”

“No, and neither have you.” Ava rolled her eyes at me and refocused on Davis. “I just think it’s so good that Soph is getting back out there.”

Davis set Lily down and stood up. I started to feel grateful that I wasn't going to have to deal with one of his hour-long visits but then he gripped my elbow and tugged. "Walk me out?"

"Leaving already? Oh, poo." Ava's fake smile was slightly terrifying but as usual, Davis ignored her.

"I love you, Lily. I'll see you this weekend, right?"

Lily looked up at me and pouted. She didn't love the idea of going to Davis's new house but once she got there, she always had a good time with her dad. "Love you, too."

Davis gently tugged me outside and only stopped when we were next to his car. He turned to face me and frowned. "What's going on, Soph?"

I frowned back at him and held up my hands. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"You have boyfriends?" He stepped into my space. "How long do I have to work to show you that I'm different now? Give me another chance, Sophia. If you're dating again, date me."

I pushed him away and shook my head. "Not this again. Please, Davis. We do this same song and dance every few months and my answer is never going to change."

"Why not? We have a kid together. We had a whole life together, Soph. I love you. That's never changed." He wrapped me in a hug and held me even as I pushed him away. "We still have something."

I pushed harder and walked a few feet away. "No. Listen to me, Davis. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you don't listen. We *did* have a whole life together and I would've stayed with you for the rest of my life, happiness be damned, but you cheated. I'm not mad at you anymore, but I'll never trust you again and I don't ever want to be with you again. You're a great dad and you were always a good friend, but you were a shit husband. Every time you do this, you make me want to ban you from coming here. I like you having access to Lily, though, so don't make me do it."

He shoved his hands through his hair and gripped the back of his neck. “I’m sorry. How many times can I say I’m sorry? I would never do that to you again, Soph. Trust me when I say I’ve learned my lesson. I lost everything. I don’t sleep the same without you.”

I groaned. “It’s been six years, Davis. If you’re not sleeping well, it has nothing to do with me. See a doctor. I’m going back inside now. If you want to go in and see Lily, that’s fine, but remember that you’re not here to see me.”

“Fine. Pretend like you don’t feel anything for me. I’m leaving, Soph, but I’m not giving up on us.”

*****SOPHIA*****

I went to work with a gameplan on Tuesday morning. I met Randal outside of my office and we put together a tour of the entire office that kept me from being alone with the guys at all times. Every moment was supervised and every moment was going to be professional. It didn't stop my body from reacting when I saw them, but it kept them from taking advantage of that fact.

The guys played along until lunch. When they realized that even our lunch would be with other people, the crankiness started to show through the cracks of their facades. I had to work hard to ignore the looks they were giving me.

Sitting in the cafeteria with them, Randal, and a few other people from our floor, I chewed my food while trying to hide a smirk at how grumpy they seemed. I should've felt bad, but it was amusing to see them wanting to throw a tantrum over not getting to be alone with me. Flattering, too, but I wasn't ready to fully admit how flattered I was.

Randal pushed his phone under my nose and cleared his throat. "Look."

It only took me a second to recognize the picture I was looking at for what it was. Before I could remember that I was a professional in a professional setting, I squealed and squeezed Randal in a tight hug. "Another one!"

He hugged me back just as tight and when he pulled away, he had tears in his eyes. “Rita surprised me last night. She’s hoping for a girl, of course.”

I had tears in my own eyes at seeing him get emotional over his wife being pregnant again. He was such a good dad and husband that a little bit of me cried in jealousy when I saw pictures of him and Rita together with their family. “Of course, she’s hoping for a girl! She’s a women’s rights lawyer in a family of boys. She needs a daughter!”

“I would love a girl, too.” A tear escaped and Randal laughed while wiping it away. “I don’t know why I still get so emotional. This is the fourth time we’ve been through this. You’d think I’d get used to it.”

I couldn’t help hugging him again. “No. You never get used to something like this. At least, you shouldn’t.”

“Is everything okay?” Ethan moved to the seat across from Randal and nodded at Randal’s phone that I was still clutching.

Randal’s smile stretched even wider. “I found out that my wife is pregnant again.”

I was on edge, waiting for how Ethan was going to react, but it turned out that my worry was for nothing. Ethan was definitely the kinder Anderson brother, by far.

“That’s amazing. Congratulations, man. What number kid is this?” Ethan even leaned forward, completely interested in what Randal had to say.

“This will be four.” Randal took his phone back from me and pulled up a picture of his family. “Three boys so far. And that’s my Rita.”

Ethan’s smile was intoxicating as he looked at the picture. “What a beautiful family. Three boys is intense. Speaking from personal experience, I know that you and your wife are not okay.”

Randal laughed and bumped my shoulder with his. “I like him. He knows what’s up.”

“We gave my parents hell. Dad wanted to send us all away to boarding school when we were still in the single digits. Our mom being an angel is the only reason we managed to avoid being sent to military school or something worse.” Ethan winked at me. “I hear women love uniforms, though, so maybe we missed out.”

I snorted. “I’m one hundred percent sure that you’ve done just fine in life without the uniform.”

Leaning towards me, he raised his brows and bit his lip. “Oh, yeah? I’m pretty sure there was a compliment in there.”

Randal whistled and looked between me and Ethan. “I think there was a compliment, too. Are you flirting with the intern, Sophia?”

My face went red and I choked on the chip I’d just put in my mouth. Randal patted my back while I tried to take a drink and I ended up with water all down my white top. By the time I finished choking, I was surrounded by people trying to make sure I was okay, which was even more embarrassing.

“I’m fine, y’all! I’m fine. Go back to your lunches.” I stood up from the table and held out my hands as people moved with me, their faces all pinched in concern. “Really. I’m fine. I’m just going to run to the bathroom to try to dry my shirt. Keep eating!”

I took my time in the bathroom and tried to regain my composure. I *had* been openly flirting with Ethan. That wasn’t okay. He was an intern and I was his boss. And that was just one of the reasons it was wrong.

I was staring at myself in the bathroom mirror, trying to lecture myself about being a professional, when the bathroom door opened and Alex walked in. He closed and locked it behind him and then ate up the space between us in two big strides. I barely had time to register what was happening before he had my face in his hands and was kissing me like he was starving for me.

Despite my lecture about being a professional, I kissed him back with just as much passion. I had my hands in his hair and

my thigh hiked up around his so fast that it seemed to surprise Alex. He stumbled backwards a step and growled against my mouth before cupping my ass and picking me up. My skirt rolled up my thighs and my panties were the only thing between my sex and Alex's black denim-clad hardness. He teased my crack with his fingers and kissed down my jaw.

“It's been a long goddamn morning and I need you to come for me so I can make it through the rest of this fucking day.” His voice was barely more than a growl but it got his point across.

I opened my mouth to try and list why it was a bad idea but he pinned me to the bathroom wall and kissed me again. I sucked on his tongue while he shifted his hips back enough to get his hand between our bodies. I hadn't been expecting anything, but if I thought he'd take it slow and be gentle, I was wrong. He shoved two of his thick fingers inside me without pause and began fucking me with them fast and hard. His thumb hooked over my clit and my eyes rolled back in my head.

Alex wrapped his other hand over my mouth while he kissed down my throat and rubbed his face over my breasts. He worked his fingers in and out faster and harder until the wet sound of fucking filled my ears and I couldn't catch my breath.

His teeth raked over my ear as he whispered. “If I had the time, I'd bend you over the sink and fuck you until you left your cream all over my dick. I want you to watch me fucking you, Soph. I want to watch your face when I come inside you.”

I came hard, clutching at him and the vision he filled my head with. My body tightened and released, pulsing as each wave of orgasm rolled over me. I cried out into his hand and had the insane thought of turning around and letting him fuck me. Thankfully, Alex had more control than I did.

He slowly eased his fingers out and brought them to his mouth to lick them clean while I watched. Then he fixed my clothing and kissed my forehead. “That should get me through the rest of this day. I'm warning you, though, Soph. If you

force me into much more polite socializing, I'm going to need more than this to get me through."

NOAH

I stared down at the piece of cake on my plate and frowned. I wasn't sure, but I had my suspicion that Sophia had somehow orchestrated me getting the piece with the word *dick* on it. The birthday party for Richard Williams had happened out of nowhere and the cake with the message *Happy Birthday, Dick!* had just appeared. It'd brought a smile to my face until I realized the guy actually went by the name Dick.

I glared across the room at Sophia and found her hiding a smile behind a cheap plastic cup of punch. She looked away as soon as I looked at her but it confirmed that my slice of cake was intentional. For some reason, knowing she'd done it on purpose made me want to smile.

"Sophia always throws birthday parties for everyone. She's never missed a single birthday for anyone on her team in all the years she'd worked here." A woman whose name I couldn't remember spoke to me in a hushed tone, like she was speaking about a goddess in reverence. "She even figures out how to get the best personalized gifts for everyone and none of us ever know how. My last birthday, she got me tickets to see a musical that I'd been dying to see but I'd never even mentioned it to her. She's magic."

Another woman leaned closer. "None of us know how she keeps getting skipped over for promotions. She's the hardest worker in the whole company, I swear. James really screwed

her over. Bill Trent? What the hell is he going to do? He doesn't know what he's doing here. He looks lost."

Randal appeared next to me and grinned when he saw my slice of cake. "Listening to the watercooler gossip, boss?"

I could hear the lowercase 'b' when he called me boss and knew that he had zero respect for me. I didn't care. Or, at least I wouldn't have cared, if Sophia didn't seem to worship the ground the guy walked on. *Randal* could do no wrong. I tried to keep my glare to a minimum. "I'm listening to everyone sing Sophia's praise. She leaves quite an impression on people."

He nodded at the women who'd been talking to us and then pointed at my brother in the opposite corner of the room. "I heard Alex rolled up his sleeves."

Both women exchanged a look and then hurried over to Alex. I looked down at Randal. "He rolled up his sleeves? Is that code for something?"

He laughed. "Nope. In case you haven't noticed, the women in this office are obsessed with your brother's arms. Tattoos, veins, and big hands are all it really takes to seduce a woman these days. Thank god I met and married Rita before the whole bad boy trope really got out of hand in romance novels."

I looked back over at Alex and watched as a woman playfully touched his arm. "And Dad said those tattoos would hold him back in life."

Randal chuckled. "I'm sure your dad says lots of things that don't prove to be true."

Snapping my head back around to him, I scowled. "What's that supposed to mean?"

He studied my expression and then shrugged. "Nothing. Enjoy the party."

Ethan came over just as Randal was leaving. He looked at my face and sighed. "He's not so bad."

"Excuse me if I don't jump to agree." I searched out Sophia in the crowded room and tensed when I saw her bent over,

cleaning up a spill. Glancing around, I saw a handful of men watching her ass sway. Being uncharacteristically possessive was something that just came with my feelings around Sophia so I didn't stop to question what I was doing as I stalked across the room.

Sophia gasped when I materialized at her side and gently pulled her to her feet. She blinked up at me and then down at my cake. A smile played at her lips. "Is this about the cake?"

I handed her the cake and bent down to finish wiping up the drink that had been spilled. When I stood up again, I realized she was staring at me with wide eyes. I didn't know how she managed to make doe-eyed look sexy as fuck one second and the next, she made me hard by staring at me with her eyes narrowed and fierce. "Men were staring."

She took a bite of my cake and looked confused. "What do you mean?"

"At your ass. Can't say I blame them, but I didn't like it." I watched her eat another bite and smiled. "You're eating my cake."

She gasped again as she looked down at the plate in her hands. "Oh, god. I'm sorry! I guess I'm hungrier than I thought. I'll go get my own."

"Finish it. I'm not big on sweets." I was but I wasn't going to take the cake back from her if she wanted it. "Aren't there people who clean up after these things? Why are you doing it?"

She waved the fork at me. "I throw the party so I clean it up. It's my mess."

"But you're-" I stopped talking when her phone rang and watched as she flashed an apologetic smile at me and turned away to take the call.

"This is Sophia Bennett." She took another bite of cake and nodded. "Mr. Vance, I'm so glad you're getting back to me. You're a hard man to get a hold of."

I watched as she laughed easily at whatever the man said and then shook hands with another man passing her. All the

while, she still had my cake in her hand.

“I’m not at my desk right now, so please forgive me if I have to ask you for exact numbers again, but I can’t miss a chance to talk with you. I’ve been so enamored with your business for years now, as you know. What you’ve done in your market has been beyond impressive. I think we can make something special together if you decide to work with Anderson Inc., Mr. Vance.” She took a bite of cake and then grunted. “Don’t you dare downplay what you’ve managed to do. You’ve grown your company year after year, despite an overall downturn in the market. I see the worth in your company. If you’re going to go into a meeting with our higher ups, you have to know your worth as well. I don’t send companies in to be taken advantage of.”

I found myself smiling as I listened to her and I ended up following her around the party as she sold a man on selling his company to ours while making a friend in the process. She cleaned as she went, multi-tasking like no one I’d ever seen before. Watching her work was like watching a magician. She was somehow the best salesperson and the most genuine person I’d ever met and that was a dangerous combination, but a priceless one for the company. It made me question how she’d been denied promotions.

When the party ended, I watched as everyone left without picking up a single thing to throw away. I would’ve done the same at any other time in my life. I never would’ve thought about who had to clean up the mess. Sophia zipped around the room while on the phone with someone else and finished cleaning everything while I was still gathering cups from my one corner of the room. I was both amazed by and terrified of her. She was powerful and I never wanted to find myself on her bad side.

*****SOPHIA*****

The end of the work day was dragging to a close and I'd kept the guys in public spaces with me for so long that I was exhausted from all the socializing and standing. My feet ached and my cheeks hurt from all the smiling I'd been doing. That was the only reason I gave up at the end and retreated to my office. I had dozens of emails to return and I just wanted to sit.

I hadn't had time to think about the bathroom incident with Alex until the four of us were alone in my office and then it was all my brain was able to hone in on. Every time I glanced over at him, my cheeks burned and I felt a throb that I had no business feeling at work.

Randal came into the office with a flourish and handed me a bottle of water and a few pain relievers. "You killed it today with Mr. Vance."

I took the pills and smiled. "He's a really nice guy. You should've heard him talking about his wife."

"Hold that thought." He left and then came right back in with a giant bouquet of flowers. "Look what he sent you!"

I clapped my hands excitedly. I loved flowers. A bouquet of flowers went a long way with me, something that Davis had never learned. "Oh, my god. They're beautiful!"

Randal plucked the card out of the arrangement and handed it to me. “And another one falls for the charms of our Sophia Bennett.”

“What’s the card say?” Noah walked over and stood beside me. “I watched that phone call and I could tell he was smitten. You did a great job.”

The compliment felt almost as nice as the flowers. I smiled at him and held the card up so he could read it with me. “If you’re ever in Pennsylvania, you have a place to stay. Thank you for your kindness.”

“I’m proud of you, Soph. You better celebrate tonight.” Randal beamed at me. “Make Ava and Milo take Lily out and have the house to yourself for the night.”

I scoffed. “We can’t send Milo out at night. He gets lost every time. It doesn’t matter if he’s with us or not, he gets lost. We always end up spending most of the night trying to find him.”

“Who’s Milo?” Ethan gently touched one of the hydrangeas. “Mr. Vance has good taste.”

“Milo is my sister’s boyfriend. He’s a local artist.” I brought up a picture of one of his most popular pieces that sat large and proud in the middle of the art district. “This is his work.”

Alex came over and looked at my phone. His eyebrows rose immediately and he glanced up at me with a surprised expression. “I’ve seen this before and I’ve always been inspired by it. He’s really talented.”

I nodded. “He’s great. I mean, I don’t love the constant scream of a chainsaw outside of my bedroom window, but when he produces art like that, I can’t really complain. My sister’s an artist, too, but she can’t decide on a medium, so she’s constantly in the exploring stage. She’s talented, too, though. As soon as she picks one medium to work in, she’s going to blow up.”

Randal glanced at the clock. “It’s my day to get the kids from daycare so I’m heading out. Do you need anything before I go?”

I shook my head and then glanced at the bouquet again. “Hey, take these to Rita. Say they’re from you.”

“I’m not taking your flowers, Sophia.”

“Take them. I love them but I won’t get to enjoy them as much as you’ll enjoy giving them to Rita.” I saw him hesitate and crossed my arms under my chest. “Take them or I’ll just have to order different ones to send to Rita.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes! Now, go. If you’re late picking up the boys, the flowers won’t make a difference. Rita will ring your neck, no matter what.” I laughed when he came around my desk and hugged me. “Tell everyone I say hi.”

Randal picked up the flowers and shook his head at me. “Thank you. You’re amazing, Sophia.”

He closed the door behind him, once again leaving me alone in my office with the guys. I sank into my chair again and tried to discreetly slip out of my shoes.

“Are your feet hurting?” Ethan took Noah’s place next to me and knelt in front of me. He patted his leg and nodded at me. “Let me help.”

I took a deep breath and bit my lip. I wasn’t sure it was a good idea. I wanted to remain professional but I was weak. I slowly rested my foot on his knee and closed my eyes, almost like it wasn’t so bad if I didn’t watch it. The moment Ethan worked his thumbs down the arch of my foot, my eyes flew open and I let out a low moan. It was heaven. His fingers dug into tight muscles that had never been massaged before. Shivers broke out all over my body and my core even throbbed in response. No one had ever massaged my feet like that.

I was so focused on my feet that I didn’t notice that Alex had moved behind me. When his hands pressed into my tense shoulder muscles, I decided right then and there that I was a goner. I didn’t have a chance of telling them to stop when they were working magic on my muscles. I reasoned with myself that their hands weren’t in any inappropriate places.

Like I'd been struck by lightning, I shot out of my chair, nearly knocking both Ethan and Alex over. Just the day before Anderson had rubbed my shoulders and I'd known it was wrong. Alex was touching me in the same way and I couldn't ignore it. I moved around to the other side of my desk, still shoeless, and rubbed my hands over my mouth as a wave of nausea hit me. Their *father* had touched me the same way just the day before.

"What's wrong, Sophia?" Ethan pushed his hair off his forehead but it was useless. The mass of thick curls just went right back where it wanted.

Before I could say anything, my office door opened and I turned, expecting Randal, but it was Gerald. He'd never walked into my office before and something about seeing him in my space made me want to scream at him to get out.

The energy in the room instantly shifted darker with him standing in it. He raised an eyebrow at his sons and looked between the four of us questioningly. When none of us said anything, he cleared his throat. "We have a photoshoot in ten. I need you boys upstairs and in hair and makeup half an hour ago."

Noah cleared his throat the same way his father did and nodded. "Of course."

Ethan's smile was forced but he nodded along with Noah. "Sure."

Alex crossed his arms over his chest and I watched as Gerald's eyes narrowed on Alex's exposed tattoos. If Alex noticed, it didn't change his bored expression. "No, thanks."

Gerald's expression darkened. He turned to me and laughed. "You have kids right, Sophia? One of them is always challenging you, right? Or is that just me?"

I felt the guys look at me but I didn't move my eyes from Gerald's, not wanting to see their expressions if they were just finding out I had a kid. "One kid. She's seven, so we're not exactly in the same boat."

“Alex, come on. There’s no getting out of this. Pull down your sleeves.” Gerald frowned at his youngest son and then marched out of my office with confidence, knowing his sons would fall in line.

I kept my eyes down as they filed out one by one. I had too much to process. Mainly the part where Gerald almost caught his sons rubbing me.

SOPHIA

“It’s lunch, Noah. It’s ridiculous to order steak at lunch.” I rubbed my hand over my stomach and slumped back in my chair. I’d skipped breakfast that morning because I’d overslept and I was starving. I’d overslept because my sleep was overrun with images of the men standing in front of my desk, frowning back at me.

“Well, I’m hungry and I’d like to eat a real meal for once in this office.” Noah ran his hands through his hair and left it looking even wilder than Ethan’s.

“What’s wrong with the lunches we’ve had?” I felt very offended because I’d picked the place we ordered from most days but no one had ever complained or offered up a choice of their own.

“Well, I’m not a dainty woman to start with. I can’t survive on salads and dreams.”

Alex scowled at his brother. “Don’t be an asshole to Sophia. And don’t pretend like you don’t eat salads almost every day to keep up your *physique*.”

Ethan snorted. “You have said that word before, Noah. You sounded like a tool.”

“I want a cheeseburger. And a real one with grease and cheese. Not any of y’all’s fancy burgers that come with a fennel

salad or some shit.” Alex stretched his arms over his head and groaned. “How the fuck is sitting upright all day long hurting my back more than leaning over for tattooing?”

“Now there’s an issue with the cheeseburgers I eat?” Noah stood up and paced behind his brothers. “I want a goddamn steak. I’m hungry.”

I stood up and planted my hands on my desk, fed up. “Then order a goddamn steak, Noah. We don’t have to order from the same place. I don’t even know why I’ve been trying.”

“I’d be fine with pizza.” Ethan shrugged.

“Just order something!” Noah had worked his hair into a full mess. “Oh, my god. Is this what life is now? Arguing over what to eat? I’m going to lose my mind.”

“Yeah! It is! And then sometimes, you argue about other things, too, like who drank all the milk and whose turn it is to bag the trash. Life is *great!*” I heard the words I was shouting and collapsed back in my chair. What the hell was I even saying? What were we fighting about?

“Who drank all the milk? Are you kidding?” Noah hadn’t clocked that I’d lost all my fight and he was still going. “Bagging the trash?! Whoever finds it full bags it. Or the cleaning service does it. Why would you argue about that? You just go around arguing about trash?”

I pressed my knuckles into my lips, trying to hold back a wave of hysteria that made me want to cackle right in his face, but I couldn’t contain it. I burst into a fit of laughter that had tears filling my eyes and my sides aching. One by one, the guys joined in, and the tension that had built throughout the week seemed to seep out of us.

After Gerald had almost caught them rubbing my feet and shoulders, I’d gotten serious about not touching them and them not touching me. I’d snapped at them time after time until they held up their hands and kept their space. It just made the tension between us worse and there we were, arguing about lunch on Friday like it was the most important decision we were ever going to make.

I wiped my eyes and tried to reign in my laugh but it was useless when I was looking at them and they were laughing just as hard. I eventually had to look away from them to get myself together.

“It’s miserable being this close to you and not being able to touch you, Sophia.” Alex’s quiet words brought the tension between all of us right back to a boiling point.

I could feel that it was a mistake to look back at them, but I did it anyway. Each of them looked somber and serious, so serious that it made an ache form in my chest. “I…”

“We’ve all heard your reasons and we want to respect your choice, but…you still haven’t said that you don’t want us.” Ethan rested his elbows on his knees and sat forward. “Being this close to you and having to pretend like there’s nothing between us is brutal. All I want to do is fucking touch you, Sophia.”

“He’s right. This is torture. You don’t seem all that happy about things, either. There has to be a way to deal with this without us all suffering so much.” Alex heaved out a big sigh. “I made you come in the bathroom on Tuesday and the world didn’t end.”

My face heated and I darted my eyes to his brothers to see if they were surprised, but they weren’t. I tried to imagine them sitting around together and listening as Alex told them about fingering me in the bathroom after lunch. My neck and chest burned right along with my face.

“If we’re wrong and you don’t want us, say so, Sophia.” Noah’s gaze was intense. “If you can’t tell us that you don’t want us, though, you need to be ready to come up with something you’re comfortable with. We’re dying here and you don’t seem to be handling it much better.”

I swallowed and waited for my brain to begin its overanalyzing so I could process what choice I should make, but there was nothing but silence. There was no overthinking or panicking as I stared back at Noah. Instead I felt a flood of hunger and awareness of my body. I noticed how I was leaning

towards him with my entire body and how my nipples felt achy and my panties were wet. “I can’t really sleep.”

Noah licked his lips and shifted even closer in his seat. “Why not?”

“I keep dreaming. Images of that night sometimes. Images of possibilities other times. I wake up frustrated every time. I spend every day frustrated. There’s no relief.”

Alex growled. “Let. Us. Help.”

I opened my mouth and snapped it closed again. My heart was racing and I felt like I was standing on the edge of a giant cliff. “It’s not right.”

“Like hell it’s not right.” Ethan stood up and reached across my desk to grip my chin and tilt my face up towards his. “It’s a lot more right than pretending that we don’t feel anything and walking about here like zombies.”

I gasped as he stroked his thumb over my lips. Every sensation in my body was heightened. Every sense was hunting for more of him. “If anyone found out-”

“No one will find out.” Noah came to his feet and moved around my desk. “We’ll protect you.”

Alex slowly pushed himself out of his seat. “All you have to do is say yes. Yes to us touching you.”

“Yes to us making you come harder and harder.” Ethan pushed the tip of his thumb past my lips. “Yes to letting us take you however we want you.”

Noah ran his hand over my hair. “Say yes, Sophia.”

I was opening my mouth to give them what we all wanted when my office door burst open. We all separated instantly, but I could tell with one look at my sister that she’d seen enough. Then my brain kicked back on and I realized my sister was standing in my office with Lily. “What’s going on?”

ETHAN

When we heard that Sophia had a daughter earlier in the week from our mom, it hadn't meant much. It was just a couple of words that made sense of the picture on her desk. Seeing the kid in real life was different. She had Sophia's eyes and they were just as intense as she looked us over. Her arms were crossed and she was clutching a stuffed seal in one hand and a book in the other.

The woman with the kid looked just as intense, with narrowed eyes and her hands balled into fists at her sides. There was practically smoke coming out of her ears as she ignored us and glared at her sister. I didn't have to guess if she was Sophia's sister, or not. The three of them were so clearly related.

"I'll tell you what's going on, Sophia! Your daughter is the spawn of satan and I can't spend one more minute with her today." The woman glared down at the kid and growled. "You're lucky I can't give you up for adoption or I'd be tempted."

Before Sophia could respond, her kid handled it. "And you're lucky Mom says I can't kick people in the crotch anymore!"

"Okay!" Sophia stood up and rounded the desk. "What the hell happened? Ava, don't tell my kid you'd give her up for

adoption. That can't be good for her development.”

“She ruined my painting!” Ava, the sister, put her hands on her hips. “I was almost finished with it, Sophia!”

“I didn't ruin it! I made it better. It's not my fault you forgot to put clothes on your people!”

Sophia's eyes widened slightly. “Lily... Tell me you didn't paint clothes on your Aunt Ava's people.”

“She did! And they aren't even good clothes!”

Lily stomped her little foot. “Yes, they are!”

“They are not!” Ava stomped her foot back at Lily. “They look ridiculous!”

“You painted *sluts*.” Lily whispered the last word but both Sophia and Ava reacted like she'd screamed it. Lily, seeing their reaction, rushed to try to avoid getting into trouble. “Mrs. Johnson said so! Not me.”

Sophia's phone rang and she jabbed a finger at both Ava and Lily. “Both of you, sit down. Plant your butts in those chairs and do not move.”

I shot an amused look at Noah and Alex as both firecrackers plopped themselves down, arms crossed and eyes narrowed. Noah looked slightly horrified, but Alex was watching with a big smile on his face.

“Sophia Bennett.” Sophia answered her phone while still frowning at her family. “Mrs. Bush, hi. How are you today?”

Lily hugged her stuffed seal to her chest and I heard her whisper. “John Cena thinks you're mean.”

“John Cena can find himself in the garbage disposal if he isn't careful.”

“I'm glad to hear that. I'm really happy you got back to me so fast, Mrs. Bush. When I saw your product, I immediately bought two of them for a neighbor. I think you're brilliant. Let's start there.” Sophia tapped the mute button on her phone and her voice dropped to something darker. “The two of you need to be silent right now.”

“But-” Lily cut herself off as her mom shot her a look.

“Caroline? Okay, but only if you call me Sophia.” Sophia pinched the bridge of her nose as she listened. “Yes, ma’am. I know I mentioned this in my email, but I handle research in my department. I look through hundreds of companies every day and I only reach out to a few of those. Your company caught my eye immediately. What you’ve done is amazing, honestly.”

Ava groaned and sank deeper in her chair. “I don’t have time for this.”

Sophia muted her call again. “Oh, you don’t? Too bad. You know better than to bring Lily here. Storming in here like that makes me look unprofessional and you know I’m already fighting an uphill battle. And you, Lily Marie Bennett, are in big trouble. You-”

Listening to something on the other end of the line, Sophia cut herself off mid lecture and I watched as her face shifted into something softer again. It was amazing to watch her go back and forth.

“I think we both know that the business world can be hard on women, Caroline. My assistant’s wife is a lawyer who specializes in women’s rights and I’ll just say that she stays busy. You’re in a market dominated by men and it’s hard to break through that glass ceiling. I was interested in your company already and when I saw that you were the owner, I knew that Anderson Inc. would be foolish to overlook you. I know without you telling me that you’ve fought for your company and poured so much into it.” Sophia tapped the mute button and turned a hard look at Lily. “You know better than to touch Aunt Ava’s work. It was wrong of you to do that. And don’t ever let me hear you calling anyone a slut again. Mrs. Johnson is a jerk for doing it and I’m not raising a jerk, am I?”

Lily pouted. “They were all naked!”

“If you don’t want to see Aunt Ava’s paintings, you don’t have to go into her work space, Lily.” Sophia went right back to her call. “Unfortunately, my work stops at the research. The purchase and contract part of Anderson is handled by people

higher up than me. I just find companies that deserve a second chance and sometimes get a little sentimental when I talk to owners. I hear so many owners sound defeated when I reach out to them. They think that I'm coming in at the smell of blood in the water, but I'll be honest with you, Caroline. I don't react to the smell of blood. I hunt for potential and promise."

I shifted where I stood and sank my teeth into my bottom lip. I tried to focus on the pain instead of how fucking hot I found Sophia. Watching her work and win over another business while simultaneously lecturing her sister and kid was impressive. From listening to Dad talk about what Sophia did, I never would've known how brilliant she was or how she sent every one of her finds to the closing team already closed pretty much.

"I wish I could go along for the whole process with so many of the people I find. I get so excited for people like you, people who get another chance. I would lose my job on my first client, though, if I did. I'm not into sales or that part of our business. I will always want more for you and have the utmost faith that you're worth it." Sophia smiled a pure, genuine smile as she jotted something down in her notebook. "I'm ready to get into the details now, if you are. Well, I'll need just a couple of minutes. I have a child to handle before we get focused."

Ava stuck her tongue out at Lily. "She's talking about you."

"You have children, too?" Sophia laughed. "Yeah, they never cease to surprise you, do they? How about I call you back in five minutes? Does that work for you?"

Lily swung her stuffed seal at her aunt and Ava snatched it away. Right before Lily could scream, I stepped forward and plucked the thing from Ava's hands and handed it back to Lily. Frowning at each of them, I planted myself between them to keep the peace until Sophia was finished with her call.

*****NOAH*****

I'd thought about Sophia as a mom after finding out she had a kid more than a few times. I'd wondered why she hadn't mentioned it and what kind of mom she was. I'd wondered who'd kept her kid when she spent the night with us. I'd thought about it a lot, probably too much. I knew she'd been married, but were she and her ex still close?

Seeing Lily in real life and watching Sophia transform into a mother in the blink of an eye was surreal. The little girl looked a lot like her mother, even down to the glares she flashed at her aunt. It was impressive to watch their interaction and even more so when Sophia balanced work and family like an expert. She'd pretty much gained a new business for the company while lecturing her kid and sister. In all the years I'd watched Dad work, I'd never seen him balance things the way Sophia could.

I stood off to the side so I could watch them without being in the way and I wasn't disappointed when Sophia hung up her phone and went into full mom mode.

"Lily, you need to apologize to Aunt Ava. She's been working on that painting for weeks and it was really beautiful." Sophia looked at her sister. "It was stunning, Ava. If you can't fix it, I'll find a way to make it right."

“I’m not saying sorry. She’s being too mean!” Lily leaned around Ethan to glare at her aunt. “You’re being a bully.”

“I can’t deal with her right now, Soph. I need to go home and see if I can get her stupid clothes off my work.” Ava glared back at Lily. “I *am* being mean but I’ve never been so angry at you, Lily. You ruined my art and that wasn’t okay.”

“I don’t want to go with you anyway! I’m angry at you, too.” Lily stuck up her nose and turned away. “John Cena doesn’t like you right now.”

“That’s enough.” Sophia turned a hard stare on her sister. “You’re the adult in this situation. You need to remember that she’s seven when you’re talking to her. You’re using a lot of phrases right now that you can’t take back. Don’t forget that you love your niece and that she’s going to be the one picking out our nursing home, so maybe don’t leave any lasting damage, huh?”

I watched Ava deflate and gained even more respect for Sophia. I wasn’t sure how she was the same woman who’d argued with me about steak earlier, but she was amazing.

“Lily, you and John Cena need to learn a lesson from this. People have boundaries and you don’t get to cross them, just because you want to. Aunt Ava’s art is off limits. It doesn’t matter what you think about them. You don’t get to shove your opinion on her or her work. Your aunt is beyond good to you and you need to respect that. And if John Cena isn’t nice to everyone in this family, he’s going to find himself in trouble. I saw you use him to hit Aunt Ava and the moment John Cena brings his fighting attitude into our house, he has to go. Do you understand me?”

Lily folded herself around the stuffed seal, whose name I was realizing was John Cena. “He didn’t do it! It was me!”

“Well, I’m never getting rid of you, so you’re safe. If you show John Cena bad behavior, though, he’s going to copy it. Be better for him.” Sophia moved around the desk and knelt in front of her daughter. “Apologize to Aunt Ava, baby. You hurt her.”

“Sorry, Aunt Ava.”

Ava sighed. “I accept your apology, but I’m still upset for now. That doesn’t mean I don’t love you to the moon and back, though. It just means I need a few hours of space to calm down.”

Sophia squeezed her eyes shut for a moment and then focused on her sister. “This isn’t okay, Ava.”

“I need some time to myself, Soph. I’m sorry, but I do.”

“Fine.” Sophia stood up and started gathering things from her desk. A notepad, a few pens, and a handful of highlighters filled her hands as she walked to the small table on the other side of her office. “Lily, you’re going to finish the work day with me, kid. Mom’s busy right now, but I want you to make me something. If you’re quiet and put up with Mom’s work, you could find yourself one ice cream richer after we leave here.”

Lily rushed over to the table. “I’m going to write a book about Aunt Ava. It’s going to be art so she can’t do anything about it.”

I barely stifled a laugh. The kid was clearly smart and being raised around artists who talked to her about freedom of expression in art.

Ava frowned but didn’t say anything to her niece. Instead, she focused on her sister. “I don’t know if I can save the painting, Soph. If I can’t, that’s weeks of work wasted.”

“Go home and try to fix it. It’s not wasted, though, Ava. You always talk about the process being so important in growing as an artist.” Sophia hugged her sister and then pushed her towards the door. “Go. Maybe visit Milo in his shed before we come home tonight.”

“Did you just tell me to get high?”

Sophia glanced around the room and seemed to register that we were still there, watching everything. Her eyes went even wider and she cleared her throat. “No. Goodbye, Ava.”

I couldn't hold in my laugh when Sophia pushed her sister out and closed the door on her. "Wow."

"Okay, that wasn't great." Sophia rubbed her hands over her thighs and blew out a deep breath. "Not my finest moment as a professional. Okay, okay. Mrs. Bush should be calling back any second. You three still haven't eaten. Lily, did you eat lunch, yet?"

"Nope." Lily looked up from her tell all book. "Are these your boyfriends, Mom?"

Ethan's face nearly split in half his smile was so wide. "Your mom's been talking about us?"

Sophia looked like she was close to throwing us out so I jumped in. "I'm Noah. That's my twin brother, Ethan. And our little brother, Alex. It's nice to meet you, Lily. What do you think about steak for lunch?"

"I want a burger." Lily put down her pen and came over to take my hand. "If you take me to get a burger, I'll let you hold John Cena while I eat it."

Her tiny hand in mine did something to my chest to make it feel uncomfortable. I rubbed at it with my free hand and glanced at Sophia. "We'll go to the cafeteria, if it's okay with you."

She winced and seemed to not love the idea. I hated that she might not trust us but she didn't know us well enough to fully trust us yet.

"Or I can just run down and grab burgers for everyone." I smiled at Sophia, trying to ease her stress.

She laughed and flashed a bright smile at me. "I'm not worried about you, Noah. I'm worried about my kid. She's a talker. I'm trying to think about the worst thing she could say and then weigh that out against how much I'm willing to be embarrassed."

Lily tugged at my hand. "Come on, Noah."

Sophia sighed. "Fine. Listen to them, Lily. Don't run off and don't forget you have ice cream on the line."

“I’m a good kid, Mom.” Lily’s matter-of-fact tone was too perfect.

Alex laughed and held out his hand for Lily to high five. “I’d be a good kid for ice cream, too.”

Lily looked up at him as we slowly filed out of Sophia’s office. “If you’re the little brother, why are you bigger?”

*****SOPHIA*****

My afternoon had been swamped. After inhaling the cheeseburger the guys brought me back from the cafeteria, I'd lost track of them. Ethan had motioned to Lily and the door at some point and the next time I'd looked up, they were all gone. When I could finally come up for air, I went out in search of them and found a small group of women gathered around the break room. I glanced over at Randal, who'd been just as busy as me, and we shared a confused look.

"I don't know what the guys are doing in there, but women keep flocking around." Randal stood up and stretched. "I guess this is as good a reason to take a break as any."

We walked over and eased our way past the women gathered around. They all seemed to snap back to reality when they saw me and by the time I got to the doorway to the breakroom, it was just me and Randal standing there. I was glad because when I saw what they'd all been staring at, I felt like I was melting right where I stood from the sweetness. I couldn't have hidden the expression on my face if I'd tried.

Lily was at one of the breakroom tables with the guys and they were showing her how to play a card game. Lily was sitting on the table and Ethan switched between holding his arm out behind her and watching her with a worried look on his face. Alex and Lily were playfully taunting each other and

Noah was holding a handful of chips that Lily kept reaching over to take.

I knew my daughter and I could tell she was in heaven with the guys. She was over the moon happy. It was such a juxtaposition to how she'd showed up in my office earlier in the day that I wanted to kiss the guys. They'd cheered her up completely.

When I finally saw that John Cena was in Ethan's lap, I must've gasped because they all turned to look at me. Lily twisted too close to the edge when she did and her arms and legs shot out as she toppled over, but Ethan was right there, catching her before she even fell off the table completely. My heart still lodged itself in my throat and I hurried to Lily to pick her up and put her in a chair.

"Kid, you're going to give me a heart attack one of these days." I looked at Ethan and pressed my lips together as my brain tried to release too much at once. I wanted to say so much in that moment, but I forced myself to keep my cool. "Thank you."

He patted his chest. "I think I just got my first gray hair."

Lily stood in the chair and threw her arms around my neck. "Mom, I learned how to play poker!"

Alex wouldn't make eye contact with me so I figured he was the guilty party. I grunted as Lily wrapped her legs around me, too, and let me hold all of her weight. "Poker, huh? Did you win any money?"

Alex finally met my gaze. "I wouldn't use real money. We used chips."

"And I somehow ended up as Lily's personal chip bowl." Noah frowned at Lily, but I could see that it was playful. "My entire job is holding her chips and I've been told a few times that I stink at my job."

"Well, you dropped them, Noah. And then you tried to give them to me." Lily giggled. "You gave those ground chips to Alex. I saw you."

Alex dropped his cards. "Are you serious, Noah?"

“Hey, Mom, can your boyfriends come over tomorrow?” Lily missed the panicked expression on my face. “I’m not going to Dad’s, so we can have a pool party. Please, Mom!”

Of course, the guys were all quiet and unhelpful. I finally cleared my throat and tried to navigate my way through Lily’s invitation. “It’s your dad’s weekend, Lily. If-”

“Nuh-uh. I talked to him yesterday and he has work. Please, Mom. Just one little party. Please! I’ll never ask for anything again.” She gripped my cheeks in her crumb-coated fingers. “They’ve never even seen our house, Mom. I need to show them John Cena’s bedroom.”

Before I could think of anything else to say, Ethan spoke up. “We’ve never even seen your house, Sophia.”

Alex grinned. “It’s just one little party.”

I turned to Noah and shook my head. “Go ahead. What’s your super helpful input?”

He dusted off his hands and smirked. “What should we bring?”

“Chips!” Lily giggled when Noah narrowed his eyes at her. “Aunt Ava said you guys are helping Mom get her groove back, so bring that, too, if you find it.”

I heard Randal coughing from the doorway and closed my eyes, hoping that when I opened them, I’d be back in my bed and Lily’s words would just be a nightmare I was having.

“I’ll make a list.” Alex was clearly laughing as he spoke. “Chips and Sophia’s groove.”

“Dad doesn’t like y’all because he wanted to help Mom find her groove. Aunt Ava said he couldn’t find Mom’s groove when they were married and he sure as hell can’t now.”

I gasped. “Lily!”

“What? Aunt Ava said it just like that!” She wiggled out of my arms and didn’t even bother looking at me as she finished leaving me mortified without even lifting a finger to try. “Aunt Ava said lots of things about your groove, Mom. She was

telling Mr. Jimmy that she'd started to worry that your groove was dried up and dead. What's a groove, Mom?"

"Okay, Lily! Let's not repeat anymore of what Aunt Ava said." I was bright red and could only hope that Randal was the only person overhearing the interaction. "Well, this was fun. I think I'm going to go back to my office and consider the pros and cons of murdering my sister."

"Sophia." Noah reached out and caught my hand when I tried to turn away. "Let your sister know she was worried for nothing."

I groaned and hurried out of the break room. I winced at the fact that Randal had just witnessed the entire encounter. I was just lucky no one else had, I guessed. I shot him a look that said not a word. I paused and had to turn around and walk past Randal again as I reentered. "I should take my kid."

Ethan waved me off. "We'll keep her talking until it's quitting time, boss."

Randal wiped tears of laughter from his eyes and pulled me back to my office. He could barely speak from laughing so hard but he managed to finally stop long enough to ensure that my embarrassment was complete. "I wasn't sure about them, but if they're helping with your groove, who am I to withhold my complete support?"

*****SOPHIA*****

I'd cleaned my house until it almost didn't look like I lived with two messy artists. Lily had helped because she was so excited about her new friends coming over. Once Ava came out of her workspace, she'd even attempted to help. She was excited for a real chance at meeting the guys. Milo was just Milo about the whole thing. He came out of his shed with a giant smile on his face and went straight to the food I'd ordered in for the party.

I was freaking out, thinking about what a bad idea it was to bring the guys into my personal life. Things had the potential of being so messy and I was walking them deeper into my life like a complete idiot. My stomach was in knots and I'd done the embarrassing thing of changing swimsuits over two dozen times while staring at myself in the mirror and I only owned three suits. I just couldn't seem to stop myself, no matter if the suits looked the same each time I tried them on again and again.

When the guys showed up, early and with their arms full, I had butterflies the size of the state fluttering through my body. Our first night together had been simple. We were there for sex. Our work experience together was messy but there were still boundaries and our roles were clearer. In my home, there were no boundaries and I wasn't sure how to act. Who was I supposed to be around them in my home?

The guys seemed less confused. Alex put everything in his arms down and pulled me into a tight hug. His hands rested low on my back and when he pulled back, he pressed a kiss to the corner of my mouth. “Do we get an official tour?”

Ethan hugged me next and kissed my cheek. “I’ve heard there are paintings of naked people here. Will they be on the tour?”

Noah tugged me into his chest and smirked down at me. “You look like you’re thinking about running.”

I bit my lip and shook my head. “No... I... No. I’m not running.”

His hands settled on the top curve of my ass and he dipped his head to press a kiss to the crook of my neck. “Good. Just know that if you change your mind and run, I’m chasing.”

Like a whirlwind, they swept into my house and then my sister and Lily swept them out of the kitchen, leaving me standing there alone. I looked at the counter and saw that they’d brought every chip imaginable.

I was still standing there, smiling at the chips, when Noah walked back into the kitchen. I looked up at him when he stopped right in front of me. “Did you get separated from the rest of your tour group?”

“I was asked to leave when I told Ava I didn’t understand why all the trees were wrapped in yarn.” He gripped my waist and pulled me close. “I want to drag you into the closest room with a lock and fuck you senseless.”

I pressed my thighs together and gripped his shoulders. “I... I shouldn’t want that.”

“But?”

“I do.”

He groaned. “This is torture, Sophia.”

I was seconds away from offering him a handjob in my bedroom when Ava led everyone into the kitchen. I spun around to face them and watched Ava’s eyes take in everything all at once. In some misguided attempt to appear innocent, I

started rambling. “Noah had something in his eye. And we were talking about the art of yarn bombing trees. Is it warm in here? We should get in the pool, right?”

Noah wrapped his arm around my waist and held me closer. “How was the rest of the tour?”

Alex smirked at us. “It was great. We saw Sophia’s bedroom and Lily showed us the no-no drawer that she isn’t allowed to go into.”

I gaped at him. “No, she didn’t.”

Ava laughed, fully enjoying my discomfort. “She did. I didn’t let her open it, though.”

“Mom, you’re all red. Why are you all red?” Lily spotted all the chips then and insisted on giving all the guys a giant hug. “Look at all of them! I’ll have chips for the rest of my life! Will you still be my chip bowl, Noah?”

Noah groaned and pretended to think about it. “I don’t know, Lily. I’m pretty busy holding other things right now.”

Alex pitched in. “You go ahead and be her chip bowl, Noah. I can hold what you’re holding.”

Ava clapped her hands and then bounced on the balls of her feet. “This is amazing.”

I’d lost control of my house. Without another idea of how to end what was happening, I suggested the only thing I could think of. “Should we go swimming?”

Lily looked at me and I could see chaos in her eyes. “Last one in the pool’s a rotten egg!”

I swore as she took off running and nearly tackled Noah as I sprinted to get to the pool. I yanked off my coverup as I went and barely managed to kick off my sandals before diving into the cool water. I came up laughing and spotted Lily a few feet away. Ava and Milo were in the pool, too, which left the guys to battle over who got in last. Only, they didn’t know the rules.

I swam to the edge of the pool and watched as they leisurely took their clothes off. I’d planned on telling them the rules but I was distracted by the amount of skin appearing. It had only

been a week since I'd had my hands all over them, but I was sweating as each item of clothing dropped to the concrete pool deck.

"The rotten egg has to do the walk of shame off the diving board!" Lily climbed into a float and laughed. "Blindfolded!"

There was a moment of hesitation and then the three brothers each reverted back to what I imagine their childhood had been. They shoved at each other and tried to knock each other down in their path to the pool. Alex broke away first and he soared over my head into the pool. Ethan and Noah wrestled until Ethan pretended to have hurt his eye. When Noah stopped to check on his twin, Ethan shoved him away and dove into the pool.

"You lousy cheat!" Noah shook his head and stood there with his hands on his hips. "Alright. I'm the rotten egg, I guess. How do I do this?"

"Mom, do it!"

I climbed out of the pool and adjusted my swimsuit bottom before approaching Noah. He didn't budge, even when I was right in front of him. His eyes were laser focused on my body and he was doing absolutely nothing to hide the way he was looking at me. I felt my nipples pebble under the top and held my arm over them to hide it. "Stop staring."

He cleared his throat and nodded. "Probably a good idea unless you're going to send the rest of your family away."

Ava groaned. "Keep it in your pants."

"Come on. Time to walk the plank, pervert." I said the last part under my breath so only he'd hear me. Taking his hand, I led him to the deep end of the pool and made him wait while I found a bandana.

"Why is this happening?" Noah gripped my waist when I returned and started tying the blindfold around his head. "Also, I'd prefer to be the one doing the blindfolding."

I pressed my finger to his lips and laughed when he tried to bite it. "Lily saw one scene of a pirate movie and became obsessed with walking the plank. She decided that when

you're the rotten egg, you walk the plank. It makes her happy so we keep doing it."

"In this scenario, am I the pirate, or are you the pirate?"

I laughed as I finished his blindfold. "You seem focused on getting the booty, so...I guess you're the pirate."

"Wow." He shook his head. "That was terrible."

It just made me laugh harder. "It was great! Now, it's time for you to walk the plank!"

Lily cheered from the other end of the pool and watched intently as I led Noah up to the diving board. "Good riddance to ya!"

Noah grunted. "What are you teaching this kid?"

I slowly walked him to the end of the board and started to back away. "Okay, stay there. Don't move."

Noah wobbled. "Oh, no. Am I at the end?"

"Yep. Just fall backwards." I gasped when he grabbed me and tugged me into his chest. "Noah!"

"Like you said, I'm focused on that booty and I'm not going down without it." He held me tight and took me with him as he jumped into the pool.

I wrapped myself around him and felt his muscles work as he swam to the surface. Wiping water from my eyes, I glared at him, just to find him grinning back at me like an idiot. I splashed him. "You're a terrible, no-good pirate."

He cupped my ass and wagged his brows. "I think I can find that blindfold if you want to play again later."

From the other end of the pool, Lily cried out. "Dad!"

*****SOPHIA*****

My stomach sank as I spun around and spotted Davis standing at the edge of the pool, glaring down at Noah. Unwinding my limbs from Noah, I swam over to the ladder and climbed out. “What are you doing here, Davis?”

“I came to spend a few hours with my daughter. What the fuck is going on here, Sophia?” He gripped my elbow and tugged me away from the pool. “You invited these guys here to play with our kid? Do you even know them?”

“You should leave, Davis. This is awkward and I’m not sure you can control yourself.”

Lily called to him from the pool. “Dad! Come play! You’re the rotten egg now! Mom, make him walk the plank.”

Davis smirked down at me. “I guess I’m staying.”

I rubbed my face and forced a smile as I turned back to Lily. “Dad doesn’t need to walk the plank. Noah already did, Lily.”

Ava climbed out of the pool and walked over to me. “I say we make him walk the plank. Right into traffic.”

I grunted an agreement and watched in horror as my ex-husband stripped down to his briefs and stood on the diving board, posing with his muscles flexed while trying to make it look natural. “This is a nightmare.”

“Make him leave, Soph. He has no right to show up and crash this party.” Ava nodded to where the guys and Milo were hanging out against the wall of the pool, talking to each other while looking back and forth between me and Davis. “This has to be painfully awkward for them.”

Before I could respond, Alex swam to our side of the pool and climbed out. His tattoo covered body was a wet dream come true as he walked towards me like a fucking cologne ad. He gripped my hips and ducked his head to kiss me. His tongue dipped into my mouth and then he pulled back and winked at me. “You’re wanted in the pool.”

I let out a squeal of laughter as he picked me up bridal style, as if I weighed nothing, and dove into the pool with me. Lily was cheering when we came up and I was breathless from being carried like that.

I clung to Alex and grinned when he slipped a single finger down the back of my swimsuit, just to stroke my bare ass. “What was that?”

He pressed his forehead to mine. “Just letting your ex know that you’re taken.”

Raising a single eyebrow, I pretended like the primal part of my brain didn’t love hearing those words from him. “I’m taken?”

He nodded. “It’s embarrassing that you didn’t already know.”

I laughed and shoved away from him. “I think someone’s getting ahead of themselves.”

“Mom! Let’s play the hide and seek game!” Lily was a fish in the water and had learned to swim before she could even walk across a room by herself. She loved the different pool games and insisted that we play them nonstop. “Dad, come on!”

I stood up in the shallow end and did the thing that I didn’t want to ever do. “Noah, Ethan, Alex, this is Davis, Lily’s father. Davis, this is Noah, Ethan, and Alex.”

Davis stood too close to me and rested his hand on my shoulder. “Also your husband.”

I glared at him. “Ex-husband.”

Ethan whistled and pointed up to the sky. “Is that a fighter jet?”

Everyone looked up, even me, and when we did, Ethan took my hand and pulled me away from Davis and into his chest. He stood behind me and wrapped his arm around my waist, just under the water.

“Huh. It must’ve just been a bird.” He shrugged and cleared his throat. “So. Are we playing something?”

I tried to hide my smile by fiddling with my straps and avoiding looking at anyone. “Marco Polo. It’s Lily’s favorite.”

“Yeah! I get to pick who plays Marco!” Lily looked around at us and pointed to Alex. “You’re Marco, Alex! Do you know how to play?”

Alex smiled and reached his fist out to her. When she bumped his fist with hers, he nodded at me. “You raised a cool kid. And yes, I believe I *do* know the game. Thank you for picking me. Just for that, later I’ll tell you where historians think the game originated.”

Davis hovered next to me but Ethan didn’t seem to mind. “*We* did raise a cool kid.”

“Okay, let’s play! Aunt Ava! Come on!” Lily flipped out of her float and stuck her tongue out at Alex. “You’re never going to catch me.”

After five games, Lily proved herself right. No one could catch her. She moved through the water so silently that it was almost scary. I was grabbed by each of the brothers and I swore they were only following my voice. When it was Ava’s turn, I swore she tried to find Davis and it seemed like he knew it because he did everything to avoid her.

By the end, I was tired from how much swimming I’d done and hungry. I climbed out of the pool and did a rush job of

drying off. “I’ll get lunch ready. Y’all stay in the pool. I’ll bring everything out here.”

I was only in the house for a minute before I heard someone come in. I held my breath, hoping it wasn’t Davis, and when I saw it was Ethan, I cheered. He grabbed my hand and started pulling me towards the back of the house, where my bedroom was. I laughed and went with him, too curious for my own good.

Ethan was focused as he pulled me into my bathroom and shut the door behind us. “Lock the door, Sophia.”

*****SOPHIA*****

I gasped when he pushed me against the door and kissed me hard before pulling my breasts out of my swimsuit and lowering his mouth to suck at each of my nipples. “Ethan!”

He dropped to his knees and yanked my bottoms down. “You’re going to have to stay quiet, Sophia.”

My breath caught in my throat as he pulled my thigh over his shoulder and then buried his face in my sex. His beard was rough on my clit but his mouth was hot and silky as he sucked at me. I gripped the doorframe in one hand and his hair in the other. “Ethan! Oh, fuck, Ethan.”

He shifted his position and I banged my head against the door when he pushed two thick fingers into me. His fingers curled and he stroked my g-spot as he looked up at me. Lifting his mouth from my clit, he watched me as he fingered me. “You have to be quiet. If we get caught, you don’t get to come.”

I pressed my arm over my mouth and nodded, silently begging him to keep going. He didn’t disappoint. He sucked at my clit and stroked it until my thighs shook and I was panting against my arm. I was close to the edge and my entire body felt wired.

Ethan closed his mouth over my clit and sucked hard while his fingers stroked my core until I couldn’t hold back. I came

hard, twisting my head back and forth while I tried to stay silent. Tears filled my eyes as pleasure ran through me. Still, Ethan lapped at my sex. He licked me clean and then stood up, his face messy and his eyes heavy with lust.

I looked down and saw that he was rock hard. He couldn't go back out like that.

“Ignore it. It'll go down, Sophia.”

I cupped him through his swim trunks. “Let me help.”

His eyes narrowed. “Sophia.”

I cupped the back of his neck and pulled myself up on my toes so I could be eye to eye with him. “I have a dirty fantasy.”

He groaned. “Tell me.”

I'd never told anyone what I was about to tell him, but I didn't even hesitate. “I want you to stroke yourself over me and come on me.”

He pressed his head into my shoulder and made a pained sound. “Fuck, Sophia. On your knees. Now.”

I dropped to my knees and watched as he pushed his trunks down and freed his erection. Precum beaded at the tip and I bit down on my lip to stop myself from licking him. Looking up at him, I couldn't help reaching down to stroke myself. He looked so massive standing over me like that.

Ethan watched my hand and growled. “This isn't going to last long, Sophia.”

I moaned his name and made a sound close to a whine as he stroked himself. From base to tip, he squeezed his fist tight around his thick cock and stroked while watching me.

“In your fantasy, where do I come?”

I tore my eyes away from his beautiful dick and met his heated gaze. “Wherever you want to, however you want to. You're in control.”

He stroked himself faster. “Goddammit, Sophia.”

I rubbed tight circles over my clit and pinched my nipples with my other hand. Watching Ethan stroking himself off to me, to my body, it was a shot of pure adrenaline.

“Open your mouth.” He stepped forward and held just the tip at my open mouth while never slowing his strokes. “No. I want my come all over those tits, Sophia. I want to know that I came all over them whenever anyone else looks at you.”

My orgasm rolled over me in waves and I fought to stay upright as it did but when Ethan’s first jet of come splashed across my chest, I froze, hungry to feel every second of what he was doing. He growled my name and jet after jet hit my chest and neck. He seemed to read my mind and know my darkest fantasies because before he was finished, he rubbed his tip over my lips and cheeks, smearing the last of his come on me. I had another, smaller orgasm and clung to his thighs to keep from falling over.

Ethan pulled me to my feet and pinned me to the bathroom counter. “Look at how beautiful you are.”

I moaned at the sight we made. His thick arms holding me up and my body covered in his come, it was erotic.

He ran his finger over my face, gathering the mess he’d left and then met my gaze. “Open your mouth.”

I did as he said and cleaned his finger when he fed it to me. It was so dirty and I’d probably feel bad later for how much I loved it, but I did. I loved it and I felt euphoric.

“I’m going to go back outside and look your ex-husband in the eye knowing that I’ve got your pussy on my breath and that you just let me come all over you like the dirty girl you are.” Ethan gripped my chin and tipped my face up to his. “Next time, I’m going to paint your face, Sophia.”

I nearly collapsed when he let me go. I held onto the bathroom counter and tried to shake myself free from the lust clouding my mind.

Ethan slapped my ass and then took my mouth in a heated kiss. Our tastes combined and he swore as he pulled away. “I could spend all day every day fucking you. You’re addictive.”

I let out a breathy laugh. “Me?”

His eyes softened and he stroked my face. “In your fantasy, do I stay and help clean you up?”

I shook my head. “You go back to the party knowing that you marked me as yours and wait to see if I’ve changed before coming back out or if I’m wearing the same top you came on.”

He took a deep, shuddering breath. “Fuck, Sophia.”

I pushed him away and watched him struggle with leaving me. “Go. We’ve been in here too long. If we were going for discreet, we failed.”

Ethan’s eyes narrowed and his lips tipped up in a cocky smile. “Who said I was going for discreet?”

I groaned and pushed him out of the bathroom so I could get cleaned up. As much as I liked the fantasy, I wasn’t carrying it outside of the bathroom. I jumped in the shower in my swimsuit and showered off completely before getting out and brushing my teeth. When I was sure I was clean, I tiptoed out to the kitchen, hoping that no one had noticed us missing. In fantasy land, I was wild and dirty and made statements. In reality, I already felt guilty for doing what I’d done while Davis was around. I didn’t owe him anything, but I didn’t want to hurt his feelings.

I was so lost in rushing through getting the sandwich trays out of the fridge that I didn’t notice Ava sneaking up behind me. When she grabbed me, I screamed and nearly took off her head with a bottle of mustard. “You scared the shit out of me! What are you doing?”

“You skank. You just let that hot young man fuck you, didn’t you?” Ava glanced over her shoulder and didn’t bother holding back her devious smile. “He walked out of here like he’d just placed gold in the olympics. Can I just say that I’m so proud of you?”

I smacked her arm. “Shut up! We didn’t do...that.”

“Bullshit. You’ve got the glow of a woman who just came.”

“Yeah, I did, but we didn’t have sex. I’m not talking about this with you right now, though. Help me carry this stuff out to the table and stop smiling like that.”

She grabbed a platter of meats and cheeses and quietly hummed. “My sister’s a skank and I love it so much.”

ETHAN

“We weren’t together through most of our time overseas. We’d meet up occasionally, but we each did our own thing.” I finished a bottle of beer and wiped my mouth on the back of my hand. My manners had been lost on Sophia’s bathroom floor and I was no longer worried about being proper all the time. “I partied my way around the world and spent a few years seeing things. Noah researched and interned at multiple corporations along the way. And Alex spent a few years apprenticing under one of the best tattoo artists in Asia.”

Sophia was curled into a chair across from me and she looked relaxed as she nibbled at a cookie. “I think I want a tattoo.”

Multiple heads jerked around to stare at her.

“What?” She laughed. “Just listening to y’all talk about traveling and exploring makes me want to explore a few thoughts I’ve had along the way. When I was younger, I wanted a tattoo. Our parents died when I was twenty and anything crazy that I’d ever thought about got pushed to the backburner. Then, I was married and having a kid. It was never the right time. Maybe I’ll do it now.”

Alex had to be salivating at the idea of tattooing Sophia. He loved what he did and would’ve told Dad to fuck himself over

the idea of working in the family business if it hadn't meant so much to Noah that we all be together. He leaned over and cupped the back of Sophia's neck. "Let me do it."

She smiled up at him and managed to nod once before her ex-husband made his presence known again.

"Sophia, come on. You're a mom. You're thirty-seven. You're not really considering getting a tattoo, are you?" Davis rolled his eyes and ruffled Lily's hair. "Tell Mom to stop being silly."

Lily was invested in a game on Sophia's phone so she just leaned away from her dad and ignored him. Davis might've gotten away with his shitty comments if everyone else at the table wasn't there.

Before any of us could tell Davis where to stick his antiquated ideas, Milo beat us to the chase. For a guy who was either stoned out of his mind or wielding a chainsaw, he was eloquent in his takedown of Davis. "Sophia is a grown woman with an IQ that would probably put us all to shame. Except Ava. Their parents made smart kids. Sophia finished raising me and Ava. She worked her way up in multiple companies and supports two struggling artists because she believes in their work. The woman is my hero and the idea that somehow getting a tattoo would make her silly is ridiculous. Check yourself at the door, D-man. If Sophia wants a tattoo, she should get a tattoo."

Sophia beamed at Milo and tossed a piece of cookie at him. "Love you, too, Milo."

Ava got out of her chair and planted herself on Milo's lap. "Sometimes you open your mouth and remind me why I fell in love with you all over again."

Lily looked up at the sound of her aunt and Milo kissing and pretended to gag. "Get a room."

Noah had his gaze trained on Davis. "Anything else?"

Davis held up his hands and laughed it off. "If she wants a tattoo, let her get a tattoo."

“Is it time for more swimming now?” Lily sighed. “There’s not enough swimming for this to be a pool party.”

Sophia nodded. “Go on. Stay out of the deep end and don’t play dead. Some people aren’t used to kids doing that to be funny.”

There was a knock on the back fence gate and I could see an old man’s head sticking over the top. He waved and let himself in. “Sophia, dear? I heard splashing and I came right over.”

Sophia rushed to meet the man and led him towards the chair Lily had just vacated. “Mr. Jimmy, I’ve got some friends for you to meet. This is Ethan, Noah, and Alex. Guys, this is my favorite neighbor and friend, Mr. Jimmy.”

“Are these the guys you played hide the sausage with, dear?” His version of a whisper might as well have been a shout. “You are a goddess if they are, because they are *hot*. I saw them through the window, honey, and I nearly tripped over my shower chair trying to get over here.”

Sophia turned a dark red shade and buried her face in the old man’s shoulder. “Mr. Jimmy...”

He glanced over and I watched him pretend to notice Davis for the first time. “Oh! Oh, goodness. Forgive me. I’m so old and I didn’t see you sitting there, David. Heavens, I can’t seem to go a day without sticking my foot in my mouth.”

“It’s Davis.” If looks could kill, Jimmy would’ve been a burnt spot on the ground. Davis pushed away from the table and looked at Sophia. “Can I speak to you inside for a moment?”

Annoyance soured my mood when Sophia didn’t immediately tell him to go to hell. She looked around the table and sighed. “Davis, there are guests here and Lily’s in the pool by herself. Can it wait?”

“No.” He took her by the arm and pulled her towards the house.

Sophia looked back at us and her relaxed posture had vanished. “I’m sorry, guys. Can someone keep an eye on Lily? I’ll be right back.”

Jimmy grunted as soon as they were inside. “If I was ten years younger, I’d wipe the ground with that asshole.”

Noah tapped his fingers on the table. “The only thing saving him is his daughter.”

Ava came up from kissing Milo and noticed Jimmy for the first time. “Mr. Jimmy! When did you get here? And where did Sophia go? And...Davis. Tell me he didn’t drag her aside to lecture her again. Or maybe this time he’ll be begging for her back again. It’s always one or the other.”

“Do me a favor and run inside shouting that I’m having a heart attack.” Jimmy smiled deviously. “That’ll get her away from him.”

“No way! I’m not putting that energy out in the atmosphere.” Ava stood up and fixed her hair. “I do suddenly have a hankering for something in the fridge, though. Maybe I’ll just go poke around and see what I can interrupt.”

Within thirty seconds of Ava going inside, Sophia came outside with Davis on her heels. “Just leave it alone, Davis.”

Noah snapped his arm out and caught Sophia as she tried to walk by. He tugged her into his lap and pulled her mouth to his. Her body instantly relaxed in his arms and when Noah let her pull away, she had a smile on her face again. Noah pushed her wet hair behind her ears and brushed his knuckles over her cheek. “Milo and Ava inspired me.”

Milo reached over and fist bumped Noah. “Right on.”

Amazingly, Davis still didn’t leave. He sat back down at the table and angrily tapped away at his cell phone. Lily had left Sophia’s phone face up on the table and I watched as message after message lit up her screen.

Sophia finally couldn’t ignore the sound of her phone vibrating and she stood up to grab it. When she saw what was causing the vibrating, she met Davis’ eyes and dropped her phone in a full cup of Lily’s milk. Then, with all of us watching in awe, she shrugged it off and jumped into the pool with Lily.

I looked over at Davis and smirked. “She *really* didn’t want to talk to whoever that was, huh?”

*****SOPHIA*****

The sun was setting and Davis still hadn't left. Lily was nodding off and it was late enough that the pool party was over. Mr. Jimmy had gone home after a long round of questions with the guys. Ava and Milo had disappeared to their room hours earlier and it was clear to every adult in the house what they were doing. There was a stalemate happening with the men in my life, though, and I had a clear winner in mind, but unless I kicked Davis out, I couldn't be sure that the guys would outstay my ex-husband.

Deciding that I was desperate enough for a minute alone with the guys to be rude to Davis, I stood up from the couch and cleared my throat. "Alright. It's getting late. Davis, say goodnight to Lily."

Lily yawned and stretched her arms out for him. "Night, night, Daddy. Carry me to bed?"

"I'll kiss you goodnight in a little bit, sweetie. Say goodnight to the guys." I wrapped my arms around my stomach and chewed on my lower lip as I waited for Davis to take a hint. "After you do that, just let yourself out, Davis. If you decide you want to take the day with her tomorrow, just let me know."

"Night, Noah. Night, Ethan. Night, Alex. Thanks for coming to my party." Lily wobbled over to the guys and surprised me

by giving them each a hug. “Can I have a puppy?”

I let out a startled laugh. “What? Lily, why are you asking them for a puppy?”

She turned her sleepy eyes on me. “I had a dream they gave me a puppy. I want a puppy.”

Davis picked her up and rubbed her back. “Let’s talk about puppies tomorrow.”

Noah let out a breath as soon as Lily was out of earshot. “I was about two seconds from telling her she can have a puppy. She’s powerful when she’s sleepy and sweet like that.”

“I was already figuring out logistics for how to get her a puppy by the time she wakes up in the morning.” Ethan rubbed his jaw. “I’m still thinking about it. Are we getting her a puppy?”

I laughed and shook my head. “No. No, you’re not getting her a puppy. It wouldn’t be right for me to get a puppy that Ava and Milo would have to take care of every day just because they work from home. I’ve always wanted a puppy and never was able to get one because our dad was allergic. Or at least Mom said he was. Maybe when Lily’s older and can make sure Ava isn’t being forced to take on more responsibility than she signed up for.”

“Are you kidding me right now, Soph?” Hearing Alex call me that made me smile. “How are we not supposed to get you a puppy after that? Lily wants a puppy. You want a puppy. We want to get you a puppy. The math is telling me to get you a puppy.”

I wagged my finger at him. “No. I mean it. I can’t take care of a puppy properly and that wouldn’t be fair to the puppy.”

“What if we paid for it to go to puppy daycare during the weekdays? They even do pickup and dropoff now.” Ethan shrugged when his brothers looked at him. “Maybe I want a dog, too, and maybe I’ve done some research.”

“Don’t do it. I mean it.” I could see them not listening to me. “Guys, if you show up here with a puppy, I’m kicking your asses.”

Noah stretched out on the couch and patted his thigh. “Come here and say that to my face.”

I moved towards him but then Davis was there again, staring at me. I frowned. “I thought you were leaving.”

“I just need to talk to you for a second. It’s about Lily.”

I ground my teeth together and nodded. “Give me a second, guys.”

Davis led the way outside and when he saw that I didn’t close the door behind us, he shook his head and reached around me to pull it shut. “This is insane, Sophia.”

I crossed my arms over my chest and blew out a deep sigh. “What? What’s insane, Davis?”

“You don’t know those guys. I don’t want strangers around my daughter. They’ve got their hands all over you in front of her. What’s she learning right now, Sophia? Mommy’s got three boyfriends who can barely manage to keep their dicks put away and it’s completely normal? How old are they? This looks ridiculous, I hope you know.”

“Are you finished?”

He threw his hands in the air. “You look like a fool, Sophia. If no one else will tell you, I will. You look like an older woman who these guys realize they can talk into doing all sorts of degrading shit. Are you that-”

“Leave. You don’t get to talk to me like that.” I turned to go back inside but stopped. “You know what, Davis? Go fuck yourself. Do you understand how insulting it is that you look at me and don’t see a woman worthy of another male’s attention without it being some sort of game to them? You just said that those three men in there are only here with me because I must be letting them do degrading shit to me. They couldn’t possibly be here because they find me attractive, or because I have a great fucking personality. Nope. They clearly just couldn’t find someone their own age willing to spread their legs for them.”

He swore and took a step closer to me. “I didn’t mean it like that. You’re a single woman and guys like that see an easy

target when they look at you. It's not about you, Soph. It's about them."

I held up my hands to hold him off. "Don't try to sweeten it up now, Davis. Let's get real. I wasn't enough when I was pregnant with Lily and you were fucking half of the women in our neighborhood and you still don't think I'm enough now. Yet, you're still here, hanging onto whatever fucked up feelings you have leftover from a marriage that ended over half a decade ago. Why? It makes literally no sense to me. I've tried so hard to be nice to you, Davis. I should've thrown you out when you showed up today. I should've thrown you out a hundred times before then. I'm over this. Don't come back to my house unless you're here to see Lily. Don't let yourself in. Don't show up unannounced. Don't think that you have a single right to comment on me or my life. If you can't respect my boundaries, I'll figure out a way to make you respect them. Go home, Davis, and figure your shit out."

I walked inside and closed the door, ending the conversation and, hopefully, a chapter of my life where I let Davis get away with everything and anything to avoid hurting his feelings. I locked the door and took a moment to catch my breath before going back to the living room to spend a few minutes with the men who made me feel good and happy.

*****SOPHIA*****

I tried to fight a smile when I rejoined the guys, but it was obvious that they'd been looking out of the front window, keeping an eye on me. I sat on the arm of the couch and watched them. "At least Mrs. Johnson owns up to her spying."

After hearing about the nosy old woman all day, they knew exactly what I was saying. Ethan's cheeks turned pink and he made a big show out of picking up a book from the bookshelf next to him and turning it over to check out the back. "Everything okay out there?"

Alex folded his arms over his chest and widened his stance. "Looked intense."

My smile faded as Noah's eyebrows furrowed and it occurred to me that while I knew exactly what my relationship was like with Davis, they didn't. After going through being cheated on, I never wanted to make anyone else feel that level of insecure, no matter what our relationship was.

"I've been divorced from Davis for over five years. When I was pregnant with Lily, he cheated on me. A lot. The moment I found out about his cheating, the marriage was over for me. I've never thought twice about being with him again. I'm civil to him and I'm realizing now that I may be too civil. I think I've left him too much room to shove himself into my life." I looked down at my feet and studied my bright red nail polish.

“I should’ve kicked him out today but it always feels like I’m being a bad mom if I run Lily’s father off. That’s done, though. He pushed me too far tonight.”

Noah hooked his finger under my chin and lifted my face to his. “You don’t owe us an explanation, no matter how much we wanted it, Sophia.”

“I do. I don’t know what the hell we’re doing here, but I do know that I don’t want there to be any doubt about who I’m interested in. I don’t sleep around. Until now, I guess.” I looked into Noah’s eyes until the intensity looking back at me was too much. “I don’t cheat. Even in a situation like this one. You should worry that I’ll drop kick you if you do anything unprofessional in the office, but you never have to worry that I’m entangled with anyone else.”

He ran his fingers over my throat and held me there. “Thank you.”

My lips parted and my breath quickened at the feeling of his hand around my throat. His hand was so large and he was so strong, but he held me like I was delicate and it did things to me. I whimpered when he leaned down and sucked my bottom lip into his mouth before pulling back searching my eyes. I wanted him to find whatever he was looking for and that should’ve scared me, but I didn’t care right then.

“I’ve never wanted another woman the way I want you.” He kissed me, so passionately that his stubble would leave marks on my face and my mouth would be swollen for hours, but I needed it. His fingers tightened when he dragged kisses across my jaw. “Tell me to let you go or I’m going to take you to your room and show you how badly I need to be inside you.”

I’d wrapped myself around him and had two handfuls of his hair that I had to make myself release. “You can’t. Lily... I’ve never done this and I don’t know how to navigate-”

He eased back and kissed me lighter, sweeter. “You don’t have to say anything else. I get it.”

I gripped his sides and pressed my forehead into his chest. “I want y’all to stay. I’m... I’m painfully turned on and my bed is

too big for just me some nights, but...”

Ethan ran his hand through my hair and smiled. “Walk us out?”

I groaned and nodded. “Of course.”

Noah stepped back and let me walk out in front of them. Instead of letting me walk down the sidewalk to the driveway, they stopped me at the doorstep. Noah gave me a stern look. “It’s getting late. You stay here.”

I laughed. “Oh, yeah?”

Alex rolled his eyes and looked around my neighborhood of mostly retired people. “Maybe we’re being overprotective, but you never know when Mrs. Johnson will snap and come after you.”

I wrapped my arms around his neck and went up on my tiptoes to kiss his chin. “If you don’t think I could take Mrs. Johnson, you’re severely underestimating me.”

He cupped my ass and brushed his lips over mine. “Were you serious about the tattoo?”

Ethan pulled me away from Alex and grunted. “Get out of here with your master tattoo skills.”

I laughed when he nibbled at the skin under my chin. “I was serious!”

“I’ll see you tomorrow, then.” Alex’s eyes practically sparkled with mischief as he tugged his brothers away. “I’d tell you to answer your phone, but you kind of dunked it.”

I wrapped my arms around myself and smiled as they slowly backed away. “It’s not like you had my number anyway.”

Noah flashed a wicked smile. “You really think we can’t get your number, Sophia?”

“I’m ignoring that.” I rolled my eyes and focused on Alex. “Am I just supposed to wait around here all day on you? What if I have plans?”

Alex shrugged. “Cancel them.”

“Alex!”

“Sweet dreams, Soph.” He winked and then wagged his hands at me, shooing me inside. “Go in before Mrs. Johnson gets you.”

From across the street, the shrill sound of the woman herself filled the otherwise silent night. “How do you know my name? Are you stalking me, Sophia?”

I had the pleasure of watching the guys all jump at the sound of her voice. I snorted and waved my hand at the woman. “You’re just that famous, Mrs. Johnson. Why are you still out?”

“Don’t question me, young lady! I can go wherever I want.” She was still standing in the shadow of a tree and it felt like the darkness was shouting at me. “Who are those men? What are you doing in that house of yours? First your sister litters all over the yard and that boyfriend of hers spends his days playing with chainsaws, and now you’re having parties with lots of random men?”

Noah called back to the shadows. “There were more men earlier. Did you miss them?”

I gasped. “Noah!”

He laughed. “Nice to meet you, Mrs. Johnson. Your reputation suits you, it seems. Have a good night.”

“Rude!” The shuffle of her slippers faded as she went back home.

“She’s going to think the neighborhood is going down the drain when you show up with a tattoo.” Jogging back up to me, Alex swept me into his arms and dipped me backwards. He kissed me and then swung me back up. “Tell your friend that I dip better than him. Now, go inside.”

*****SOPHIA*****

A delivery driver dropped off a brand new phone first thing Sunday morning. After turning it on, I had a text waiting from Alex, telling me to be ready by noon. As much as I felt like I should be irritated at him for not considering any plans I might've already had, I wasn't. While married to Davis, I'd always been the one making plans and rearranging plans. I never got to just get ready and be taken places. I never got to take a backseat and relax.

Of course, Ava had plenty to say while I got ready, but it was all positive for a change. She liked the guys and thought any reservations I felt about the age gap were silly. She didn't even blink an eye about the idea of me sleeping with three guys at once. She just cheered me on. The only thing making her sad was that she couldn't come and watch me get tattooed.

Davis even managed to make my day easier by picking Lily up for an afternoon out with his parents. He didn't say much to me while Lily got herself together and I left the interaction feeling positive about the direction we were going.

When Alex pulled into the driveway, I was on the porch waiting for him. He stepped out of his truck and met me halfway. He cupped my face and kissed me before saying anything. His leather and citrus scent was something he didn't wear during the work week, I'd realized. It was still there, but

I liked when I could press into him and that scent lingered on my clothes for later.

I stepped back and gestured to my outfit. It was a dress shorter than anything I'd normally wear, but I'd tried to think through the best clothing for where I wanted the tattoo to go. "Is this okay? I wouldn't typically wear this in public, but I want my tattoo on my thigh so I thought being able to just pull this up would make it easier."

He fingered the hem of the dress and then tipped his head back to the sky. With a groan, he glanced back at me. "A thigh tattoo. You want to kill me today, don't you?"

I was still painfully turned on from the night before and the idea of his hands all over my thighs had been driving me slightly crazy, too. I pressed into his chest and brushed my hand over the bulge in his pants. "I could take care of this first."

His pale gray eyes grew heavy with lust but his full mouth was set in a firm line. "Tattoo first. Once I start touching you, I'm not going to want to stop."

I shivered and nodded. "Sure. Okay. Makes sense."

Grinning, he took my hand and pulled me to his truck. "I'm glad you were able to get away today."

Once we were in the truck and headed towards his tattoo studio, I turned so I could watch him. His tattoo covered arms were strong with a couple of prominent veins that shifted when he fisted his hands. Those hands were also an aphrodisiac. Huge and rough, they felt good on my skin.

"What are you staring at?" He knew what I was staring at, if the playful tone in his voice was any indicator.

"Nothing." I grinned and pulled the phone he'd given me out of my purse. "You didn't have to do this."

"How else was I supposed to tell you when I was picking you up?" He merged onto the highway and seamlessly joined the traffic. "It's fine. Don't try to give it back. I won't take it."

“Oh, I wasn’t.” I laughed. “I assumed it was Anderson money that bought it and I’m not above taking back some of the money I helped make.”

He didn’t laugh or even acknowledge that I’d said anything. His mouth did seem to tense, though.

“I’m joking, Alex.” Not sure which part of what I said upset him, I went quiet, not wanting to make it worse.

“I don’t use his money.”

“Whose? Your dad’s? I’m sorry, Alex. I wasn’t trying to imply that you-”

He glanced over at me and the frustration in his gaze cut me off. “Don’t apologize. I shouldn’t be so touchy about it. It’s just...I can’t say anything around my brothers. Noah has idealized Dad since we were kids and Ethan is a perpetual peacekeeper so he just goes along with Noah. Our dad’s a piece of shit, though.”

I opened and shut my mouth, unsure of how to go forward. I had plenty of thoughts about their father, but it wasn’t appropriate to talk to them about him.

“I saw the way you looked at him the day he introduced that asshole Bill Trent as the new manager. You think he’s a piece of shit, too.” Alex blew out a rough breath. “I don’t use his money. I especially wouldn’t use his money to send a gift to you.”

“Well, now I think I might need to give the phone back. I didn’t earn this phone.” I joked to lighten the mood and when I saw his shoulders relax, I sighed. “I’m sorry you don’t have the relationship you’d like with your dad, or that he’s not the man you’d prefer him to be. Your mom seems like an angel, though. I’m honestly not sure how she married Gerald.”

He took an off ramp and pulled onto the shoulder of the road. “She’s not my mom.”

“What? I just assumed... How...?”

“No one knows.” He turned to face me and shrugged. “I only found out because I took a DNA test. I spent most of my

childhood thinking that Gerald wasn't my dad. I'm so different from him that I thought that Mom cheated or something. The bad thing about a teenager with an unlimited allowance is that I could follow through with whatever ideas I got stuck in my head. Gerald is my father, without a doubt, but Mom isn't my mom."

I took off my seatbelt and moved to the middle of the truck to lean into him. His voice was flat as he spoke, but I could see pain in his eyes. "So, Gerald...?"

"I'm the kid of one of his mistresses. I never could figure out which one and I don't think it matters. Our mom has never treated me any different than Noah and Ethan. She's amazing. Gerald seems to have a chip on his shoulder about my existence, though." Alex wrapped his arm around me and held me tight. "He always treated me differently. I was never smart enough or athletic enough. The twins were always better than me and I thought it was just true for a long time. When I confronted him about who my real mom was, he lost it. I was still a kid, but he threatened me and made a big fuss about it. He didn't want the world to know anything about it, not even the twins. He'd built an image of a perfect family, one my birth almost ruined, and he was horrified at the idea of his affair getting out."

"That asshole." I wrapped my arm around his waist. "That's a horrible way to treat a child."

"Yep. I'm only sticking around at the office to make Noah and Ethan happy. Daddy Dearest called us home and we all had to put on a good show. I mean, it's not a show for Noah and Ethan. They have a different relationship with our dad. As soon as people stop looking, I'm out." Alex searched my face and frowned. "Well. I was going to be out. Now, I think I may stick around for a while. There's this woman in Acquisitions I've got an office thing with."

I rolled my eyes. "The way your brothers bragged about your tattoo skills yesterday, I'm surprised they want you in the office. They believe in you."

“Yeah, they do. I haven’t been able to talk either of them into getting a tattoo, but that’s fine.” Running his fingers over my thigh, he nodded. “Yeah, completely fine. Especially when I get to tattoo you instead.”

I pushed his hand away and scooted back to my seat. “Thank you for telling me that, Alex. I’ll never say a word to anyone. I will add this to the list of reasons I want to punch Gerald, though.”

“Want to give me some of your other reasons?”

I shook my head. “No. Knowing you have a complicated relationship with your dad is just one more reason for me not to voice my complaints.”

“It’s not going to do more damage than he’s already done, Sophia.”

“Do you think you’ll ever tell your brothers?” I buckled up as he started to pull away. “It seems like a lot to hold onto by yourself.”

“They don’t need to worry about this shit.” Alex smiled suddenly. “I wasn’t completely correct in saying no one knows. Obviously, Mom and Dad know, too. I’ve talked about it with Mom. She’s become even more of a mother hen since I found out. I think she’s trying to make sure I know that she thinks of me as her own, but I never doubted that. She’s always been the best mother to me.”

I blew out a shaky breath and fanned my eyes. I was *not* going to cry over hearing him talk so fondly of his mom. I wasn’t going to. I stared out my window and tried to quietly sniff myself back together.

“Hey. Are you crying?” Alex sounded like he was close to laughing rather than concerned. “You’re a sucker, after all. Look at you, crying over a man loving his mother.”

I reached over and slapped his thigh. “Shut up. I’m not crying. It’s just that the most you can hope for as a mother is your kid feeling loved, no matter what. I could tell Mary was great, even as I was trying to run away from her, but hearing

you say that makes me want to hug her so tight. It would've been so easy for you to have ended up as an angry man."

"Who's saying I didn't?"

I grinned. "The tattoos and the scowls aren't fooling me, Alex. I'm not the only sucker here. You're a big softie."

He growled. "We'll see if you're still saying that when I'm tattooing your virgin skin."

*****SOPHIA*****

I gritted my teeth and stared down at Alex with my eyes narrowed into daggers. “Is this how you tattoo every woman who wants a thigh tattoo?”

He lifted his tattoo gun from my skin and looked up at me with a smirk. He’d positioned himself between my thighs with my dress hiked up to my waist and I felt like I was in something between a sex swing and the stirrups at the gynecologist. “Nope.”

I wasn’t sure if I wanted to drag him up my body so he could screw me or if I wanted to kick him away from me and call for help. The tattoo gun going across my skin burned like fire and I was an idiot for choosing my thigh. His elbow kept bumping into my sex, though, and the sensations were combining to make me very confused and very horny. “You don’t?”

He wiped down the lines he’d tattooed so far and lowered his face to press a kiss on my panty-covered clit. “I don’t. This position was chosen for my own pleasure mostly, and some for yours, too. I’m a professional with every other client. With you, though? I thought you might need a little reward system for making it through your first tattoo.”

I winced as he went back to work with the devil gun. Blood rushed to my face and I groaned. It hurt. There was no way

around it. I hadn't even done the smart thing of choosing something tiny. I'd told Alex what I wanted and watched him draw out something even better than I'd imagined, the size of his hand with lines that trailed out on either side. He was still working on the outlines and I was considering the benefits of just an outline.

“Not interested in my reward program?”

I lifted my head to stare at him. “I don't know. Maybe? An outline of a coneflower is cool, right?”

He put the tattoo gun down and turned to face me. “Maybe I should call it an incentive program.”

I came up on my elbows and raised an eyebrow. “I'm not thinking all that clearly right now. Spell it out for me.”

He trailed his hands up my inner thighs and then hooked my panties with one finger to pull them away from my soaked core. I didn't get a chance to even start to lift my hips before he tugged at the material and ripped it. He tore it apart and then flipped the ruined material out of his way.

I gasped. “What am I supposed to wear home? This dress is too short for-”

He spread my lower lips with his glove-covered fingers and inspected me. “Despite how much this is hurting you, you're still swollen and dripping wet for me. You have no idea how fucking sexy that is, Soph.”

I couldn't form words. I watched him with my breath held as he leaned down and ran his tongue from the bottom of my sex, all the way to my clit. His groan vibrated against me and then he was gone and the tattoo gun was moving over my skin again.

Alex's elbow pressed against my bare clit and he held it there. “Don't move or I could ruin one of the lines, Soph. Stay perfectly still and I'll get back to you in just a moment.”

All I could do was cry out his name and hope for some sort of release. The pain was too much. The pleasure wasn't enough. Then his tongue was on my clit again and the pain was just a ghost of its former self. He twisted his tongue

around me and then moved lower to fuck me with it. I gasped for breath as I slammed towards an orgasm, but just before I got there, the tattoo gun was back and Alex took his mouth from me.

It went on like that for so long that I wasn't sure where I was or what was happening. My brain only knew pleasure and pain and Alex. I panted and screamed for him. I begged him to make me come. It was torture.

My thigh burned and then Alex's tongue flicked my clit in tight circles that made my eyes roll. Alex's tongue vanished and then my thigh burned again. It felt like it would never end and like I'd lose my mind before the tattoo or I was finished.

I barely registered what was happening when Alex pulled me out of the chair and bent me over the side of it. Only when his hand gripped my hair and he lifted my head did I see him standing behind me and understand what was about to happen. I broadened my stance on jelly legs and gripped the seat. "Alex, please!"

He plunged his length into me in one hard stroke and gripped my hip in a bruising grip. "Watch."

I did watch. I watched as he set a furious pace, fucking me so hard that I lost my breath. We were both still dressed and the feel of his jeans on the back of my thighs was rough. His face was twisted in pleasure and I didn't recognize my own, it was so transformed by need.

He met my gaze and growled. "Come for me, Soph. Come on my dick before I fill you up."

My body reacted as if his words were law. My toes curled in my shoes, my sex tightened, and my vision went white at the edges as hot pleasure scorched through my body. I came hard with a loud scream and bucked my hips into him as hard as he was thrusting, wanting him as deep as he would go.

Alex drilled into me and then I felt him coming inside me, filling me with his seed. He tugged at my hair when my head started to droop and he watched my face as he fed me every

drop of come he could. When he finished, he leaned into me and wrapped his arms around my waist. “Shit.”

I started to slip and he scooped me up. He settled in the chair and held me in his lap. I leaned into his chest and pressed my face into his neck while catching my breath.

“This is my favorite place to be.” When Alex spoke again, his voice was gravelly and hoarse from shouting my name.

“In the tattoo studio?”

“Inside you.” He shifted, reminding me that he was still inside me, as hard as when we’d started.

I wrapped my arms around his neck and licked his throat. I was feeling more happy cat than human after that orgasm. “Thank God. I’m not sure I’ll ever get another tattoo, no matter how good the reward programs are.”

“I got to tattoo you and that’s enough for me. I won’t ask you for more. You did well, though. You were perfect and let me finish in record time.”

I looked down and saw my thigh was covered in some sort of plastic wrap. “I didn’t realize you’d finished.”

“Wasn’t so bad, huh?”

I twisted so I was straddling him. “It was a fucking nightmare and I’m not sure my thigh will ever be the same, but the orgasm was worth it.”

He groaned when I lifted myself off of his dick and then dropped back down. “Fuck, Soph.”

“I liked watching you fuck me. I like when you get all bossy and rough.” I rolled my eyes. “I also want to punish you a little. Can you keep your hands down to yourself or do I need to find rope in here?”

His eyes narrowed. “I’ll keep my hands down for as long as possible.”

“Welcome to my incentive program for you keeping your hands to yourself.” I lifted myself and started to ride him. He

immediately reached down to stroke my clit. My movements faltered and he took over easily.

“I tried.”

NOAH

There was a noticeable limp to Sophia's walk on Monday morning when she came into her office. I shot a glare at Alex. I was bitter that he hadn't let us come to his studio while he'd tattooed Sophia and that he'd come home looking like he'd won the lottery. To see that he'd *hurt* her, too? It was unacceptable.

I walked over to slam the door shut before pulling Sophia across the room and into my lap after I sat in her desk chair. Pulling her skirt up while she laughed and struggled against my hands, I kept shooting glares at Alex. "What the fuck did you do to her?"

"Noah!" Sophia was breathing hard by the time I got her skirt worked up to her hips but judging by the look in her eyes, it wasn't purely from struggling.

I pulled her legs open so I could see the large covered tattoo on her thigh. I couldn't tell what the design was under the plastic covering but I knew it would be good because Alex was an expert. Still. She was limping too much. "Come here and look at it. Is it okay?"

Sophia scoffed. "What the hell? Of course, it's okay! Also, you can't just invite your brothers over to look at my vagina in the middle of my office!"

I tilted my head so I could see her face. “I was talking about the tattoo, Sophia.”

Her entire face went bright red before she slapped her hands over it. “Oh, my god.”

I couldn’t help laughing. “First of all, I know your pussy is better than okay. It’s amazing and if I needed to check it out, I’d do it my goddamn self. Second of all, you’re limping. I want Alex to get his ass over here and make sure he didn’t fuck something up.”

“Tattoos hurt, asshole. She’s fine.” Alex looked too smug for my liking. “I know because I checked this morning and got a very lovely picture for my troubles.”

I pulled Sophia’s hands from her face. “You sent that dickhead a picture?”

She tugged her skirt down and surprised me by gently kissing me. I felt the tip of her tongue brush over my lips but then she was gone, standing up and straightening her skirt suit. “Of my *thigh*. Because, yes, it does hurt. Apparently, I chose quite the spot for my first and only tattoo.”

“Only?” Alex’s face was really starting to piss me off. “You’re willing to give up that sort of incentive program?”

Sophia’s eyes went dreamy for a moment. “Well...”

I looked up as Randal walked in. I was willing to admit that I’d judged him too quickly. He’d proven himself time and time again in the week I’d been around. I still wished he worked further away and knocked, though.

“The four of you are being summoned for a meeting with Mr. Anderson upstairs.” He looked at Sophia and hesitated. “He wants to see you first.”

Sophia’s body language changed completely upon hearing his words. She lost the soft edge she’d been showing us more and more. It was like watching wax touch cold water, she stiffened up immediately. “Sure. I’ll head up then.”

I glanced over at my brothers to see if they’d noticed her shift and found both of them frowning. I didn’t understand the

mood shift. Our dad could be a hard ass but we'd done our job and he had nothing to complain about. He'd probably lose his shit over us sleeping with Sophia, but we weren't going to advertise that to him. I didn't get why everyone was suddenly stiff and unhappy.

"We'll come up with you." I stood and straightened my suit. "Thanks, Randal."

He nodded at me before shooting another concerned look at Sophia. She sent him a forced smile and then marched out of her office, towards the elevator. Ethan and Alex followed her but I hesitated.

"What's going on?" I asked Randal the question I felt like I couldn't ask anyone else.

Randal shot a hard look my way. "You've worked next to Sophia for a week and I can tell that your respect level has gone way up for her. She's amazing. Yet she's been passed up for every promotion she applies for. Why do you think that is?"

"I don't know and I don't think I like where you're going with this."

He shook his head. "I'm not going to spell anything out for you. Pay attention and it won't take you long to pick up things around here."

"If you're just going to be cryptic, don't bother saying anything at all. It's not helpful." I straightened my suit and moved past him. "If you decide you want to talk to me about it, I'm willing to listen."

Ethan was waiting for me at the elevator. "Sophia was in a rush to get up there. I told her we'd catch the next ride up."

I nodded and shoved my hands in my pockets. The look on Sophia's face was bothering me and I thought about talking to Ethan about it, but it all left a weird feeling in my gut that I didn't like. I didn't want to spread any doubt I was feeling to anyone else.

"Everything good?"

I looked up at Ethan and nodded. “Yeah. Everything’s fine.”

“Do you know what this meeting is about? You met with Dad this morning, didn’t you?”

I nodded. “We had breakfast at the house. He didn’t mention any meetings. He did ask about how things were going. I told him that it was good and that I thought this was a good department for us to start in.”

“Any mention of that weirdness between him and Sophia last week?” The elevator doors opened and we stepped inside, still just the two of us. He hit the button for the top floor and leaned against the wall opposite me. “I got the feeling they don’t especially like each other.”

That bad feeling in my gut grew heavier. I wasn’t going to mention the wink Dad had thrown my way when he’d made a comment about us watching Sophia closely to see how she ran things. It’d given me a gross feeling, knowing that we were involved with Sophia the way we were. Dad didn’t know, though. He was just being Dad. He’d never cheated as far as I knew but he did like to look.

“Noah?”

I shook myself out of my funk. “No, he didn’t mention anything that made me think he doesn’t like her.”

“But you got the feeling that she doesn’t like him, right?”

I frowned. “I don’t know, Ethan. Does it matter?”

The elevator doors opened on the top floor and Dad’s assistant was waiting for us with a smile and two fresh cups of coffee. “Hi! Good morning. Sophia is in with Mr. Anderson and Alex is waiting in the conference room.”

Ethan was staring at me, unmoving. “Of course, it matters. I mean, if-”

I glared at him. “Not now.”

He took his coffee and nodded at the woman before stalking away.

“I hope everything’s okay, Noah. Is there anything I can do for you?” The woman placed her hand on my arm and leaned closer. “If you need some space, you can sit at my desk.”

I just shook my head and walked away. I didn’t need space. I just needed to focus on what mattered. Work. Even as I thought that, a clear image of Sophia crept into my mind.

*****SOPHIA*****

It should've made me feel better that the guys were just on the other side of Gerald's conference room door. Unfortunately, it didn't. Gerald still spoke to my chest, despite my top covering everything up to my neck. He made me feel like I needed to leave and take a shower. He also made me feel utterly disrespected. He'd sent for me and once I was in his office, he made a call and didn't seem like he was in a hurry to end it. It left me sitting across from him, doing my best to not notice the way he looked at me while talking about a golf game he'd recently played with someone.

The list of things I could be doing grew in my head the longer I sat there. Gerald couldn't have made it clearer that he didn't consider me or my time important. I had hundreds of companies to research, dozens of calls to make, appointments to keep, and a team of researchers to direct. None of that mattered, though. Not to Gerald.

At the back of my mind, I felt a real sense of dread that somehow he knew that I was sleeping with his sons. The tattoo on my thigh, done by his son, was a vivid reminder of the wild sex we had just the day before. I'd accepted the idea that I was going to keep sleeping with the guys but facing off with their father made me feel dirty for it. It was strange to suddenly be doing something that I had to keep hidden and I wasn't sure I

liked it. My conscience didn't feel clean and I didn't like knowing that it wasn't when dealing with Gerald.

The sound of Gerald ending his phone call drew my attention back to him just in time for me to see him smirking at my breasts. I crossed my arms over them and met his gaze with a stern expression. Not jumping in to fill the awkward silence made my skin crawl but I managed to keep my lips sealed.

Gerald chuckled and stood up. "I like you, Sophia. You've got spirit."

I took a deep breath and nodded. Still, I kept my mouth shut. I realized I was walking a fine line of being too openly unhappy with the CEO of the company so I wanted to play as nice as possible.

Walking around his desk, coming closer to me, he sat in the chair next to me after pulling it closer. "Tell me how the training is going."

"It's fine. Your sons are all qualified and intelligent, which makes it easy to show them around. They understand everything and catch on quickly so I haven't lost as much time as I thought I would. I'm not sure how much more time they need in my department, though." I kept my back straight and face blank, hiding every emotion I felt towards the guys.

"Only two of them went to school for business." He leaned forward and raised his eyebrows. "Can you tell which one didn't?"

Anger lapped at the edges of my conscience. If I hadn't just learned about Alex's childhood, I still would've found his question awful, but knowing what I knew made me want to scratch his eyes out. "Not at all. They're all three very smart."

"Of course." He smiled and steepled his fingers together. "Do you realize a mistake you made cost the company dearly last week?"

The quick change in topic threw me off, most likely the way he wanted it to. I frowned and shook my head. "I'm sorry?"

He smiled and reached out to pat my knee. “Don’t worry. I’m not going to fire you, Sophia. You fill a very important role here at Anderson Inc..”

My blood ran cold at his touch. I shifted back in my seat to try to get out of his reach. “Can you explain what mistake I made?”

Standing, Gerald walked behind me. “Did you recommend that we make an offer on Boulder Gear?”

I sat perfectly still. “Yes.”

“Did you tell Bill how important it was?”

I glanced at the conference room door and wished the guys were in the office with us. “When I send my research to my manager I always assign a level of importance. When I emailed Bill, I made sure to signify that it needed to be rushed.”

“I spoke to Bill and he never received the information to rush anything. Because of your slip, we missed out on Boulder. Charles Marcum called me this morning to let me know that he just closed the deal. We lost that deal because of your negligence in making sure Bill knew to move quickly.” He rested his hands on my shoulders and began to rub them. “You’re lucky that I like you, Sophia.”

I squeezed my eyes shut and forced myself to keep breathing. “I can forward you the email I sent Bill.”

“That won’t be necessary, Sophia. You just need to be a team player. I know it’s upsetting that Bill beat you for the job, but I expect you to continue to put the company first. These sort of slips won’t be allowed. If your job is too much for you, you could always work under me, like I previously mentioned.” He squeezed my shoulders harder and then strode across the room to open the conference room door. “Boys? Join us.”

I barely had time to correct my face and fight back tears of fury before the guys walked in. What happened next had me questioning my sanity. The moment they walked in, I felt a sense of calm wash over me. All the fury I’d been feeling

eased and my shoulders sank down to where they should've been, instead of up by my ears. It occurred to me that I suddenly felt safe and that before they came in, I hadn't. That thought had my stomach sinking.

Noah's face was set in a hard expression as his eyes moved over me and then to the chair next to me. If he noticed that it was closer to me than it should've been, his face didn't show it. Instead, he casually folded his tall body into the chair and presented a perfect picture of ease as he looked up at his dad. "Did Sophia tell you we're awful and that she'd like to be set free from us?"

Gerald sat in his chair and smiled. "She was actually informing me that I have highly intelligent sons. I believe you boys have impressed Ms. Sophia here."

Ethan pulled up another chair and smiled. "I'm flattered."

I glanced back at where Alex stood behind me and saw the tension around his eyes. I wanted to hug him so badly to ease the anger and pain he felt because of his dad. It made me hate Gerald even more than I already did.

"So, tell me how this is going. Noah?" Gerald folded his hands in front of him on his desk and managed to keep his eyes off my chest while his sons were in the room.

"It's been informative. Sophia runs a tight ship and it's been good to learn from her." Noah looked over at me and I felt the weight of his stare. "You picked a good department for us to start in."

"Father knows best." Gerald laughed. "Sorry. I know you boys hate when I say that. It's true, though. How do you feel about working under Sophia's care for the next week or two? Unless you feel like you've learned all you can from her?"

Ethan gripped the back of my chair and I felt his knuckles gently press into my back. "I'm good with staying in Acquisitions."

"Noah?"

"I feel the same way." Noah turned his head to look at Alex but Gerald made it clear he didn't care what Alex thought.

“Great, then. You’ll stay with Sophia. I’d like to set up daily meetings with you, Sophia, to stay on track of their training. We’ll start tomorrow during lunch.”

I ground my teeth together and gave a curt nod. “Yes, sir.”

I could feel their eyes on me and I was torn between telling them to stop looking at me in case their dad noticed something and telling them to never look away to keep their dad away from me.

*****SOPHIA*****

I went straight home to spend the evening with Lily that night. Then, on Tuesday, I spent the morning going over the Boulder Gear case with Randal. I wanted to be prepared with answers for my lunch meeting with Gerald, but when I reported to his office for our new daily meeting, he just had me sit in front of his desk while he took a call from one of the board members. I clasped the file I'd put together in my hand and found myself thinking about where the line would be with Gerald. How far would he push me before something snapped?

I was dismissed from his office without ever having talked to him about the guys and I spent the rest of the afternoon on edge and angry. Gerald called the guys away a few hours before the end of the day to do more media stuff so I didn't get to see them before I left work. I was grumpy and it was all I could do to make it home without screaming.

Mrs. Johnson walked out in front of my car to stop me as soon as I pulled into the neighborhood and when she started in, I imagined myself telling her to fuck off while I listened to her complain with a forced smile on my face.

“That man isn't right! His hair is bright pink now! And he was cutting up logs all day! I couldn't hear myself think. Now you've got those other hooligans coming over and I'm *this*

close to calling the mayor on you. You're ruining this neighborhood."

"Honestly, Mrs. Johnson, if the worst thing Milo does is dye his hair fun colors and work on his art during daytime hours, you could do worse." I started driving away. "I'm driving away now so I don't have to hear anymore complaints today!"

I was so over the day that I didn't even notice that there were two more vehicles than normal in my driveway until I was out of my car and walking up to the front door. Spinning around, I recognized one of the trucks as Alex's. A spark of energy shot through me and I hurried inside.

Lily greeted me as soon as I had both feet in the house. "Mom! I invited my new friends over for Taco Tuesday!"

Ava walked out of the kitchen carrying a bowl with a suspicious purple substance in it. "She did. She wanted your boyfriends to come over for dinner and she insisted we invite them over."

"They're my friends, too, Aunt Ava." Lily grabbed my hand and tugged me towards the living room. "They're playing with Ginger and Jasper."

I frowned. "Who?"

A tiny yip came from the living room and I rushed in to see Ethan and Alex on the ground with two small puppies. The puppies were twin balls of yellow fluff and the guys were calendar worthy with their sleeves rolled up and their hands busy shaking toys around. My ovaries screamed at me to drag them to my room and make babies. The puppies yipped again and I glanced down at my stomach, as if I was telling my ovaries to shut up. They had no place in any conversation I was having.

Noah appeared at my side and leaned in to press his lips against my cheek. "If you're mad, I had nothing to do with this."

I looked up at him and bit my lip as I took in his messier than usual hair and softened expression. "And if I'm not mad?"

He slid his hand up my back until he was grasping the back of my neck. “Then I have a few dozen ways for you to thank me.”

“Mom! Ginger likes you!”

I looked down and watched one of the fluffballs pawing at my shoe. Without hesitation, I bent over and scooped it up. Up close, the fluff just got cuter. I held her to my chest and felt my eyes turn into cartoon heart eyes when she rested her head against me.

“Ginger and Jasper are going to be spending their days with a highly recommended trainer for a few weeks.” Ethan stood up and moved closer with Jasper in his hands. “I’ll be taking care of everything.”

“Ethan told me that the puppies could visit whenever I want them to!” Lily reached up to pet Ginger. “And I’m going to learn, too, Mom.”

I met Ethan’s eyes. “Oh, yeah?”

Lily rushed on. “Yeah, the trainer can come here and teach me how to train the puppies and how to take care of them! Mom! I’m so excited! I want to scream, but I don’t want to scare the puppies. Can I go outside and scream?”

I thought of Mrs. Johnson and smiled. “Go for it, baby.”

Jack’s voice came from behind me. “I’m busy for a week and you’re already as thick as thieves with new men and settling down with puppies? What gives, babe?”

“Jack!” I turned and hurried into his hug. Holding Ginger out of the way, I grunted when he squeezed me. “What are you doing here? You never come to Taco Tuesday anymore.”

He pinched my chin and turned my face to and fro to inspect me. “You look good. When Ava filled me in on what’s been happening with you, I wanted to come see for myself. Imagine my surprise when I get here and find a fucking sitcom in your living room.”

I hugged him again. “You’ve been gossiping with my sister. That’s never safe for me. You already met the guys?”

He studied me as I pulled away and moved back to stand between Noah, Ethan, and Alex. “We met.”

I stroked Ginger’s head while trying to remain calm, despite having all of my favorite people surprise me after a shit day at work. I almost felt like crying. “Okay, well. I’m going to go change and I’m not going to panic about what the four of you have been talking about. Someone take this adorable puppy from me.”

Alex took her and then we all froze as Lily’s wild screams pierced through the house. I knew I’d be getting a call from Mrs. Johnson as Lily’s screams continued.

“I’ve got a puppy! Hell!”

Pressing my hands over my face, I shook my head and mumbled. “That was her one swear for the week, I guess.”

Jack snorted. “Go change into something cute for these fine young men. I’ll explain to them how you got talked into allowing your seven-year-old one swear word a week.”

“Yep, yep. Thanks for that.” I hurried to my room and leaned against the door after shutting it. My family felt like it’d grown so much in such a short amount of time and the house felt so full of life that I almost felt overwhelmed by it. After years of keeping so much of myself closed off because of what I’d gone through with Davis, I felt like I was breathing air into both lungs for a change.

SOPHIA

“Jack’s a dirty little liar tonight! I did *not* sleep with my college professor.” Leaning over to swat Jack, I scowled at him. “*You* slept with your college professor and then called me on your walk home to tell me that the fifty-year-old man you’d just slept with had better sexy time skills than me!”

Jack’s grin was priceless. “Oh, yeah, I did that. I earned an A and found out what it meant to toss a salad all in one night.”

Noah spit out the water he’d just taken a sip of and started coughing as he choked on it. He patted his chest and glanced at where Lily was lounging in the living room, just one room away from us.

“Don’t worry. Between the TV and the puppies, she hasn’t heard a thing in the last hour.” I grinned and shifted closer to him to pat his thigh. “You’ve traveled the world but you’re still scandalized by a little salad tossing talk?”

Ethan held up his hands. “Wait. How do you know what Soph’s *sexy time skills* are like?”

Ava stretched over the table to grab another brownie. “Oh, this is beautiful. Let me just get this little snack and settle in. Milo, this is what happens when you make weird choices as a child and have to face them in public years later.”

My entire body burned as I realized I'd just outed myself and Jack. I met Jack's gaze and saw that he was laughing at me. Groaning, I slumped lower in my chair and looked anywhere but at the guys. "It was prom night and we don't need to talk about it."

"Um. No, I think we should talk about it." Noah rested his arm along the back of my chair and played with my hair.

"I'm going to let you handle this one, babe." Jack stood up and walked to the fridge. "Anyone want popcorn for the show?"

I flipped him off and sank even lower. "We decided it would be a good idea to lose our virginities to each other and test to see if he was really gay."

Ava choked on her brownie and shook her finger at me. "Don't just make it seem like it was nothing. You two came back to our house that night in a fit of giggles and when Mom asked y'all if you'd done drugs, you both just blurted out that you had sex. Mom cried! I remember hearing her talking to Dad in their bedroom later that night and she felt so bad for you because she thought you didn't know Jack was gay."

I nearly gagged on the embarrassment. "I spent the next year trying to convince her that I wasn't upset that Jack wasn't interested in dating me. It was humiliating. And then you called and told me an old guy was better at sex than me, Jack, and I cried!"

He scoffed. "Those were misguided tears. You were really upset because Troy Broner told all his friends that you were bad at blow jobs."

"Oh, my god, Jack!" I curled into Noah's chest to bury my face. "I never even did *that* with him!"

"Oh, now she can't even say blow job." Jack sat down again. "Anyway, that's the story. Your lady was willing to give up her virginity so I could know if I was gay. And then Troy made up lies about her and I beat his ass."

Noah's chest rumbled under my ear as he spoke. "That's a lot to unpack."

Ethan's voice was full of laughter as he spoke. "From personal experience, you have to be the gayest gay that ever gayed if Sophia's-"

"Oh, my god!" I cut him off and sat up. "Let's talk about the weather. Talk about a hot day, right?"

"Wow, Soph, four out of the five men in this room have been inside you." Ava, doing her job as my little sister to mortify me, so helpfully provided that tidbit.

"Three out of five plan on being there again very soon, from the looks of things." Jack was right up there with Ava at being great at embarrassing me. "I could babysit the three kids if you need a night to yourselves."

Ava tossed a napkin at him. "You shut up."

"Let me know your hourly rates." Alex's deadpan comment made everyone laugh and when I looked at him, he winked.

"If they don't run after this conversation, you might be stuck with them, babe. None of them have flinched at our sordid prom night story." Jack pulled me up and into a hug. "I should go. I only meant to stay for a little bit but this was fun. I like embarrassing you in front of new people."

I held him tight. "You're lucky I love you and it can't be helped."

He pinned me to his chest and spoke over my head to the guys. "And she didn't flinch at the idea of y'all sticking around. That's pretty big."

I pushed away from him and slapped his chest. "Get out of my house. You're nothing but trouble."

Lily walked into the kitchen and hugged Jack's leg. She looked up at me and pouted. "Do Ginger and Jasper have to go home with Ethan, Mom?"

I cut my eyes at Ethan and ran through a myriad of ways to torture him. Before I could come up with something to say to Lily, he spoke up, saving himself. "For now, they do. They need training so they learn how to be the best doggos ever."

What if I sent pictures to your mom when I get them home so you can see that they're safe and sound?"

"Okay, I guess. You'll bring them back tomorrow?" She stuck her lip out even farther and batted her eyes at him. "Please?"

Ethan looked like he was ready to offer her his trust fund. "Of course. They need to see their new best friend, don't they?"

She ran over and hugged him. "Thank you, Ethan!"

I looked up at Jack and sighed. "Do you see what you got me into?"

He smirked. "I do and you're welcome."

Noah eased me into his lap and wrapped an arm around me. "You like it."

I watched as Lily moved on to hugging Alex and smiled as the two of them tried to do a handshake that looked too complicated for them to have had the time to learn. "I do."

"Alright, hold your tears. I'm leaving. It was nice to officially meet you three. Take care of our girl." Jack looked at Ava. "Ava. Take care of my Milo."

Milo looked up from his sketch pad and grinned. "Jack."

"And you take care of everyone, Lily. You run this place like the badass you are. What do we say? Take no crap!" He picked up Lily and hugged her tight. "And what else do we say?"

"Uncle Jack is the best uncle in the world and he's husband material!" She kissed his cheek and they both cheered together. "Marry him, marry him!"

"That's my perfect little wing-girl." Jack put her down and backed away. "Call me tomorrow, babe. We have things to discuss. Like size, duration, O-count."

I swore. "Leave, Jack!"

Noah held me tighter. "It's fun here."

*****SOPHIA*****

I stared up at the ceiling in my bedroom after everyone left that night and Lily was fast asleep. My brain was going too fast for me to fall asleep. Thoughts of the guys, work, my family, the combination of all those things, had me stuck in a weird place. Things were good and fun but they were also messy, especially at work. I was scared of how messy they could get. No matter how I looked at it, though, I didn't want to pretend like the guys didn't make me feel happy and lighter than I had in too long.

I was worried I was letting the guys too far in, but they fit into my family so well. Lily loved them already and Ava seemed smitten, too. Milo had put his drawings away finally to invite the guys into his studio, a sure sign that he liked them, too. Our age gap didn't bother me that much when we were with my family and I knew they weren't judging me for it. No one had made a single cougar comment. Everything in my life made it easy to let them in, and that made me nervous. Not that it mattered. I wasn't going to stop them from showing up and making me feel beautiful and special.

I rolled over and punched my pillow, trying to pretend like it was the reason I couldn't fall asleep. I saw my phone light up from my new position and reached over to grab it.

Noah: Are you up?

I rolled my eyes as my smile grew wide. *I'm a little too old for you up texts.*

Noah: *Come to your window.*

I gasped and flung my blanket back. Making sure my door was shut, I quickly locked it. Pulling my curtains aside, I lifted my window and stuck my head out to see Noah standing a few feet away, his eyes narrowed on me. "What are you doing?"

He grabbed the window sill and easily pulled himself up and inside. Once he stood up to his full height, he reached for me. Grabbing the front of my sleep t-shirt, he tugged me close. "I went home and I tried to stay there, Soph, but I'm dying to touch you."

I ignited with need. Whispering back at him, I felt like a teenager again. "You're touching me. Is that all you needed?"

He walked me backwards. "No."

The back of my knees hit the bed and I sank down on it. Looking up at him, I watched him grip his belt and undo it. "What do you need, then, Noah?"

He slowly pulled his belt free. "I need to be inside you. Spread your legs for me, Soph."

I did as he said and watched as he unzipped his pants and pushed them low enough to pull his cock out. My mouth watered at the sight of him, hard and angry looking at the tip. His need was slowly leaking out and my mouth watered for him.

He stepped forward and stroked my cheek. "Suck me, Soph."

I whimpered in need and nodded as I leaned forward. I loved hearing his voice harshen as he struggled to keep his control.

"Lift your shirt up." He saw I was wearing panties and growled. "Take those off, Sophia. I want to see that pretty pussy leaking for me."

Before I could take them off, he leaned down and tugged them down my thighs roughly. Throwing them across the

room, he ran his fingers over my lower lips and then pushed my legs further apart. My heart raced as he pushed two thick fingers inside me and curled them.

Noah swore under his breath and picked me up like I wasn't a fully grown human. He swung me around and settled me on my back with my head hanging off the bed and my legs spread for him. Pulling my shirt up, he cupped my breasts. "I need to be able to watch this pussy as I stretch it out."

I gripped his thighs and opened my mouth, nervous for the new angle. Noah gripped his cock and rubbed the tip against my lips, smearing precum over them. I flicked my tongue out to taste him and looked up to see him watching me. As he shifted away slightly, I swallowed my nerves and just said what I was almost too embarrassed to say. "I've never done it like this before. Just go easy on me."

He bent down and kissed me. "Do you want to move? I-"

I pushed him away and wrapped my fingers around his length. "No."

"Soph, I-" He lost the rest of his words as I took his tip into my mouth and sucked. Arching over me, more of his cock slid over my tongue and right when I started to feel slightly panicked, his fingers pushed inside me again. My jaw relaxed and more of him slid into my mouth. "That's it, Soph. Suck me with that velvet mouth of yours."

The feeling of his tip at the back of my throat triggered my gag response but I fought it. Squeezing his hips, I stroked him with my tongue and sucked with everything I had. Just when I thought I couldn't take more, he added a third finger and fucked me with them in quick, shallow thrusts. My eyes rolled and I lifted my hips to give him even better access. In response, he ran his other hand through my wetness and pressed the tip of a finger against my ass. I gasped and his shaft lodged deeper in my throat. There was no stopping my gag but Noah pulled out until just the tip remained in my mouth and I regained my control in time for him to slide deep again.

The sensation of him fingering me kept my mind distracted from the feeling of being choked and I managed to lift my head and take him deeper. That earned me a grunt from Noah and a fourth finger. He pulled those fingers out, slapped my sex, and thrust them deep again. I was stretched around his fingers and the sting from the slap settled around my clit in a shocking way. It pulsed and felt wired for pleasure. The next time he pulled his fingers out and slapped me, I pulled his hips closer so I could have more of his cock.

I moaned around him as he pumped his hips and fucked my mouth. His fingers were in me again, thrusting faster. He had another finger in my ass and I slammed my knees together as the first waves of an orgasm rolled in, just for him to pry them apart.

“Come on my fingers, Soph. Let me see it.” He fucked my mouth faster and when I gagged, he tried to pull out but I wouldn’t let him. I sucked at his base even as my thighs shook and my lungs burned. I needed air but I wanted to come more. “Goddamn, Soph. Yes, suck me harder.”

The next slap to my clit sent me over the edge. I screamed around his dick and my lower half went crazy as the pressure built higher and higher until it snapped and I felt a rush of fluid leaving my body. I bucked and tried to wiggle away from him as the pleasure just continued to grow bigger and bigger. He held me down and continued to finger me as more of the hot liquid sprayed out of my core. I gasped and dug my nails into his thighs while I choked on his dick without caring. Noah thrust his hips, driving his dick into the back of my throat and deeper until he froze and let out a wild growl. His come flooded my mouth and leaked out around my lips, leaving me messy and swallowing as fast as I could while my body didn’t belong to me. He owned me when he made me come like that. I was his.

Noah, probably thinking he’d pushed me too hard, pulled out and quickly pulled me up on my knees as I took big, gasping breaths of air and vibrated from the orgasm he’d given me. I could barely sit up but when I managed to come back down to earth and look up at him, I gave him a weak smile.

He wiped his come from my face and when I opened my mouth to clean his fingers, he pressed his still hard dick into my stomach. “I didn’t go easy. I’m sorry.”

I quirked an eyebrow. “You- I-... I want more.”

*****NOAH*****

I picked Sophia up and tossed her higher up the bed. “Shirt off. I don’t want anything between us.”

She yanked her shirt off and even though the lights were off in her room, there was enough moonlight coming through the open window that I could see everything. Her full breasts, soft stomach, wet pussy and ass that were still leaking for me. She was wide-eyed and hungry to take me inside her sweet body. I watched as she trailed her fingers over her breasts and down her stomach, until she rubbed her clit. “Undress for me, Noah.”

I yanked my clothes off in a hurry and put one knee on the bed before pausing. “Is your door locked?”

She nodded and chewed at her bottom lip.

I climbed up the bed and hovered over her, bracing myself with my fists pressed into the bed on either side of her head. “I’ve dreamed of your pussy every night. Tonight at dinner, I wanted to bend you over the table and sink every inch I’ve got as deep as I could get them. I’m not the jealous type but hearing about another man being inside you made me crazy. I wanted to spit on this pussy and claim it as mine. I wanted to make you scream for me so everyone would hear. You make me crazy.”

She ran her nails down my chest and stomach until she reached my dick. Gripping it, she rubbed the tip over her clit. “Claim it.”

Maybe there was something twisted in my head, but I felt possessed. I gripped her thighs and went back on my knees so I could lean down and spit on her pussy. I rubbed it into her lips and over her clit. “Fucking hell, Soph. I have to be inside you.”

She opened her thighs wide to welcome my hips and before she could finish wrapping her arms around my neck, I filled her with a single thrust. Her core was tight around me but she was dripping wet and soft. I stared down at where we were connected and then up at her face. Her mouth was open in a silent cry and I covered it with my hand across her lower face.

I wrapped my other arm under her shoulder so I could grip the back of her neck and hold her still as I fucked her. My first thrust was slow and hard and her tits swayed with the force. Wanting to see it again, I repeated the thrust. Slow and hard, as deep as I could get with every stroke, I fucked her.

Sophia gripped my hair and panted into my hand while hugging my hips with her thighs. Her eyes were dilated and I could feel her walls pulsing around me. She was as into what we were doing as I was and there wasn't a doubt in my mind about how much she wanted me.

I continued the slow and deep thrusts and pressed my lips to her ear. “You're mine, Soph. This pussy, this body, all of it's mine. Say it.”

She tugged harder at my hair and lifted her hips as much as she could to meet my thrusts. She moaned into my palm. When I moved my hand, she lifted her mouth to mine and whispered against my lips. “Yours. And theirs.”

Something in the back of my mind clicked into place. I was demanding ownership over her and her gentle reminder that my brothers were a part of what we were doing, too, forced the connection between my head and my heart. She wasn't just mine. She was ours. Hearing her accept that and even embrace it filled me with even more passion for her. She didn't say

what she thought I wanted to hear. She spoke her truth and her truth was a pure bond to all three of us.

I ran my knuckle over her lips. “Good girl.”

Her eyes flared before they went even softer than before. She didn’t want to like being called a good girl, but she did.

I nodded at her even as I thrust faster. “Fucking embrace it. You’re our good girl. You’re *my* good girl. So much power and control everywhere else, but when it’s just us, like this, you’re as sweet as a kitten. You want to do what you’re told and let us come all over that pretty face. You want to let us fuck you however we want. You’re not just a good girl, Soph. You’re the best girl.”

She whimpered and squeezed her eyes shut.

I sat up, taking her with me, and sat with her in my lap, still impaled on my cock. “You take care of everything everywhere else. Here, I’ll take care of you. We’ll take care of you, Soph.”

She opened her eyes and met mine. She lifted her mouth towards mine and when I kissed her, she moaned. Her walls tightened around my cock and she held onto me tight. “Yes!”

“Good fucking girl.” Flipping her over onto her stomach, I slid into her from behind and wrapped my arm around her neck in a loose grip. She gripped my arm and arched her back for me, so I gave her what she needed. *More*. I drove my dick into her hard enough for our skin to slap together and I didn’t stop. “Reach back and spread yourself open for me.”

Without hesitation, she did. I pulled out of her core and slowly pressed into her ass. I watched her for signs of pain but she stayed perfectly still and relaxed. Her ass was so tight that it almost hurt, but I got off on knowing how much she trusted me to take care of her.

After a few thrusts, I was inside her ass and she moaned for me. I raked my teeth over the back of her neck and growled. “Spread your legs out, Sophia. Let that clit grind into the bed while I fuck your ass.”

She cried out with my first full thrust. “Oh, god. Oh, god. Yes, Noah!”

I thrust again and grunted at the pleasure coursing through my body. “Quiet. If I have to stop now, I think I’d lose my mind, Soph.”

She sank her teeth into my arm and groaned. The sound was muffled enough.

I let go. I fucked her ass harder and faster, driving her clit into the bed below. She only lasted a few thrusts before she was coming again. I wanted to see her squirt again and I wanted to know when I was done with her that she’d come enough to leave her satisfied. I fucked her through her orgasm, grinding her clit into the mattress. When my arm didn’t keep her quiet enough, I wrapped my hand over her mouth instead and tightened my arm around her neck just enough for her to buck against me.

She came again and then again while I took her ass. The last time she came, I felt her come splash out around my thighs and I gave in to the pulsing need to come. The dark part of my brain took over and I pulled out of her ass so I could press my tip into her pussy and fill her core with my come. I didn’t know or care if she was on birth control in the moment. I just wanted my come inside her, marking her as mine.

I collapsed on top of her and had to catch my breath before rolling to the side and pulling her on top of me. She curled into my chest and struggled to settle her own breathing. I stroked my hands up and down her back, feeling her relax completely. Just when her breathing started to deepen, a bolt of light flashed through the room from the open window.

I rolled Sophia under me to hide her and growled out in the direction of the light. “What the fuck are you doing?!”

“This is the police! We have you surrounded!”

*****SOPHIA*****

Standing on my front yard with a blanket wrapped around my naked body while Noah stood next to me in just his dress pants wasn't how I thought the night would end. I'd been well on my way to sleep when a team of cops started shouting at us through my bedroom window. Noah had been dragged out of said window, cuffed, and left to stand naked in front of my nosy neighbors. I'd sprung into action as fast as my shock and fear had allowed, shouting out of my window at the group of cops to let Noah go while also demanding to know what the hell they were doing.

After a quick clarification, they uncuffed Noah and let him put on his pants. I'd met him at the front of the house in my blanket with Milo and Ava at my heels. I couldn't hug him without opening my blanket so I just pressed my face into his chest and sank into him when he wrapped his arms around me.

If I was angry, Noah was furious. Even while holding me, he ripped everyone a new one. "I'm pretty sure it's not fucking protocol to drag a man out of his girlfriend's house without stopping to ask a single question. You scared her and left her exposed while half of your fucking men gawked through the window at her. There's a child in that house and you could've just traumatized her for life. Also, your response time is fucking atrocious. You said someone called you when they

saw me go in through Soph's window and you're *just now* showing up?"

Ava stood beside me, shaking from how angry she was. "You saw my sister naked? What the fuck is wrong with y'all?"

I noticed Mrs. Johnson standing at the end of my driveway and seethed. "You! You called them, didn't you?"

She crossed her arms and lifted her nose higher in the air. "I saw him crawling in through the window. How was I to know that he wasn't a burglar? I just knew he was one of the new hooligans hanging around here."

"So you knew it was one of my boy- one of my friends and you still called the cops?" I marched towards her. "You could've gotten someone killed!"

"This used to be a nice neighborhood!" She glared at the cops. "You should arrest her for lewd behavior!"

"If you don't leave my family alone, they're going to be arresting me for beating up an old lady."

Noah scooped me up and easily tossed me over his shoulder, blanket and all. "Let's get you inside before you do get tossed in a jail cell for threatening people."

I hung there, humiliated and furious. I'd been caught sneaking a guy into my room. Every cop there, my sister and Milo, all my neighbors officially knew my private business. They even knew the size of Noah's dick if they'd gotten there early enough. I couldn't believe what was supposed to be a secret meeting had been exposed so publicly.

"Are we done here?" Noah's voice was hard, all traces of the pleasure-filled gravel gone.

"I'm sorry again, Mr. Anderson. We'll have a talk with Mrs. Johnson about abusing emergency services. This isn't her first call, I'm hearing. If you need anything, just call the sheriff's office and ask for Sheriff Landing."

Noah was already walking away. He carried me through the house, stopped at Lily's door so I could check on her, and then

into my bedroom. He put me down and walked over to the window to shut and lock it before pulling the curtains shut. “I hate to think what they would’ve done if the window hadn’t been open.”

I sat on the edge of my bed and wrapped my blanket around me tighter when I saw Ava and Milo inching their way in. “Not a word, Ava.”

She waved her hand. “So what if you’re sneaking your boyfriend in? It’s your house and you’re a grown woman.”

“I’m just glad they didn’t go into my shed.” Milo wiped imaginary sweat off his forehead and whistled. “Talk about lucky.”

Ava elbowed him. “I told you not to keep so much weed in there that you could get in trouble.”

“Sorry!”

Noah grabbed his shirt from the ground and pulled it on. While doing the buttons, he watched me. “I’m sorry. If I hadn’t crawled in through the window, the cops wouldn’t have been here at all.”

I shot a look at Ava. “Aren’t you two going back to bed?”

She winked and backed out of my room. “Say less. Go ahead and finish whatever y’all had going on. We’ll just be in our room, celebrating you getting your groove back.”

I groaned and flopped back in the bed after they closed the door. “Well. I guess it could’ve been worse.”

Noah sat down next to me and leaned over so I could see his face. “Oh, yeah?”

I nodded. “You could’ve still been inside me.”

“I would’ve been forced to kill them if they dragged me out of you before we were finished.” He stroked my hair out of my face and smiled. “It was memorable.”

I rolled my eyes but found myself smiling back. “Can’t say I’ll ever be able to forget it. I’m sure my neighbors won’t,

either. I think I saw Mr. Jimmy peeking out of his window at your ass.”

“I guess I should go now that I’ve scandalized the neighbors and embarrassed you.” He sat back and sighed. “Ethan and Alex will love this story.”

I sat up and watched him finish getting dressed. I wanted to ask him to stay but that was crazy. I was letting things get out of hand. “Okay. Thanks.”

He stopped mid-movement and dropped the shoe he’d been pulling on. “What’s wrong?”

I forced a smile and shook my head. “Nothing. Nothing! I’m just tired.”

He finished pulling on his shoe and walked over to stand right in front of me. “Liar.”

“I’m not lying, Noah.” I felt myself getting worked up and tried to hold my tongue.

“Coward.” His smirk said he knew what he was doing. “Say what you’re thinking.”

I stood up and still had to glare up at him. “I’m not a coward.”

“Then prove it.”

“I don’t want you to leave!” I shoved my way around him, still clutching the blanket around myself. “It’s stupid and it doesn’t matter. I was just having a moment. We didn’t have to make it a thing.”

I waited for him to say something snarky back but he was silent. I had my back to him and as the silence stretched on, I was more and more embarrassed.

“I’m not being clingy. I just like cuddling, but it doesn’t matter. I sleep just fine all by my-” I turned around and saw that Noah was naked again, standing next to my bed with laughter sparkling in his eyes. “What?”

He pulled back the sheet and gestured for me to get in. “I was only leaving because I thought that you didn’t want us

staying over. You've extended the invitation now, so there are no take-backs. Get in the bed and cuddle."

My heart ached at the sweetness. My brain wanted to argue more but I just dropped the blanket on the end of the bed and climbed in. Noah fixed the blanket and crawled in behind me, wrapping his larger body around mine.

"You like me." He kissed the back of my head. "You can't even deny it. You were ready to throw a tantrum at the idea of me leaving."

I groaned. "Shut up, Noah."

"You even started to call me your boyfriend."

"You called me your girlfriend first!" Taking a deep breath, I tried again. "I only almost let that word slip because you'd said girlfriend already. I was just tongue-tied."

"It's fine. I can be your boyfriend." He laughed when I grunted at him. "I'll let Ethan and Alex know that our roles have changed. From sex toys to boyfriends. We made it."

"You're not funny."

He tugged me over until I was on top of him. "Not usually."

I straddled his hips and sat up. "I won't be able to sleep with all of your smugness hanging around."

He moaned and gripped my hips. "Fuck sleeping."

I felt him harden beneath me and rolled my hips. "I should kick you out now."

"You'd better call the cops back. I'm not leaving any other way."

I leaned forward and kissed him while he gripped my ass and lifted me enough for him to press his shaft into my core. When I sat back, I sank fully onto him and moaned. "Noah..."

He nodded as he cupped my breasts. "That's right, Soph. Ride me like a good girl."

Pleasure worked its way through my body, into each of my limbs, and I nodded at Noah. I didn't know how the guys

knew each and every one of my kinks, but they did and they used them to take me that much closer to the edge of my sanity.

By the time Noah was done with me, I was limp and I wouldn't have noticed if he slipped out. He didn't, though. He stayed next to me for the rest of the night and only snuck out right before Lily woke up. And it was only after he'd given me a good morning kiss and told me I was beautiful. I was in too deep but there was no helping me at that point.

SOPHIA

“Mr. Anderson asked me to have you wait in his office. He’s in a meeting in the conference room right now but he’ll join you soon.” Tiffany frowned and looked me over. “You’ve been spending a lot of time with Mr. Anderson.”

I raised my eyebrows at her. “And?”

She pressed her lips together and shrugged. “It’s just something I’ve noticed.”

I let myself into Gerald’s office and pulled out my phone once I sat down in my normal chair. Ignoring Tiffany, my mood wasn’t bad despite having to deal with Gerald. The morning had been productive and fun. That wasn’t something I’d ever considered possible at work, not in a real way, but I’d had fun working with the guys. In a different world, it would’ve been amazing to work with them somewhere far away from Gerald.

Alex: I never thought Noah would be the criminal of the family. You’re corrupting my brother, Soph.

My cheeks heated. I made Noah promise he wouldn’t tell anyone that story. He’s dead to me.

Noah: I hear that I’m dead to you? And after I gave into your cuddle demands?

Alex: Don't text Noah back before you text me back. His head is already too big, as it is.

I opened a new text to Ethan, just to mess with them. *Your brothers are already texting me. Do you think that's an abnormal level of attachment? Should I distance myself from them?*

Alex: That was mean.

Noah: Really?

Ethan: Distance yourself with me.

Noah: Aren't you supposed to be meeting with Dad? How are you free to torment me via text?

Mood dampened. I blew out a big breath and closed my phone. I didn't want to talk to them about Gerald. I didn't want to admit that I was being given the runaround in a professional setting, either. I'd always been in control of my professional life but Gerald seemed to be enjoying taking my control away.

I looked out at the view of Dallas and tried to think about where I was going. If Gerald didn't get out of my way, I was stuck. Worse than being stuck was being Gerald's plaything to bring out and bat around when he was bored.

I had a family to support so walking away wasn't going to happen. Until I had something else lined up, I wasn't going anywhere. I would continue going up to Gerald's office everyday during my lunch and I'd just...deal with it.

The conference room door opened and Gerald walked in with another man I didn't recognize. Gerald strode to the drink cabinet on the other side of the office and pulled out two glasses. "A celebratory drink is in order, Matthew. What's your poison?"

The man eyed me up but ignored me the same way Gerald was. "Scotch."

"There's nothing better than a scotch to celebrate a win like the one we just had. Well..." Gerald's smile felt greasy as he ran his eyes up and down my body. "There might be one thing better."

My fight or flight was triggered with that look and I had to grip the chair arms to stay seated. “Gerald, if you’re busy, I can just come back later.”

He came over to stand behind me and started rubbing my shoulders like always. His fingers dipped lower than normal and he groaned. “So tense. That’s why I think you should take on a job more fitting, something easier. You just need to learn to relax and let loose. Isn’t that right, Matthew?”

Matthew’s eyes settled on my chest and he licked his lips when Gerald’s fingers hooked on my blouse and tugged it open slightly. “Very right, indeed.”

Gerald pretended to fix my shirt but just ran his hands over my chest. “Let me just fix your shirt for you, sweetheart.”

I pushed his hands away and stood up. “I’ve got it. I think I should get back to work.”

“Sit back down, Sophia. Our meetings are very important to me and I refuse to miss one. Sit down and smile about what a great deal Matthew and I just closed.” Gerald walked back over to the drink cabinet. “Would you like a scotch, Sophia?”

I was trapped. The longer I sat there, the worse I felt. I shook my head and clung to the hope that the meeting would be over soon.

“You’re no fun, Sophia.” Matthew moved closer to me but continued his conversation with Gerald. I could smell the overwhelming scent of his cologne and my stomach turned.

Feeling desperate, I opened my phone by my side and sent an SOS text to Randal. He knew what I meant and would come up with a way to get me out of Gerald’s office.

Barely three minutes passed, I knew because I was counting each second, and there was a firm knock at the door. I kept my face straight ahead and held my breath as the door opened. I prayed it was Randal, coming to claim an emergency.

“Dad?” Ethan. Ethan had come to hopefully save me. “There’s something weird going on with one of the accounts we’ve been researching. I really need Sophia back in the office to take care of it.”

I shot out of my chair and rushed around towards Ethan. “Is it the Grady account? I tried to talk to Mr. Grady this morning about it, but he promised to call me back.”

“Yeah, it’s that one.” Ethan smiled at his dad. “Sorry to interrupt, Dad. I wouldn’t do it if it wasn’t necessary.”

Gerald’s voice was tight as he replied. “Of course, son. Go on. I’ll just find Sophia later.”

A chill ran down my spine and I all but pole-vaulted out of there. The elevator was already open and I got in and immediately stabbed the button for the abandoned records floor. I was close to losing it and I just needed to get out of view so no one watched me crumble.

Ethan brushed his hand over my arm and frowned when I flinched away from him. “Sophia, what the fuck is going on? You sent me an SOS text and now you look like you’re about to pass out.”

I watched the floors as we slowly descended. “I’m sorry. I-”

He waited after I cut myself off but when I didn’t say anything else, he stepped back and just watched me. I don’t know why I thought he wouldn’t follow me when I left the elevator, but he did.

Steve took one look at me and jumped out of his chair. “Sophia?”

I waved him off and broke out in a run to get to my private space. I tried to close the door, but Ethan was right behind me, slipping inside with me. He shut the door behind him and leaned against it but I couldn’t wait anymore. I let out a frustrated cry and swiped a pile of folders to the floor. Same folders, different day.

I destroyed the room and then sank to my knees in the middle of my mess. I didn’t want to deal with Gerald anymore. He was getting worse and I wasn’t sure how much more I could take.

*****ETHAN*****

I knelt in front of Sophia and caught her face in my hands. There were big tears in her eyes that fell as soon as she looked at me. Her bottom lip wobbled and that was all it took for me to drag her into my chest and hold her. I didn't know what the fuck happened but I swore to myself that I'd make it right.

I sat back against a desk and held her in my lap. Stroking her hair, I did what our mom had always done for us when we were upset; I gently rocked her.

I'd only known Sophia for a little while but she was tough. Seeing her crying made me antsy. It was like there was something big and dark looming over my head but I couldn't see it yet. I just wanted to make her feel better.

Sophia cried into my chest and held onto me with two fistfuls of my shirt. She was shaking in my arms and making the most heartbreaking whimpers I'd ever heard.

"Soph? What happened?" The growing pit in my stomach needed to know that she was okay.

She lifted her head and her red-rimmed eyes looked greener than ever. "I hate him. I fucking hate him, Ethan. I've never felt so disgusted and...scared. I don't want to go back there. I don't want to be here at all. I just-"

My shocked face registered to her and she cut herself off. I shook my head and cleared my throat. “What happened?”

She looked away and tried to climb out of my lap. “Nothing. I’m just having a weird day. I’m... I’m sorry.”

I held her where she was. “Who do you hate, Sophia?”

She wiped her eyes as more tears leaked out but she looked anywhere but at me. Her voice cracked when she spoke. “The guy with your dad.”

Something in the back of my mind said she was lying but I didn’t understand why she’d lie to me about it. Or, if I did, I didn’t want to think about it. “What about him?”

She pushed at my chest until I let her move off of me and as I watched, she started methodically picking up the folders she’d thrown around. Judging by the state of them, I had to wonder how many times she’d done the same thing before. “He was just a pig. Forget it.”

“No. I’m not going to forget it. Tell me what happened. I’ve never seen you like this, Sophia.”

“You’ve only known me for a little over a week, Ethan. Maybe I’m always like this. Maybe I’m just a messy person who throws tantrums a lot.” She froze and her shoulders sank. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be rude to you. I’m just... Shit like this happens sometimes in this world and there’s not always a way to fix it.”

I sat up. “Explain, Sophia.”

“That guy was just a pig. He talked to my chest and rubbed my shoulders. It was just creepy and I didn’t like it. It’s infuriating to know I’m smart and talented and then be treated like a pair of tits for someone to ogle. Sometimes, I can handle it. And then there are days like today. I just couldn’t sit there for a minute more.”

Fury burned its way up from my stomach and filled me until all I could think about was breaking that guy’s jaw. “Why didn’t my dad do anything to stop him?”

Sophia looked away too quickly. Her lip wobbled again but she fought back more tears. “Maybe he didn’t notice.”

“I’m sorry, Soph. Men like that are disgusting. I’ll take care of it. You’ll never have to see him again.” I thought I was helping but her eyes went wide and she shook her head so hard her hair flew everywhere.

“No! No. Just...leave it alone, please. I have to deal with it myself.” She saw me start to argue and held up her hands. “I’m eleven years older than you, Ethan. Do you know how fucked up it is that I’m having you take care of me? Not to mention that I’m supposed to be training you. This is wrong on so many levels. I won’t let you get involved.”

“You won’t *let* me get involved?” I frowned. “Sophia, there are eleven years between us but not the ones that would make it acceptable for you to act like I’m a child who can’t help.”

She sank even lower. “No, I didn’t mean it like that. I just mean... I don’t want anyone else involved. I’ve been trying to get a promotion for three years. If I ever want to move up, I can’t be seen as a complainer. It doesn’t matter how valid the complaints are. I have to be better than everyone and also appear manageable. If you talk to anyone for me, it’ll hurt my chances in the future.”

My stomach felt like there were rocks inside it. “Sophia... That’s fucked up.”

She went back to picking up folders. “Yeah, it is. But I’m not going to change it from my current position, so I just have to deal with it for now.”

I didn’t mention anything but I fully planned on talking to Dad. I knew how she felt, but she didn’t know Dad like I did. He wouldn’t let her be treated that way. He’d step in.

“Promise me, Ethan.”

I cleared my throat and nodded. “I promise.”

I didn’t like lying to her, but I had to do something. I couldn’t let her go on feeling the way she was. She looked so defeated and overwhelmed. I had to try to do something.

“I’m sorry you saw all of this. This is the place I come when I’m overwhelmed. I like to destroy this place and then put it back together before leaving. It’s therapeutic.” Sophia looked up at me through her lashes and smiled timidly. “Do you think I’ve lost it?”

I pulled her into my lap again and shook my head. “Not at all. It looked kind of nice actually.”

Her eyes brightened and she almost looked like her normal self. “Should we...do it together?”

“It?” I blushed when she laughed and I realized what she’d meant. “Shit. Sorry. I didn’t mean-”

She gently kissed me and rolled her eyes. “Come on. Make a mess with me.”

*****SOPHIA*****

I passed Ethan another stack of folders and watched as he threw them across the room. My blood heated at watching him do it. I knew it was silly and didn't make a lot of sense, but he was there, doing it with me. He was supporting me. After that meeting with Gerald, I felt like I shouldn't be able to get turned on, but Ethan brought me back to the moment and made me feel okay again.

He scooped up a bunch of folders from the floor and tossed them in the air. "Fuck these folders."

I laughed and threw myself into his arms. He caught me easily and cupped my ass so I wrapped my legs around him. "Thanks for making me feel better."

He nodded. "Anytime. I won't even let on that I'm sad you didn't mean to send me that SOS text."

I pressed my lips to his and ran my hands through his messy hair. "If I'd known that you'd show up and rescue me in less than four minutes, I would've texted you on purpose."

He hardened against me and tried to put me down. "Shit. I'm sorry, Soph. I'm not trying to--"

I kissed him harder and locked my arms and legs around him. Stroking my tongue over his lips, I deepened the kiss until he walked me backwards into a wall. With a grunt, I

looked up at him and found him staring back at me with hunger clear on his face.

“I don’t want to push you, Soph.” He ground his hips into me and swore. “I’m trying to be a gentleman, I swear.”

I forced my hands between us and gripped his belt. “Don’t be. I just want you right now. I’m breaking all of my rules but I need to feel you. I need to feel something good.”

“Goddammit, Soph.” He kissed me then, giving everything to me. My head bumped the wall behind me and our tongues danced against each other while I jerkily undid his pants and worked my hand inside.

Ethan pulled back enough to shove his pants down and drag my panties to the side. Then he was sliding into me, pinning me to the wall as he did, and still kissing me like we’d never have another chance. I held onto his hair as he filled me over and over again. We panted into each other’s mouths as he slowly fucked me against the wall.

I gasped when he spun us away from the wall and sat me down on top of a file-covered desk and he swallowed that sound just like every other one I made. He held my thighs open and then reached down to circle my clit. His steady, slow pace drove me crazy and I knew that was what he wanted when I met his gaze. He was taking his time, driving me higher at his own pace.

“Please, Ethan.” I begged against his lips. “*Please.*”

He pushed me back so I was flat on the desk and drew my legs over his shoulders. He leaned over me and pumped his cock into me harder, but just as slowly. When my eyes fluttered closed, he gripped my chin and held my face. “Eyes on me.”

I looked up at him and moaned. “Ethan, god, yes. You feel so good.”

He slipped his fingers into my mouth and thrust into me harder. “Suck, Soph. You need to be quiet when you come.”

I sucked his fingers like he said and watched as he licked his lips and drank me in. His eyes were everywhere all at once.

“I haven’t been able to stop seeing your face with my come all over it, Soph. If we weren’t at work, I’d push you down and come all over you. I’d call Alex and Noah up to join in. You want that, don’t you? You want us to come all over you, paint that pretty face white?” He nodded my head up and down with his fingers. “I can feel your squeezing me at the idea. You’re a dirty girl, Soph.”

My face burned but I could only feel pleasure as he nearly folded me in half and fucked me harder. It was intoxicating to watch him change from the sweet brother to the filthy, dominant one. I did that to him.

“I’m going to come inside you today, Soph, and you’re going to go back downstairs and finish your work day with my come leaking out of you.” He pumped faster, getting close to his end. “Come on my cock. Milk my come out of me, Soph.”

My back arched and I tightened all over as I came on his command. His fingers muffled my cries of pleasure and then he was driving into me harder and my voice gave out as my body sucked at his cock. When he came, he bared his teeth and growled my name. So much of his come filled me that I could already feel it leaking down my ass. I shook as my orgasm started to ease up and Ethan loosened his grip on my thigh. When he pulled his fingers from my mouth, I watched him wipe my spit on his lower stomach with a smile. He was just as dirty as me and there was something so comforting in knowing that sweet Ethan turned raunchy for me.

“You’re going to kill me.” He slowly pulled out of my sex and tucked my panties back into place. “I never knew sex could be this good. It was great before, but this... Fucking you is the stuff of gods, Sophia.”

I slowly sat up and looped my tired arms around his waist. “You’re a flatterer.”

“I need another uninterrupted night with you. The things I want to do to you...” He fixed his pants and then took the time to run his fingers through my hair and straighten it. When I did the same to his hair, he smiled. “There’s no fixing it.”

“I love your hair. It’s a little hint of the man inside.”

“I love your hair, too. It’s fun to hold onto and pull.” He laughed when my mouth fell open. Leaning forward, he kissed me and cupped my face in his hands. “I love seeing you smiling because of something I did.”

My heart thumped faster. “Thank you for being here for me. I hate that you saw me cry, though.”

“You want to see me cry to make it even?”

I laughed and pushed at his shoulder. “Let me up so I can clean up now.”

“I can do it for you.”

I shook my head. “It’s part of my process. You can stand back and watch me if you want.”

He picked me up and let me slide down his front until my feet touched the ground. “I think I’ll do just that.”

*****ALEX*****

Family dinners were the bane of my existence but there was no getting out of them. Especially not when Noah and Ethan went along with the idea so quickly. Sitting across from our dad wasn't my idea of a good time and not even seeing Mom made up for it some nights.

Mom sat next to me at the table and chatted happily about her day until Ethan cleared his throat and fixed Dad with a hard stare. It was so abnormal to see Ethan making waves that I was immediately focused on him.

"Who was that guy in your office today?" There was something dark in Ethan's voice and I couldn't look away.

"Matthew Francis." Dad finished off his glass of whiskey and sat it down with a *thud*. "Did you figure out whatever caused you to rush in and call Sophia away?"

Mom perked up. "Sophia? *The* Sophia?"

Noah coughed and shook his head. "No."

"Can we focus on what Ethan is saying?" I gave Mom a look that I hoped conveyed my message. I'd tell her later about Sophia but we didn't want Dad to know that we were sleeping with someone from the office.

"We figured it out." Ethan pushed his plate away and sat forward with his elbows on the table. "She mentioned

something to me after we left your office. She was really upset and when she finally told me why, I understood completely.”

I frowned and looked between Dad and Ethan. Sophia hadn't seemed upset after coming back to her office with Ethan.

Dad grunted and threw his napkin over his plate. “She’s emotional. That’s one of the reasons she keeps missing those promotions.”

I stiffened. “She’s never been emotional with us. She’s always been the picture of professionalism.”

“And I’m supposed to trust you to judge that?” Dad laughed. “She’s emotional and I’d love to hear what she blamed it on today.”

If Dad noticed the angry look on Ethan’s face, he didn’t act like it. Ethan’s fists were balled as he spoke. “She said Matthew made her feel uncomfortable. He rubbed her shoulders and kept staring at her chest. Did you see him doing that?”

Noah sat up straighter. “What the fuck?”

“Watch your mouth, Noah!” Dad slapped his hands down on the table hard enough to make the dinnerware rattle. “Of course, Matthew didn’t make Sophia feel uncomfortable. She managed to turn that story around nicely for herself.”

“What do you mean?” Ethan shook his head. “I saw how upset she was, Dad.”

“It’s time we had this talk, I guess. Sophia is good at her job, even though she is emotional. She’s great at research and she’s an asset to the company. I think you boys should keep your distance, however. She has a reputation around the office... I hate to even repeat it and I wouldn’t if I hadn’t seen it for myself a few times throughout the years. She’s not always professional with the men she works with.” Dad blew out a big breath and held up his hands. “Just today, I walked in on her flirting heavily with Matthew. He was waiting in my office for me and she was practically pushing her chest in his face when I came in. Matthew is a happily married man, though, and he

turned her down. He told me that himself. I guess the rejection upset her.”

Prickles of anxiety broke out all across my skin. I couldn't believe what he was saying. We knew Sophia better than that.

Ethan shook his head. “I don't think that's what happened, Dad.”

“Well, I was there, Ethan. Are you suggesting that I'm making it up?” Dad hit the table again. “Why the hell would I do that?”

Noah laughed, but there was no humor to it. “Dad, come on. We've worked with her for almost two weeks and she's the picture of professionalism. She takes her job seriously, Dad. I can't imagine her being the way you're saying. Maybe you thought you saw something that wasn't actually what it was.”

“I've got a list of complaints I can get you through HR.” Dad pushed away from the table and stood up. “It makes me sick to think she'd paint Matthew as a villain just to feel better about herself.”

Ethan stood up, too. “I saw how upset she was, Dad. It wasn't fake.”

“Grow up, Ethan. Women lie. Men fall for those lies. It's just the way the world works.” Shaking his head, Dad gripped the back of his chair and sighed. “I should've told you boys about her before sending you to train under her. I'm sorry about that. She hasn't been unprofessional with any of you, has she?”

“No.” Noah stood up and pressed a kiss to Mom's head. “I've got to go, Mom. Thanks for dinner.”

“Oh, honey. Are you sure you have to go so soon?” Mom looked between the four of us and frowned. “You're all leaving, aren't you?”

I stood up and nodded. “Yep. I've heard quite enough gossip for one night.”

Dad shoved his chair into the table. “Gossip?”

Ethan and Noah each took one of my arms. Ethan winked at Mom and nodded at Dad. “We’ve got to get going. We’ve got something to do before going home for the night.”

“Call me later, one of you.” Mom followed us out and closed the door behind her. “It’s the same Sophia, isn’t it?”

I nodded. “She’s not like that, Mom.”

“Of course, she isn’t. I didn’t get that impression from her at all.” Mom patted us each on the cheek. “She’s a woman in the business world. People will always talk.”

“Dad isn’t normally the type to buy into shit like that.” Noah turned away. “I don’t know. I have a headache and I need to go home.”

“Trust your gut, honey.” Mom hugged each of us. “Be careful going home. Tell Sophia hi for me.”

We’d driven together in my truck and the drive home was silent until I parked. I got out and slammed the door shut. “He’s lying.”

Noah scowled at me. “Why would he lie? That doesn’t make any sense, Alex.”

Ethan held up his hands, ready to mediate. “I don’t think he’s lying, but maybe he just trusts that Matthew guy. Something happened, though. Sophia cried.”

I growled. “Someone should have their teeth knocked out.”

“Why didn’t you say anything earlier?” Noah leaned against the side of my truck and crossed his arms over his chest.

“I didn’t want to say anything in front of Sophia. She was fucking distraught. And I promised her I wouldn’t say anything to anyone.” Ethan looked down at his feet and grunted. “So, I’m a liar.”

“We’ll talk to her tomorrow and figure it out.” Noah ran his hands through his hair. “Fuck this night.”

*****SOPHIA*****

I stared across my desk at Randal and tried to remember what work was like before the guys had joined us. Things just felt too quiet without them. Gerald had sent a message earlier that morning, letting us know that the guys were moving on to training with a different department. I hadn't even gotten to see them.

"Missing them?" Randal read me like a book, as always. "I kind of do, too. They grew on me."

I dropped my pen and sat back in my chair. "Am I that obvious?"

"Only to me." He tapped his pen against his chin. "Why don't you take a day off, Soph? When's the last time you did?"

I shrugged. I couldn't remember. "I can't be at home with Ava and Milo right now. They just make sex jokes at me nonstop."

"Rita has been begging me to invite you to dinner so you can tell her all about the guys." He laughed at my facial expression. "The chemistry between you four is off the charts. You didn't have to spell it out for me to get it. I'm happy for you, Sophia. You deserve someone to make you happy."

Before I could respond Gerald walked into my office and crossed his arms over his chest. "Leave us."

Randal looked at me and frowned. “Do you-”

“Out.” Gerald barked out the order and the moment Randal stepped out of the office, he slammed the door shut. “Have you lost your goddamn mind?”

I stood up, not wanting to be at such a height disadvantage. “What are you talking about?”

“You told my sons that Matthew sexually harassed you? That’s ridiculous!” He leaned over my desk and glared at me. “You’ve got a lot of nerve.”

My entire body erupted in goosebumps but I wasn’t going to back down. “I panicked and told Ethan that Matthew was the one rubbing my shoulders and talking to my chest because it didn’t feel right telling him that his father was the one doing it.”

His face turned red with anger. “You stupid girl. You think a shoulder rub is such a bad thing?”

I glared at him. “Yes. You touch me all the time, when it’s clear that I don’t want you to. You stare at my chest. You make comments that are rude. You’ve passed me over for a promotion for three years and I know it’s been your call the entire time. James told me. *You* blocked my promotions and then tried to get me to work *under* you.”

“I would’ve given you the fucking promotion if you’d just played nice. I’ve dealt with your shit for five years. I’ve watched you strut around in your tight skirts, swinging that ass around. You teased me for years and then my sons come around and you’re fucking them all over the place. You were always a whore, but it took my boys to bring it out of you.” He circled my desk and closed in on me. “I’ll put up with a lot, Sophia, but you trying to get between me and my boys is a line I won’t let you cross. Watch what you tell them.”

“I have no intention of getting between you and your sons, Gerald. I just want you to leave me alone.” I hated the way my voice shook. “I just want to do my job.”

“I’ve got a big dick, too, Sophia. I’ve been fucking women for a lot longer than my boys.” He moved so fast that I

couldn't stop him from grabbing my ass and yanking me against his chest. His sour breath washed over my face and he laughed when I struggled to get away from him. "I can make you feel better than they can. Or maybe you want the whole package. Daddy and the sons? It's just a shame you only have three holes."

I drew my hand back and slapped him as hard as I could. While he cupped his face, I shoved away from him and hurried towards the door. Before I could get there, he grabbed my arm and yanked me away from it. I only stopped fighting to get away from him when his grip on my wrist became excruciating. "Let me go, you piece of shit. This was too far. I'm going to HR and I'm going to press charges. You're disgusting!"

He shook me. "You would do that to my boys? The way they're hanging around you, I figure they're sweet on you. You'd hurt them like this? You lied to them once about this, Sophia."

I whimpered when his grip tightened. "Let me go!"

"Go to HR and I'll make sure my boys end this night thinking you're the biggest whore to ever cross their paths. I'll make sure they fucking curse the ground you walk on. Are you willing to do that?"

Tears filled my eyes. "Just let me go! Please!"

"Are you going to make a fuss?" He leaned in closer and smiled. "Or are you going to play nice and get that promotion you've been wanting?"

I just wanted him to let me go. I didn't care about the promotion. "Fine! I won't say anything if you just let me go and leave me alone."

"I think we've got a deal." He released my wrist but pulled me in for a wet kiss. "If you change your mind, you know where to find me. Also, if you change your mind about keeping quiet, you should know that there are cameras on every inch of this building. I've never been so proud of my boy as I was when I saw him railing you yesterday. Sophia,

open your mouth and every person in this city will watch you coming on Anderson cock.”

I shrank away from him. “What?”

“The part about all of my sons covering you in come? I shot my load all over my desk to that image.” He roughly patted my cheek and laughed. “Are you going to keep that mouth of yours shut from now on?”

I nodded and stumbled towards my desk. I sank into one of the desk chairs and covered my mouth with my hand. He’d watched me and Ethan... He had a tape of it...

“Sophia? I heard shouting...” Randal appeared at my side and knelt in front of me. “What happened?”

I looked into his concerned eyes and felt my own fill with hot tears. “I have to go. I’m going to take the day off... I just... I’m sorry.”

“Did he fire you? What did he do, Sophia?”

“I wish. I just need to go home. I’m sorry, Randal. I can try to put together a list of things-”

“Just go, Soph. Call me if you need anything.”

I grabbed my purse and wiped my eyes. “Um... I... I’m sorry.”

I took the stairs to make sure there was no chance I’d run into Gerald again. Every sound in the parking garage made me jump and I didn’t take a full breath until I was on the interstate, flying towards home.

By the time I pulled into the driveway I was fighting the urge to vomit. I barely got out of my car before I violently lost my breakfast on the grass. Gerald’s words were circling in my mind and I could still smell his breath on my lips.

“Soph? What’s wrong?” Ava wrapped her arms around me and helped me into the house. “You’re home so early. Did something happen?”

I sagged into her arms and sobbed. “He grabbed me, Ava. He touched me.”

She looked at my wrist and gasped. “Who the fuck did this?”

I glanced down at the deep bruise already forming and gagged again. “Gerald. Ava, he’s the devil. I don’t want to go back. I can’t.”

“I’ll fucking murder him.”

“I can’t say anything. I can’t protect myself from him. Ava, the stuff he said...” I pushed away from her and ran to the bathroom as the need to vomit struck again. I sat in front of the toilet and cried.

“We’ll handle this, Soph. We won’t let him get away with it.”

I didn’t bother telling her that he already had. Somehow, he’d managed to see straight through my feelings for his sons.

*****SOPHIA*****

“Soph, the guys are here. Do you want me to get rid of them?” Ava stood in my bedroom doorway, in full protector mode.

I’d spent hours crying and there was nothing left to come out so I shook my head. “They can come in. It’s not their fault, Ava.”

She grunted. “They’re the spawn of Satan, Soph. They might have some of his stench on them.”

I sat up against my headboard and hugged a pillow to my chest. I tried to force a smile when Noah walked into my room with a determined look on his face. The moment he saw me, his expression softened and my smile fell.

Ethan and Alex followed Noah and the three of them looked shocked at my state. Flat hair, no makeup, red and swollen eyes. I was a sorry shell of myself.

I shrugged. “I look a little rough, I guess.”

Noah sat down next to me on the bed and studied my face. “What’s wrong, Soph? We went to find you after work and Randal said you left before lunch. He was worried about you, Soph. More than normal.”

I squeezed the pillow tighter. “I just wasn’t feeling well. I’m okay.”

Alex leaned over the bed and pressed his hand against my forehead. “You don’t feel warm. Do you need anything?”

I shook my head. “No. I’m okay. Really.”

Ethan shouted suddenly. “What the fuck happened to your wrist?”

I looked down at the swollen, bruised mess and lost the story I’d prepared to explain it away. Every time I looked at it, I could still feel Gerald’s crushing grip.

“Sophia? What happened to your wrist?” Noah gently lifted my face to his. “Talk to us.”

I opened and closed my mouth a few times and then glanced up to see Ava standing in the doorway. I sent her a pleading look and she hurried in.

“She’s having a really unlucky day. She came home throwing up and she tripped over a log in the yard. It’s not broken, but it’s a terrible sprain.” Ava brushed my hair out of my face and kissed my forehead. “It’s time for more ice for it so I’ll get that.”

Ethan swore. “Bullshit. That’s a handprint. Was it that Matthew asshole? Did he grab you, Sophia?”

Ava glared at him. “If you upset her, you have to go. This is her house but when she’s sick, it’s mine. I’ll kick you out faster than you can toss that curly hair of yours.”

“Sophia, who did that?” Ethan ignored her. “We’ll take care of it. Trust us.”

I curled into myself tighter. “I just fell.”

Noah stood up and began pacing. “You’re lying. Why are you lying, Sophia?”

“Did you talk to your dad today?” Ava glared at them but when she saw the look on my face, she threw her hands up. “Fine. I’ll go get some ice.”

“What the fuck did she mean?” Noah stopped pacing and frowned at me. “Why did she ask about our dad?”

Alex growled at his brother. “Lower your voice, asshole. Can’t you see that she’s hurting?”

“He came to see me today.” I pressed my knuckles against my mouth and swallowed. “He was upset that I’d mentioned anything about Matthew.”

Ethan sat forward. “Fuck. I’m sorry, Soph. I wanted to help.”

“He doesn’t like me very much.” I spoke so quietly that I could see them all leaning in to hear me.

“What does that have to do with anything, Sophia?” Noah sat down beside me again. “Just say whatever you’re trying to say.”

“Noah!” Alex took my hand and squeezed. “What happened?”

I stared at my fingers next to Alex’s. “Nothing. Nevermind.”

“No, say what you need to say.” Noah sighed. “Please.”

“He just yelled a lot.” I swallowed the truth and ground my teeth together. “He didn’t think Matthew did anything wrong.”

Noah began pacing again. “He’s a loud guy, Sophia. And he said he didn’t see anything happen with Matthew. He’s going to stand up for his friend, of course.”

I stared at him and realized that he would always take his father’s side. He loved his dad and wanted to follow in his footsteps. He would never believe me about his dad. Even if Alex believed me, he’d be going against his brother. I couldn’t do that. I wouldn’t. “You’re right.”

He stared back at me with frustration playing at his features. “He’s used to being loud with the guys around the office. He didn’t mean anything by it. You shouldn’t take it to heart.”

I forced a smile. “Of course, not. I’m sorry I said anything.”

“Wait a second, Sophia. You don’t have to go along with what Noah says just because he’s seconds from yelling, just like Dad.” Alex squeezed my hand. “He’ll shut up and listen to whatever you have to say. Won’t you, Noah?”

I shook my head and stared at our hands. “Honestly, I’m just under the weather. Y’all should probably go so you don’t catch whatever I have.”

“You’re probably right.” Noah backed away and sighed before turning and leaving.

Alex swore. “Fucking asshole. I’ll check in on you later, Soph.”

When just Ethan was left, he inched closer. “I’m really sorry if I made a mess of things, Sophia.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

He sighed just like his twin and nodded. “Feel better, okay?”

As soon as he was gone, I turned over and curled around my pillow. I managed to find more tears to cry and when Ava came back in with the ice, she curled herself around me and held me tight.

“They’ll always take his side. Noah wasn’t even willing to listen to a single thing.”

Ava sighed. “Then fuck them.”

“He’s their father, Ava. I can’t expect them to believe bad things about him.” I rolled over to face her and sniffed. “It’s over, isn’t it?”

“Maybe not. Maybe they’ll get their heads out of their asses.” She put the ice on my wrist. “Just focus on you for now. Call Jack. Maybe you need to get good and drunk on his dime to feel better.”

That sounded like a terrible plan. Everything sounded terrible, though, so maybe she was right.

*****SOPHIA*****

“I’ll kill him. That bastard doesn’t know who he’s messing with.” Jack held my wrist against his chest and blinked back tears of fury. “I swear to god, babe, I’m not letting this go.”

I rested my head on his shoulder and took another shot. “I’m starting to feel better about everything.”

“That’s because you’re hammered.” He wiped running mascara from under my eyes. “I wish you’d have told me everything before you got drunk, babe. That way I could’ve stopped you from getting this drunk. We drink for fun, not problem solving.”

I groaned and waved him off. “Hush.”

“How about we get you home and then I come over to your house tomorrow and take care of you? I’m sure you could use a break from Ava’s shouting.”

I pulled my phone out of my pocket and laughed at the picture of Lily’s silly face on the lock screen. “Isn’t she so cute?”

“Let me call you a car.” Jack reached for his own phone but I waved him off.

“I can get my own ride.” I looked up as a waiter stopped by our table. “You’re busy anyway.”

“I’m sorry, Jack. There’s something wrong with the ordering system.”

“Don’t move a muscle, Soph. I’ll be right back.” Jack gently rested my wrist on my leg and frowned. “Murder. I’m just going to murder him and then bring him back to do it again.”

I scrolled through my phone and landed on the messages from the guys. I’d taken off the rest of the week and we’d only exchanged a few texts since our awkward last encounter. I wanted to call them and ask them for a ride so I’d be able to see them, but I didn’t think it was a good idea, even drunk.

My next message was from Davis and I decided he’d be a good bet. Instead of texting him, I called. He answered on the second ring. “Hey, Davis!”

“Well, I didn’t expect a call from drunk Sophia tonight.” He laughed. “Where are you? I’m assuming you need a ride?”

“How’d you know I was drunk?”

“You never sound as excited to talk to me as you do when you’re drunk. Now tell me where you are.”

I told him and hung up after he said he was on his way. I waved goodbye to Jack and walked outside to wait on Davis. The night air was warm and thick with the smell of barbeque and beer. Leaning against the wall outside the bar, I closed my eyes and lifted my face to the sky. I got lost in my thoughts and the next thing I knew, Davis was standing in front of me.

“Hey!”

He laughed. “Come on. Let’s get you home.”

Once I was in his front seat, I rolled down the window and hung my head out. “Thank you for driving me home, Davis.”

“Why didn’t you call your boyfriends?”

I pulled my head back in and turned to face him. “I don’t think we’re together anymore.”

“Why not?”

Tears filled my eyes and I sighed. “Their father... He’s my boss and he’s evil.”

“Yeah, I can see how that would make things awkward.”

I wiped my eyes but more tears kept falling. “I care about them. I didn’t mean to, but it happened. They’re great. It just isn’t enough. If I tell them about their dad, they’ll hate me. I can’t date them without telling them, though.”

“What did their dad do, Soph?” He rolled my window up as we got on the interstate.

“He has a sex tape of me and his son. He stole it from the security system and threatened me with it. I didn’t know my room had cameras. He’s a pig. He’s blocked me from getting promotions for years and he’s ruined my career. I can’t go back to work there. I have to, though. It’s awful, Davis.”

He was quiet for a few minutes and when he spoke, I had to strain to hear him. “That motherfucker.”

“But the guys aren’t like him. They’re kind and special. I have fun with them. None of it matters, though.” I sniffed. “Is this my karma for not taking you back?”

He snorted. “No, Sophia. This is just shitty luck. You really care about them, don’t you? I don’t think I ever saw you cry about me and you liked me enough to marry me.”

I reached over and patted his shoulder. “I’m sorry. I *did* cry about you but I didn’t think you deserved to see it.”

“I didn’t. I’m sorry about the guys, Sophia.”

“Are you really?”

He laughed. “Nope. I’m sorry you’re hurting, though.”

I rested my head against the headrest and closed my eyes. “It just wasn’t meant to be, I guess.”

“How would you feel about me beating the shit out of that boss of yours, though?”

I blew out a big breath. “Can’t. He’s their dad and they love him.”

“Soph? Sophia.” Davis gently shook my shoulder. “Wake up. You’ve got company.”

I yawned and stretched. “Five more minutes.”

“Sophia? What the hell is going on here?” Noah’s voice cut through my foggy brain.

I sat up and gripped my head as it spun. “What’s happening?”

Davis sighed. “She’s drunk. She called me for a ride.”

I groaned. “Everyone be quiet so I can go back to sleep.”

“Move, Noah.” Alex’s voice was gentle and his scent filled my nose as I was picked up. “Let’s get you inside, Soph.”

“You’re welcome.” Davis called out.

“Thank you!” I looked up and smiled when I saw Alex’s face. “Hey, you.”

“I’m a little angry at you right now. Why the hell didn’t you call us? Why’d you call your ex-husband, Sophia?” He put me down in what I realized was my bed and I wondered how he got inside so fast.

“I wanted to call you.” I stretched out and yawned. “I just couldn’t.”

“Why not?” Ethan’s voice joined the rest.

“Cause. I can’t tell y’all everything. Too many secrets.” I hugged my pillow and tried to kick off my shoes. When I felt someone’s hands undoing the straps, I smiled. “Thank you.”

“What secrets, Sophia?” Noah still sounded so cranky.

“You sound like him when you’re mad at me.” I pouted. “I wish I could tell you the things that have been making me sick but you wouldn’t want to hear it. You would choose him.”

“What are you talking about?” Alex stroked my cheek and pried one of my eyes open. “Come on, Soph. Talk to us.”

“I hate him.” I curled into myself. “But I care about y’all. It’s complicated. I already miss y’all.”

If they said anything else, I missed it. I passed out and when I woke up later, they were long gone.

ETHAN

“What does he want?” Alex slammed the truck door shut and scowled at Noah over the hood. “I don’t want to fucking be here.”

Noah scowled back at him. “Grow up, Alex.”

I growled. “Both of you grow up.”

Mom waited at the door for us, her eyes wide and worried. “Hurry up and get in here. The last time your father called a family meeting, we were at war with some random company in New York and he looked less stressed than he does right now.”

We each hugged Mom and then followed the sound of Dad’s pacing to the library. He and Noah were so similar at times in their mannerisms. I wondered too many times if that was why Alex and Noah butted heads so often. Alex hadn’t gotten along with our dad in over a decade and Dad didn’t exactly make it easy for Alex to come back to him. It wasn’t a surprise that Alex also held a grudge against Noah.

“Come in. Sit. Sit.” Dad ran his hands down his face, looking overly stressed. “There’s no coffee or anything, but I could get some water if anyone needs.”

My stomach turned. Dad was never accommodating, which meant whatever we’d been called together for was going to be

bad. I sank onto one of the couches and crossed my ankle over my knee. My foot bounced as I waited for the ball to drop. Noah sat beside me and I watched his fingers tap nervously on his thigh. We all knew something big was up.

Mom sat across from us and Alex stood behind me. Dad frowned at Alex before shaking his head and continuing his pacing.

“Honey, you’re stressing us all out. How about you sit down?” Mom crossed her legs and uncrossed them before crossing them again. She was just as restless as the rest of us.

“Something happened.” Dad’s opening line left us all leaning in, waiting to see what he was going to say next. When he didn’t say anything else right away, we all leaned back and sighed.

“Get on with it, Dad.” Alex had been in a bad mood for several days and the reason why was obvious. Sophia.

“Sophia Bennett.” Dad sighed and let his thoughts trail off again.

It was strange to hear her name repeated after thinking it. “What about her?”

“I need all of you to promise to hear me out before you get angry and storm off.” He stared especially hard at Alex. “This isn’t going to be easy for me to say.”

Noah took a deep breath. “Just get on with it, Dad. This is just making whatever you’re going to say worse.”

Dad scrubbed his hands down his face and then looked at Mom. “I messed up. I broke our vows, Mary, and I’m more sorry that you’ll ever know.”

My stomach bottomed out completely. Sitting all the way forward, I stared hard at our dad. “What the hell are you saying?”

“Sophia. She... When she didn’t get the last promotion, she came to me.” Dad looked down at his hands and there was raw emotion in his voice. “She came onto me and I was weak.”

Noah was rigid next to me and I could feel fury radiating off of Alex. I just stared in shock. I couldn't believe the words that were coming out of his mouth. There was no way.

"I'm so sorry, Mary. I messed up and I've never hated myself more. I wouldn't be telling you this in front of our sons if it didn't involve them, too." Dad looked back at us. "I know she seduced you boys, too. I don't blame you. She's...smart. She was more conniving than I ever would've thought possible. And now she's cost us millions of dollars. Millions that I think she's going to get a share of."

My ears rang and I wasn't sure I was still awake. I had to be dreaming.

"Explain yourself, Gerald." Mom's voice shook. "Now."

"I gave into her and I've never been sorrier for anything in my life. I regretted it the moment it was over and if I could take it back, I would. She made demands before she even left my office." Dad wiped his eyes. "I've never felt like such a fool. She demanded money right away. She told me that she'd tell everyone if I didn't give it to her. So, I did. I was an idiot. She just kept making more and more demands."

I felt physically ill at the idea of my dad sleeping with Sophia. I couldn't believe it. We knew Sophia. She wouldn't do that. Would she?

"She wanted the promotion but I couldn't just take it away from Bill Trent. I told her to wait a year and I'd make it happen. I just hoped I could figure something out in the meantime. Her threats to expose me worked every time. I didn't want you boys to know what I'd done. I didn't want you to know what I'd done, Mary. I'm so ashamed of myself."

"Get to the millions, Gerald."

"She pushed a company through to Bill and while he was busy learning the ropes, she tricked him into making a deal. I don't want to think about how she got him to give in." Dad stood up and began pacing again. "This company was supposed to be on the cusp of a huge breakthrough. We bought them out, at Sophia's doing, for thirty-six million. I found out

this morning that they're not worth a thousand dollars. I have a private investigator looking into it but he's already found links between Sophia and the company owner. It's not the money.... We could survive losing that and be fine. It's the news story that's going to break any day. We'll lose everything. Who's going to trust us to make business decisions when we lost our shirt in such an embarrassing way?

"She came to my office every day and did and said vile things. She told me all about your relationship. She bragged about the things she got you boys to do, despicable things. I'm just so sorry you boys got mixed up in this."

Alex laughed. "This is bullshit. You're playing the innocent husband and father so well, but this isn't the first time you've fucked around on Mom. I don't buy a word of what you're saying."

Noah and I both turned to look at our little brother. What the hell was he talking about?

"Alex..." Mom sighed. "Maybe this isn't the best time?"

"You're going to let him pretend like he's always been faithful?" Alex threw up his hands. "I'm not doing this shit. I don't know what you're doing here, *Dad*, but I want no part of it."

"Alex, don't leave. Please, honey. We need to face these things together." Mom looked away and discreetly wiped her eyes. "Let's just stay together."

I looked back at Dad. "Just...clear this up for me. You're saying that Sophia seduced you, blackmailed you, stole millions from our company, used us, and...did it all while stroking a white cat and twirling her eye patch? Dad, you're making her sound like some sort of evil villain. We've spent so much time with her and she's not the things you're making her out to be."

"You think I'm lying? You think I would chance ruining my marriage and hurting everyone I love? For what?" Dad threw his hands up. "What would be the point, Ethan?"

Noah stood up and walked up to Dad. “You’re not lying? Sophia did that stuff? Before you answer, Dad, think about it. This isn’t just some random woman to us. We care about her. We’ve spent time at her house, with her family, with her *daughter*. I need you to look me in the eye and be one thousand percent honest with me.”

Dad gripped Noah’s shoulders. “I’m sorry, son. She isn’t the woman you think she is.”

“What do we do?” Mom pinched the bridge of her nose. “Solutions, Gerry. Now.”

Dad nodded. “Solutions. I’ve got a few options for right now.”

*****NOAH*****

I sat at the island in our apartment and stared blankly at my laptop screen. I wasn't sure how much time had passed since I'd opened the email, but I was frozen. I couldn't see the words anymore, but I could hear them in my head. They were playing on a loop.

The encrypted email was from Dad's PI. The man provided pages of documents linking Sophia to The Volley, a company based right outside of Dallas. There were copies of emails between Sophia and a man named Peter Davis regarding the bullshit company and more information from the PI showing that Peter Davis was none other than Davis Bennett. Sophia's ex-husband. They'd stolen millions from Anderson Inc.. There was also a witness statement from Tiffany about Sophia's comings and goings from Dad's office. The things she wrote about hearing...

"Eat, Noah." Mom's voice drew me out of my own personal hell. "I know that you're upset but starving to death isn't going to fix anything."

I hit print on the document I'd compiled from the email and slammed my laptop shut. "It's all right there."

My blood was boiling and I couldn't face Sophia to take it out on her yet so I went to the next best thing. My brothers. The two idiots who were still too blinded by her charm to see

what was right in front of us. I grabbed the pages from the printer and found Ethan and Alex on the balcony. I could tell from the smell that they'd been partaking in a copious amount of liquor.

"Here it is, in black and white." I slapped the pages to Alex's chest. "She's everything Dad said she is."

Alex pushed my hand away. "Fuck off, Noah. I'm not doing this."

"Fucking look at the papers!" I shouted in his face and brushed off Ethan's grip on my shoulder, trying to pull me away. "Get the fuck off of me, Ethan. I need you both to look at this. She's a fucking monster."

Alex stood up and got in my face. He was a couple of inches taller than me but I had rage on my side. He shoved me and jabbed his finger into my chest. "You don't know anything about monsters, Daddy's boy."

"Stop it! Stop this right now!" Mom's voice rose above ours. "Get inside right now before you push each other over the balcony."

Alex brushed past me to go in and I was on his heels. I needed him to accept what Dad told us. "Don't be a coward, Alex. Look at the papers."

He spun on me and shoved me again. "I know her! She's not what he's saying!"

"The company is owned by her ex-husband." I clenched my jaw so hard it felt like it would break. "The one she swore to us she'd never touch. She's head of research, Alex. How did her ex-husband's company get past her?"

He swallowed. "What?"

A wave of emotion hit me and I had to clear my throat to make my voice work again. "I don't want to believe it, either, Alex. I- I cared about her, too. You think I want this to be real? I feel like someone stabbed me in the chest, Alex. I'm fucking miserable, but I'm not a fucking fool. The evidence is all right here. She played us. She played Dad. I won't let her do it anymore."

Ethan took the papers and after a few minutes of heavy silence, he swore and shoved the papers back at me. He walked back towards the balcony with his hand over his mouth. I could almost feel the pain radiating off him and it just made me angrier.

“We have to be a united front. There’s no other way.” I gripped Alex’s shoulder tight. “We’re family and someone tried to hurt us, Alex. We can’t ignore it.”

Alex clutched the papers in his fist and shrugged my hand off. “I’m not agreeing to anything. I’ll look at them. That’s all I’m saying.”

I watched him walk off towards his room and went back to the island. I sat down and held my head in my hands. I was the oldest, even if it was only by a couple of minutes. I was the son who’d been groomed to take over the business one day. It was my responsibility to take care of my family and I’d let a snake into the hen house. I couldn’t let Sophia get away with hurting us.

“You can take some time to grieve, Noah.” Mom rested her cheek on my shoulder and sighed. “She hurt you. I know you and I know you want to fix everything, but you need to let it hurt.”

“Are you?” I turned my head to look at her. “Are you letting it hurt? Dad cheated on you, Mom.”

She moved away, busying herself on the other side of the island with fixing a cup of coffee. “It’s different for me, Noah.”

“How? How is it different?”

“I’ve been married to your father for a very long time, honey. We’ve been together through a lot that you boys don’t know about and I’ve always stuck it out with him. I’m crushed that he would do this to me. I’m angry that he put our family at risk. But I have to believe that your father has a good heart at the end of the day and that’s the foundation I always come back to.”

The sliver of doubt that didn't want to believe Sophia would hurt us was loud in that moment. What if his heart wasn't as good as she thought?

"Noah, honey, I liked her, too. I only met her for a few minutes and most of them she spent running away from me, but I liked her. Now I know why she was so eager to get away... I'm normally a good judge of character but it seems like Sophia Bennett is better at this game than the rest of us." Mom sighed. "I'm just sorry that you boys got hurt in this mess. None of you deserve this."

"We'll be fine." I hardened my heart and sat up taller. "No one's destroyed us yet and no one will. We'll fix this. It'll all be over Monday morning."

Ethan sat down heavily beside me. "Fine. I'll be there."

Later that night, Alex joined us where we all still sat at the kitchen island. I could tell from the redness around his eyes that he'd looked at the documents and believed them. It hurt to see him hurting, but we had to be on the same page.

"We do this and then I'm done. No more pretending to be Mr. Anderson Jr. for me. I'm out." Alex didn't leave room for argument. He tossed the papers on the counter and walked away.

Ethan sighed heavily as he stood up. "I need another drink."

Mom pulled a bottle of whiskey out of a cabinet and held it up to us. "Why not?"

*****SOPHIA*****

“Are you sure about going in?” Ava worried her hands together as she watched me from my bed. “You’re a mess, Soph. You’ve been going back and forth between crying over not hearing from the guys and crying over being assaulted by their father for days. Ask to have the meeting virtually. Please.”

I buttoned the sleek dress pants I’d chosen and pushed my hair out of my face as I looked at Ava. “Thank you for reminding me of how pathetic I’ve been. I’d love to stay home forever, Ava, but I can’t. The head of HR called the meeting and the verbiage was serious. I need to start sorting this out and make sense of my professional life. I have a family to support. I can’t hide forever.”

“You haven’t been pathetic, Sophia Bennett. You’ve been heartbroken on top of being victimized by that slimeball Gerald.”

“I’m not heartbroken.” I said the words fast, like if I said them and got them out they would be true. I lowered my voice and tried again. “I’m not heartbroken, Ava. It was a two-week fling. It’s over now and that’s fine.”

“Lily’s been asking about the puppies.”

I gripped my dresser and had to catch my breath as another wave of pain hit me. “I know. I’ve spent half of the weekend

trying to explain to her why the guys aren't coming over."

"Did she not understand the simple explanation of they're assholes and their dad is a predator?"

I pulled on a silk blouse that made me look like I felt confident and not at all like a complete loser. "They're not assholes... It was messy from the beginning. I should've known better. I'm older and supposedly wiser."

"If they support their father, their assholes, Sophia. That man... I would love to take one of Milo's chainsaws to him." She let out a scream. "I have so much pent-up rage. Say the word and I'll make him vanish."

I tilted my head to the side and found a smile for the first time in nearly a week. "You're insane."

Milo appeared in the doorway. "I heard rage screaming."

I shoved my feet into my heels and took one last look at myself to make sure I was put together. "I'm going. I want to stop in and check on Randal before I go to the meeting."

"Just...be careful, Sophia. I don't trust this." Ava stood up and pulled me in for a hug. "I love you. I love Lily. But if something ever happened to you and I was stuck with her, I'd lose my fucking mind."

I pushed her into Milo's arms and tried to ignore the sense of foreboding hanging all around me. "I'm going to a meeting with HR, Ava. It's not a swordmatch."

Leaving my driveway for the first time in days, I drove with the sinking feeling in my stomach getting heavier and heavier with each mile I got closer. I didn't know how I was supposed to keep going to work like nothing happened. I didn't know if I could but I knew I couldn't stop going. It was a brutal twisting mindfuck that left me in a nauseous stalemate no matter how I tried to think about it.

I parked in my normal spot in the parking garage and felt my entire body go cold when I looked up on my walk towards the elevators and saw two security guards blocking the way. Without them having to say anything, I just knew they were for me.

I stopped in front of them and gestured towards the elevator. "I have a meeting with HR that I need to get to."

"We'll escort you, ma'am." And they did. Only they didn't stop the elevator on the floor I was told to go to. We climbed past HR and didn't stop until we were on the top floor.

I swallowed around a lump in my throat. "I'm actually supposed to meet-"

"Change of location, ma'am. The meeting is being held in the conference room on this floor. Please follow me." The guard that spoke stepped out and the silent one stayed behind me as I followed.

My brain was shouting at me to run. I needed to get the hell away from there, but I was trapped. No matter how much adrenaline my body produced, I couldn't do anything but follow. It felt a little like I was being led to walk a plank. Only, instead of pool water under me, it would be starving sharks with the taste for human blood.

Outside of the conference room door, the first guard stopped and stepped aside. "They're waiting for you."

I glanced down to see if Tiffany was at her desk, but there didn't seem to be another soul on the floor. It was just the guards and whoever waited for me just through the heavy wooden door. I pushed my hair behind my ears and nodded to myself. My feet argued but I forced myself through the door. What I found inside that room was just as scary as a dozen starving sharks and when the guard closed the door behind me, I knew feeding time was about to begin.

The room had been rearranged. On the far side sat the board, Gerald, Tiffany, a few men I didn't recognize, the guys, and even their mother, Mary. They were all facing the lone chair on my side of the room. There were almost two dozen people facing me but it was the three sets of eyes that didn't meet mine that made my heart sink the most. The guys didn't look up to see me.

"Please, have a seat, Ms. Bennett." Gerald nodded towards that lone chair and clasped his hands together in front of him.

“I’m sorry to call you here under false pretenses but this meeting had to happen as soon as possible.”

I didn’t want to sit but I did. I didn’t know what else to do. I’d never been in a situation so unprepared and confused. I didn’t know what was going to happen, but I knew it wouldn’t be good.

When I didn’t say anything, Gerald sighed deeply and shook his head. “I’m sure you know what this is about, Ms. Bennett.”

Mary was glaring at me in a way that made me want to crawl under my chair and when the guys did look up, I watched in horror as their faces shifted into disgust and anger upon seeing me. My heart hammered in my chest and I knew whatever happened, I was already fucked.

“I don’t.” My two simple words drew a reaction from Noah and I watched as he scowled down at the table in front of him.

“The games are over, Sophia. The stealing, the blackmail, the abuse, it’s all over.” Gerald looked so smug that I knew whatever he had planned, I’d lost before I even sat down. “Along with the board, we have our lawyers and a very talented private investigator here with us. I want to make it very clear to you that we know everything you’ve been up to and we won’t hesitate to prosecute to the fullest extent of the law if we need to.”

I gripped my knees and looked around the room. “I’m... sorry. I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“The Volley? That special company you pushed through and made sure Anderson Inc. acted on? We know. Bill Trent didn’t know enough to not stop you but we know.” Gerald shook his head. “There’s nothing I hate more than a thief, Sophia.”

I blinked a few times and frowned. “The Volley? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“No? Well let me refresh your memory.”

*****SOPHIA*****

Feeling like I'd been dropped into an alternate universe, I nodded at Gerald. Facing him wasn't as hard as I thought it would be when he was saying things that made no sense. "You can't refresh a memory that isn't there. I've never heard of The Volley. Every company I've ever sent up the chain is well documented and you won't find The Volley in that list."

"The Volley is a company just outside of Dallas, owned by a man named Peter Davis. Through your research, it was promised to be something on the cutting edge of technology and it was sure to return hundreds of millions. Anderson Inc. paid over thirty million dollars for the company, Sophia. None of that rings any bells?"

I shook my head and prepared myself for a fight that I didn't want to have. "No. I'll say it again. I've never heard of The Volley. I've never spoken to Peter Davis and any company I've sent to my managers, especially ones with a price tag of that size, have always been thoroughly vetted. I would know if I sent something like that through."

"Of course, you've never spoken to Peter Davis, Sophia. You want to know why? Peter Davis doesn't exist." Gerald pointed to one of the men I didn't recognize. "Our PI found that Peter Davis is actually Davis Bennett. Are you going to say that you've never spoken to Davis Bennett?"

I held out my hands and shook my head. “Wait a minute. What are you talking about? Am I missing something? Is this a joke? Davis is my ex-husband. He’s a dentist. Even if he came to me with a business, I’d never act on it. It’d be completely unethical.”

Noah threw his pen down and sat back in his chair. “Totally unethical.”

Gerald patted his son’s hand and turned a nasty glare on me. “Deny it all you want. We have the evidence. You and your ex-husband sold us a company not even worth a thousand dollars and you got over thirty million dollars for it. That’s quite the theft. We’ll be looking into how such an oversight was allowed to slip through the system, but we know it was you at the root of this.”

I moved to the edge of my chair. “This is insane. None of this is true. I’ve never stolen anything in my life, much less millions of dollars. I’ve worked sixty-hour weeks at this company for five years. I’ve poured everything I have into vetting companies and I’ve done a damn good job. You suggesting that I’ve done anything like this is absurd.”

“Why would we make this up?” Gerald’s eyes practically twinkled.

I pressed my hand over my mouth as understanding set in. I’d earned Gerald’s wrath, it seemed, and that wrath came in the form of accusing me of theft. “This is your way of shutting me up, isn’t it?”

I knew I’d walked right into another trap when Gerald’s eyes brightened even more. There was a shift amongst the Anderson family and it was obvious to me that whatever was coming next was going to hurt even more.

“I’ve told my family everything, Sophia. I’ve admitted my mistake to them, and to the board. You can’t use it against me ever again.” He reached out and took Mary’s hand. She was sitting just behind Noah and I watched Noah’s hard exterior break for just a split second. Pain was so clear on his face in that second that it took my breath away.

It caused me to stammer. “I- I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You can’t blackmail me anymore. I’m done. I confessed to my wife. I confessed what happened between us so I could finally be free from you, Sophia.” Gerald’s voice was so sincere and full of grief that I could’ve believed him if he wasn’t talking about me. “You won’t get another dime from me. You won’t hurt my family ever again.”

A horrified laugh escaped my lips and I watched the guys wince at the sound. “This is crazy. What are you talking about? What happened between us? You mean when you *assaulted* me? Is that what you confessed to?”

Noah shot out of his seat and slammed his hands down on the table. “Stop it! You’re not going to come in here and accuse my father of something so disgusting to get out of your own vile choices, Sophia.”

I jerked back like he’d slapped me. He might as well have. Raw emotion clogged my throat as I spoke. “My vile choices?”

Gerald pulled Noah back into his seat and tapped the table in front of him. “I’ve shown my sons everything. They’ve seen the evidence of your theft, your blackmailing, and your games. The evidence doesn’t lie, Sophia, unlike you.”

“What evidence are you talking about? I can’t believe this is happening. I’ve kept quiet about you for years, Gerald. I’ve swallowed my pride every time you fucked me over, but this? This is outrageous.”

“Boys. Do it.” Gerald smiled at me and I saw the devil in his eyes. “Handle this problem.”

Noah glanced over at his brothers and both Ethan and Alex nodded. “Ms. Bennett, you’re fired. You are no longer a part of this company. Your stuff has already been gathered and will be waiting for you with security.”

“He’s lying to you. He’s lying to all of you! Look at my record. Look at what I’ve done for this company. You know me. You know this isn’t-”

“That’s enough. You’re done using my family for your own gain. If you don’t stand up and leave this building, I’ll come after you for the full extent of what you stole from us. I’ve already been granted a protection order against you, Sophia. An order that you’re currently in violation of. Stay and find yourself in jail, where you belong.” Gerald stood up and nodded to someone behind me. “Escort her out.”

I stared at the guys and felt every nerve ending in my body ache. My career was over and I wasn’t sure how I’d ever support my family again. I wasn’t even scratching the surface of the pain that was surely going to crush me when I had more time to think about everything that had happened. When I looked at them, sitting with their mother and father, I felt a different ache, one for them. They trusted their father to be a good man. They didn’t know the monster in their own family tree.

I stood up and walked closer to them. I could hear the security guards coming up behind me, but I ignored their hands on my arms, trying to pull me away. I met Noah’s angry gaze, Ethan’s weary one, and then Alex’s exhausted one. “For your sake, I hope you never find out the truth about who he is.”

Silence echoed in the room as I was led out.

*****SOPHIA*****

For days after that ambush I stayed in bed. Ava and Jack stayed by my side and Ava sent Lily to spend some time with Davis so she didn't have to see me like I was. The house cycled through bouts of anger and sadness for me but I couldn't get past heartbreak. It was crushing and consuming and I felt like there were weighted chains attached to my limbs that I couldn't shake off.

Jack blew off work to hover over me and between threats of violence, he held me and told me over and over again that everything would be okay. He took care of me in so many ways, proving that he was my true soulmate. He forced me into showers and brushed my hair for me. He rocked me to sleep and sang to me every off-key song that came to his mind. He didn't grow frustrated when I didn't bounce back.

Ava moved her studio into my room and angrily painted while watching me out of the corner of her eye. She brought me food and repeated the things our mother had told us when we were young. She was always right there, ready for whatever emotion I needed from her.

I mourned for days and when the mourning turned into anxiety over my future, I was helpless to it, as well. I'd been knocked so far off course by the Andersons. I'd worked so hard to have a career I was proud of. I'd worked my way to earning a living that allowed me to take care of my family.

That was just gone. With the wave of a hand, Gerald stole my security. I didn't know how I was going to feed my daughter. More bills came in every day and my savings would only last so long.

I was trapped in my dark emotions and I couldn't think about getting out for long enough to do anything about it. I was making myself sick and my pain was turning into self-hatred. I honestly felt like I was losing my mind. It went on like that for a week and I knew Jack and Ava were getting scared. I never stayed down for that long. Lily needed to come back home and I wanted her back home but none of us wanted her to see me in that state.

It was a series of unfortunate events that finally forced me to rejoin the living. After not eating much, I'd devoured a whole bag of Lily's old Halloween candy and promptly threw up all over myself. While I showered, Ava opened the bedroom window to let the room air out. Milo, after tiptoeing around the house for a week, couldn't take the silence anymore and broke out of Ava's imposed chainsaw break. It was him snapping and using his chainsaw to cut a log into smaller bits of wood that dragged Mrs. Johnson out of her house and into our yard. Her shouting came in through my open window and something about hearing her judgmental voice screaming at Milo filled me with enough anger to propel me out of bed and out the front door.

Milo told me later that I looked like a messy avenging angel storming out of the house towards him. He also said that he'd nearly shit himself at first because he thought my rage was directed at him for breaking Ava's no chainsaw rule.

Mrs. Johnson was still shouting at Milo when I stomped up to them. "You and your kind are what's so wrong with this world. You think you can just do anything you want, whenever you want! Well, let me tell you something, you little punk, the world doesn't revolve around you!"

I planted myself firmly between the two of them and let loose. "No more! I've put up with you for years, Mrs. Johnson, but I'm done. Take your judgmental, nosey, too-much audacity having self out of my yard and don't come back! Milo is an

amazingly talented artist and an amazing man. Not only that, he's kind, which is something I'm pretty sure no one has ever said about you. If you come back into my yard, I'll consider it a declaration of your intent to cause trouble and I'll meet that declaration with whatever force necessary to get your bony ass back to your own yard. Do you understand me? Nod your head if you do, Mrs. Johnson."

"Well, I-"

"There's nothing you can say that would make me any less irate unless it's an apology to Milo for being an asshole to him for years!" Yelling felt so good that I didn't want to stop. It felt like a good stretch after being cramped in a too-small space for too long. "Don't ever call me or stop me again, not until you manage to find some decency. Now get the hell out of my yard!"

Mrs. Johnson's face was bright red and she stomped her foot before marching back to her own house. I could hear her mumbling but I didn't care. I'd made my point.

I turned to face Milo and found Jack and Ava standing behind him. They were all staring at me with smiles on their faces. "What?"

Ava looked like she was going to hug me but Milo beat her to it. He wrapped his arms around me in a bear hug and picked me up. Ava winced. "You're going to make her throw up again!"

"That was amazing, Soph!" He put me down and gripped my shoulders. "You're my hero!"

I could feel the blood flowing through my body and it was so much better than the numbness I'd been experiencing. My scalp tingled with anger and normally I would've done something to calm down, but I didn't want to. The anger felt good. It felt like fuel. Anger could get me places. Anger could keep me out of my bed.

"Soph?" Jack stroked my hair and cupped my cheek. "Everything okay?"

I shook out my hands and nodded. “I need things to stay mad about. This is good. This, I can handle.”

“You can take more time to grieve, babe.” He held his hands up when I turned my angry gaze on him. “Nevermind. Let’s rage against the world. Lord knows I’ve got plenty of shit I can bitch about.”

“The Rickford rejected my painting.” Ava spewed the words and then covered her mouth.

Milo gasped. “No! They commissioned it! How can they reject it?”

“They said they overestimated their budget and would only pay me if I would agree to half of the original amount.” Tears filled Ava’s eyes. “I was too embarrassed to say anything. That money would’ve been so good right now and I poured so much time and effort into that painting.”

I cracked my knuckles and nodded. “What’s the name of your contact there?”

“Jeremy May.” Ava grabbed my hand and squeezed. “I’m sorry. I thought I was going to be able to help for a change.”

“Ava! You make my life possible! You take care of Lily when I can’t. You cook and clean! You take care of Milo!” I pulled her close and pressed my forehead to hers. “I’m sorry I’m yelling, but you need to know that without you, I would probably still be stuck with Davis because I couldn’t afford to escape that marriage. I wouldn’t have been able to afford childcare on my own. You’ve saved me a hundred times in a hundred different ways. Don’t you ever doubt that!”

Her tears escaped as she hugged me tight. “I love you, Sophia.”

“I love you, too, but I’m focused on rage right now so stop being sweet to me. Let’s go find this Jeremy May guy so I can tell him what a dipshit he is. Bring the painting. When I’m done with him, he’ll cut you the check for the original amount.”

A few hours later we walked out of The Rickford without her painting and with a hefty check. I’d almost gone to jail in

the process of getting that check, but I had my power back.

*****ETHAN*****

Noah knocked my feet off the coffee table as he walked past me to sit on the couch. Lately, all of our interactions were laced with anger so it wasn't a surprise. I was trying my best to be the mediator but it wasn't easy when all I wanted to do was punch something.

"Watch it." I put my feet back up and went back to staring at whatever sport was on. I wasn't actually watching anything, but it helped with Mom obsessing over us if she thought we weren't just staring into space for hours at a time.

"You fucking watch it." Noah sank heavily next to me and ripped off his tie. "Randal quit today. He made sure to do it in front of everyone, all while threatening to sic his wife on us."

I grunted. "The women's rights attorney?"

"The very one. When I pointed out that we kept things above board at Anderson, he literally laughed in my fucking face. It took everything in me not to punch him." Growling, Noah pulled his phone out of his pocket and tossed it on the coffee table where it sat vibrating. "Dad's been extra needy. I can't take a piss without him calling me."

I shrugged. "He doesn't call me."

"Is that supposed to be helpful?"

I rubbed my face. “No. Sorry. I’m just... I don’t want to talk about Dad.”

“You’re still having doubts.” Noah stood up and turned a fierce flare at me. “How much more evidence do you two idiots need? What the fuck has our dad ever done to us to deserve you and Alex thinking of him like that?”

Alex came out of his room at the sound of Noah’s shouting. He was more than ready for a fight at any time those days. “You want to know what he’s done?”

Before another war could break out in our apartment, the intercom buzzed. “There are two visitors here hoping to be let in.”

Alex was closest to the screen that connected our apartment to the security desk downstairs. “Who is it?”

“It’s Jack, asshole.”

“Excuse me, sir! Stay on your side of the counter. I’m more than capable of relaying your name.” Whichever security guard was working was in over his head with Jack.

“Let them up.” Alex strode to the elevator and waited for it to come up. I could read him too well and I felt like he was almost hoping Sophia was with Jack. Who else would he come with?

I felt myself growing anxious at the possibility of seeing her. I stood up and wiped my sweaty palms on my thighs.

When the elevator opened and it wasn’t Sophia, the amount of disappointment in the air should’ve told us something. We were all hoping to see her, no matter how we felt about her and what she’d done.

Jack and Ava came out of the elevator like two wild animals. Ava pulled back her fist and decked Alex before he ever saw it coming and Jack went for Noah. He shoved Noah back until his knees hit the couch and he fell back on it.

“What the fuck?” Noah stood up and shoved Jack back. “Who the fuck are you to come into *our* home acting like this?”

Ava pushed Jack out of the way and tried to punch Noah but after watching her punch Alex, he knew it was coming and dodged her. She swung around to me and whatever she saw on my face took the wind out of her sails. For punching, anyway. She still had plenty of wind for shouting at us.

“If I could tie the three of you up and throw you in the ocean, I would. You sorry pieces of shit. You hurt my sister and I’ve had to wait a full goddamn week to be able to leave her side so I could come here and tell you all about yourselves.” She cracked her neck from side to side and shook out the hand she’d punched Alex with. “Sophia is a better woman than any of you deserve. She always will be. She-”

“She’s a thief.” Noah had a death wish. He went toe to toe with Jack and shook his head. “She’s a thief and a-”

“I suggest you think about how you finish that sentence, Noah.” Jack looked even larger than he normally did and while I figured Noah would give him a good fight, I had no doubt that Jack would end my brother.

Alex appeared next to Ava with a bag of ice. “Solid right hook but you probably just broke something.”

She took the ice while still glaring at him. “I hope I broke something in your face.”

I could already see a black eye forming but we Andersons had harder heads than that. Alex shrugged and sat down next to me. “Sure.”

“I get that you want to come in here and fight for your sister and friend, but you probably don’t have a clue what she did. I doubt she admitted everything.” Noah let out a bitter laugh. “Unless you’re all in on it together and this is her new attempt at some sort of shakedown.”

“Jack, hit him.” Ava snarled. “Or put a piece of tape over his mouth. Either way, just shut him up. How Sophia managed to like you when this is who you are is beyond me. My sister is normally smarter than that.”

Jack narrowed his eyes and leaned closer. “You heard her. Shut the fuck up and listen to what we have to say.”

Noah held up his hands and sat back down. “Please. Enlighten us. Waste our time more than your sister already did.”

“Sophia cared about the three of you and you tossed her aside like she never mattered to you at all. She sacrificed parts of herself to protect you assholes.” Seeing Noah start to interject, Ava raised her voice. “She’s complained about your father for the entire five years she worked at that company. In the last three years, it was worse, but these last few weeks were hell with him. He made her sit in his office and listen to him take calls while he stared at her tits. He made endless innuendos and offered her a job *under* him every time he blocked her for the promotion she deserved. When he thought she was going to tell you idiots something about how he treated her, he attacked her. That bruise on her wrist? Your father.”

“Bullshit!” Noah was on his feet again, shoving Jack. “You’re just spilling more lies for her.”

“She knew you would never listen to her so she never said anything to you. And then she couldn’t. Your father threatened to release revenge porn of her!”

“So she did have sex with him?” The words were out of my mouth and a sour feeling filled my stomach.

“No, you jackass! She had sex with *you* in the office!” Ava stopped as emotion filled her voice. She shook her head and when she spoke again, she was in control again. “He watched you two have sex and threatened to release the tape. He touched her. He touched my sister and he deserves to be in prison. Instead, he’s still sitting pretty at the top of his game, facing zero consequences!”

Alex frowned at me. “You had sex in the office?”

“On the old records floor. There aren’t supposed to be cameras in those rooms, just on the open offices.” I raked my hands through my hair. “No. There can’t be a tape. There aren’t cameras in those back rooms. Why would there be?”

“There were cameras. He watched enough to spew filthy things to Sophia that he heard you saying to her.” Ava saw the look of horror on my face and nodded. “Yeah, now imagine you’re my sister with a seven-year-old and no trust fund to fall back on. Imagine being assaulted and not being able to tell the men you care about because you fear for your safety and security. Imagine the man who assaulted you still tries to ruin your life, even when you didn’t tell anyone what he did.”

“You’re full of shit. Sophia blackmailed our father. She stole millions of dollars from us. Scream at us all you want. It doesn’t change who your sister is.” Noah walked over to the windows and looked out. “You can leave.”

“You’re a piece of shit, too. Just like your father.” Ava smiled when Noah spun around to glare at her. “Oh? What part of that don’t you like, Noah? That I think you’re a piece of shit or that I think you’re like your father?”

“Get out.”

Jack shook his head. “I hoped you three weren’t all complete monsters, but the way I see it, you support everything your father has done and said. I hope you can live with that.”

“I hope you all rot in hell. My sister deserves better than you three. The three of you together aren’t half the man she deserves. She’ll get over this. She’ll pick herself up and make gold out of this shit, but you? You three will spend the rest of your lives wondering what life could’ve been like, standing in Sophia’s sunshine. That’s what you bunch deserve.” Still shaking her hand, Ava looked at Jack. “Let’s go. I can’t stand to be around them for another second.”

With perfect timing, Mom walked out of the elevator. I hadn’t even noticed it go down or come back up again, but she was there to let them in, her face twisted in an emotion I couldn’t place. She looked at our guests and lowered her gaze to the floor. “They aren’t the bad guys.”

Jack pulled Ava into the elevator and punched the button for the ground floor. “Sure looks like it from this side of things.”

Mom watched them until the doors shut and then she turned to us with tears in her eyes. “I think we need to talk.”

*****ALEX*****

“I’m your half brother.” I blurted out the words I’d been dying to say and didn’t look at Mom’s face. She was already crying but I couldn’t hold it in for another second. Noah thought Dad was perfect and it was time he knew the truth. Maybe then he would do more than blindly take Dad at his word.

“Oh, Alex.” Mom hurried over and cupped my face in her hands. “I should’ve let you tell them whenever you wanted to. I’m sorry, honey. I’m afraid I’ve made a huge mistake with you boys and I’m terrified to know what it could cost you.”

Ethan frowned. “What the hell is going on? What do you mean, you’re our half-brother?”

“Dad cheated. A lot. He knocked someone up and along came Alex.” I took Mom’s hands in mine and held her teary gaze. “I don’t want to protect him anymore.”

“What the fuck? Wait. Wait a second. You’re saying that you’re not Alex’s mom?” Noah collapsed into his chair. “I don’t understand.”

“She’s my mom. She’s the only mother I’ve ever known and the only one I’ll ever know. By choice.” I swallowed. “She didn’t birth me, though.”

“He cheated on you.” Ethan was coming around to the idea faster than Noah. “And what? Just showed up with a baby one day?”

“He’s always cheated on me. I just looked the other way because it was easier. I have a good life. I loved him. I get to do things I want to do and I got to raise you boys without interruption because of the life I chose with your father. I didn’t want to leave and have to share you. I didn’t want to miss a single moment with you boys. So I ignored his cheating. And when he showed up with Alex... I wanted another baby but he didn’t. I didn’t care that Alex wasn’t biologically my own. All I cared about was that no one would show up to steal him away from me when she decided she wanted him back.”

“Mom... No...” Noah sat forward with his elbows on his knees and held his head. “Why didn’t you tell us? Why didn’t *you* tell us, Alex?”

I stiffened at Noah’s accusatory tone. “It’s not like I’m the one who knocked anyone up while I was married, Noah. You don’t need to talk to me like that. I kept it a secret because it wasn’t just mine to tell. You worship the ground Dad walks on. It would’ve been cruel for me to hurt your relationship with him. Over a decade had passed when I found out the truth. I didn’t think he was still actively cheating.”

“Fine. He made a huge mistake over twenty-years ago. That doesn’t mean he’s a bad man now.”

I tried to stay calm but it was hard. “Of course, you wouldn’t think he could be bad. You’ve always been the golden child, Noah. He’s no angel. He’s treated me like the mistake I was for my entire life. I’ve seen the bad in him over and over again. If what Ava said is true...”

“It’s not fucking true!” Noah tugged at his hair and jumped to his feet. “I’m not listening to this.”

“Noah!” Mom hurried after him but he took the emergency stairs and fled.

“Good riddance.”

Mom frowned at me. “That’s your brother, Alex.”

“Maybe a bad time for a joke, but he’s only my half-brother.” I shrugged. “I need to get out of here, too. I can’t deal with this shit right now.”

“Honey, no. Just stay and talk to us. This is all such a mess.” She turned around and walked a few steps away before turning back to us. “I have things I need to tell you boys but you have to be together. Stay here and I’ll go find Noah.”

“No. I don’t want to be a part of this anymore.” I patted my pockets to see if I had my keys and swore when I didn’t.

“Your father lied!” Mom’s broken cry shut me up. She sat down and suddenly looked twenty years older. “He lied.”

The door to the stairs slammed shut and Noah held up his hands as he tried to walk through the living room. “I’m just getting my keys. I’m not back to talk about any of this.”

“Noah, come here and sit down.” Mom’s tone was serious and it stopped Noah in his tracks. “I mean it. Get over here and sit with your brothers. I’m not going to let your father hurt you boys anymore. Especially when it comes to your relationship with each other.”

“What are you talking about, Mom?” Noah still sounded just as furious but he walked over and sat down on the couch between me and Ethan.

“Your father thinks I have the IQ of a squirrel so he’s never bothered to hide things from me. After that meeting with Sophia, I didn’t feel right about the entire situation. Your father has never once confessed his cheating to me. Even when he brought Alex home, he didn’t actually admit what he’d done. He refused to say the words.” She stared down at her hands. “Him confessing to cheating wasn’t believable, especially after I saw the way Sophia reacted to the accusation.”

We were all on the edge of our seats and when Mom hesitated, I nearly lost my mind. “Mom!”

“I went through his emails. He never bothers to close his laptop or lock his phone around me. He has a folder of files

right there on his desktop. Each file is a video. If it wasn't for the context, I would've happily watched most of those clips. I saw the way you three looked at Sophia and touched her. Hardly appropriate behavior for the workplace, but you boys couldn't help it. It was really beautiful to see."

"You're getting a little offtrack, Mom." Ethan motioned with his hands for her to go on.

"He just had all these clips of Sophia with you boys. And then there was the video that no mother ever wants to stumble across. Ethan." Mom shuddered. "Don't worry. I stopped it before I saw anything too horrible, but I got the gist. You really need to keep it in your pants at work, young man."

One glance in his direction told me that he was mortified. He was bright red. "Shit."

Noah let out a frustrated growl. "Why the fuck did he have those videos?"

"There were more that didn't star you guys. She wasn't lying." She held out her phone with a shaking hand. "I saved it. Just in case he deleted it. If Sophia decides to press charges against him, I want her to have this."

My stomach crashed and burned as Noah took the phone and hit play on the video. As I watched my father sexually harass and assault Sophia, I could see the fear in her face. I could see her trying to get away from him. Her shaky voice begging him to leave her alone rang through the apartment.

Noah put the phone down gently and stood up. "And the rest? He lied about every part of it?"

"I saw an email between him and that so-called PI. There was never an investigation. No money was ever stolen. That PI is one of his golf caddies, apparently."

I got up and walked to my room. I could hear Mom calling after me, but I couldn't make out her words. I only had one thing on my mind. Sophia.

*****SOPHIA*****

“A lright, Lily. Get ready. I’m going to throw the ball to you.” I watched her bring the bat up and grin at me. “Here it comes!”

She swung and her bat connected with the ball perfectly. I was too busy cheering to worry about trying to get her out. As she ran the makeshift bases, I jumped up and down and screamed her name like she’d just won a gold medal.

“She’s a natural!” Davis had stopped by to see Lily and he was leaning against his truck and grinning just as big as I was. “And you’re a great teacher.”

Lily passed the home plate and high-fived Milo. “I did it! Did you see?”

“How could I have missed it? You could go pro, kid.” He nodded at Ava, who’d just gotten back from running errands. “Should we quit making art and just turn into those nightmare parents who live vicariously through their kid?”

“You know she’s not our kid, right?” Ava stuck her tongue out at Lily. “No offense.”

I saw that I was losing Lily to an argument with Ava so I walked over to stand next to Davis. “She told me she wants to play this year. Can you believe we’ll be sports parents? I always hoped she’d be into inside things.”

He shook his head. “She’s going to take after me. I was a championship winning ball player, if you recall.”

I snorted. “I saw a trophy in your mom’s basement one time. Is that what you wanted me to recall? I’m pretty sure it was a little league trophy, at that.”

“Okay, okay. Stop busting my balls.” Laughing easily, Davis watched Lily debating with Ava. When he turned to face me, I could tell he had something serious on his mind. “How are you doing?”

I groaned. “Don’t. The last thing I want is my ex-husband feeling pity for me.”

“I’m asking as a friend.”

“Is that what we are now? Friends?” I sighed and shrugged. “Fine. I’m okay. Some minutes suck. Some minutes are okay. There’s really no other way of putting it.”

“Still counting time in minutes, huh? That’s rough. I remember that stage.” He crossed his arms over his chest. “It gets easier.”

“Ava and Jack have been keeping me busy. Same with Lily. If I don’t slow down, I don’t feel the overwhelming fear as much.” I forced a laugh and looked back at Lily. She was holding me together. I couldn’t sit around and cry all day because I didn’t want her to see that. “I got an interview for a job similar to my position at Anderson. If Gerald hasn’t blacklisted me, I have a good chance of getting it.”

“I know you know this already, Soph, but I’ll help with whatever comes up. I have enough to support you and Lily while you’re handling all of this.”

Shaking my head, I tipped my face up to the sky and let the sun warm my skin. “Nope. Thank you, but...just nope. I’ve got this. It was touch and go there for a few days, but I’m okay. I’m going to bounce back. And then I’m going to ruin Gerald.”

“So this was your villain origin story?” Davis laughed when I shot a glare at him. “Hey, I’m not judging. If you want to pull

on a spandex bodysuit and start plotting to rule the world, that's cool with me."

"Shut up." I found myself smiling and looked over at him. "This is nice. Being friends, I mean."

He looked away and nodded. "I'm doing my best. As fucked up as it is to admit this, seeing you so hurt over someone else has helped me get over my shit. I didn't make you feel the same way they did. Honestly, Soph, I never even realized you could feel shit that big."

I frowned. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means that I watched you come alive for them in a way you never did for me. I'm not the one for you. No matter how much I wanted to be."

I rolled my eyes. "You weren't the one for me because you couldn't keep your dick in your pants, Davis."

He smiled and nudged me with his shoulder. "Yeah, there was that, too. I mean it, though. These guys may not be the right ones for you, but now you know what you can have. Don't settle for some asshole who doesn't know what he's got until it's gone."

"The thought never crossed my mind." I smiled at him and then pulled him in for a hug. "Thank you, Davis."

He pushed me away with a laugh. "I said don't settle, woman! I'm going to have to turn you down, no matter how much you might want me."

"Good. It's got to be good for your ego to finally be the one rejecting me." I laughed and then pushed off the truck. "Want to play ball with us?"

"I have a date, actually." He sucked in a deep breath and blew it out slowly. "Lily's teacher introduced me to her sister and she asked me out for coffee."

I groaned. "Davis, no. If you make things weird with Lily's teacher, we're going to have to switch schools."

"I'm not going to make things weird! Why do you think I'm going to make things weird?" He pulled something out of his

pocket and then proceeded to perform a magic trick that produced a plastic rose. “Not weird at all.”

“Davis. You can’t be a dentist who performs magic. People will think you’re a serial killer.”

“I bet Tasha likes it.”

“I bet Tasha runs.”

Davis glanced over his shoulder at the sound of a truck coming down the road. “I bet Tasha...”

I glanced over at him when his words trailed off. “What? You bet Tasha what?”

“Is that who I think it is?” Davis turned to me with a concerned look on his face. “Shit.”

Seeing Alex’s truck in my driveway wasn’t something I thought I’d have to see again. No amount of distraction was going to ease the deep ache that formed in my chest when I watched the doors open and the guys step out.

I blinked away a rogue tear and stiffened my shoulders. I wasn’t going to let them hurt me again. “Get Lily inside.”

Davis whistled. “Glad it’s them and not me this time.”

*****SOPHIA*****

I rounded the back of Davis's truck and cut the guys off at the end of my driveway. I couldn't let them back into my space. With my hands on my hips, I shoved all of my emotions as deep as I could get them and stared at them as they walked closer.

They each looked older somehow. I expected more of the same angry expressions, but what I got was three men who looked shell-shocked and sad. It deepened the chasm in my chest but I didn't trust them. It didn't matter how sad they looked. They were Anderson men.

"Soph... Can we talk?" Alex gripped his hands in front of himself, looking every bit the part of the kicked puppy.

"The time for talking was a week and a half ago." I kept my voice level, refusing to show them anymore of my pain. "I think y'all should just go."

"We were wrong." Ethan moved closer. His hair was even wilder than normal, as if he'd been tugging at it. "We messed up."

I nodded. "Yeah, you did. I don't see why it matters now, though. You made your decision."

"We made a decision based off of lies, Sophia." Noah was quiet but his voice shook with conviction. "We didn't know."

He's our *father*. We- *I* thought I could trust him."

I wrapped my arms around my waist and shook my head. "And what? He just magically came clean suddenly? He was so trustworthy when he was accusing me of sleeping with him but now you're not sure? Or do you still believe that part and not the rest? You'll have to excuse me if I'm confused; there were just so many allegations."

"Mom found things on his computer. It was all bullshit." Alex reached for me but I backed away. "Please, Soph. Let us explain."

"*Don't* touch me." I balled my hands into fists and glared at them. "So, you still didn't believe me? Your mom had to show you proof that I'm not a lying whore? Fuck you."

"We deserve that." Ethan gripped the back of his neck and ducked his head so he was eye level with me. "Dad was convincing. It wasn't that we thought-"

"I'm sorry. I'm going to be honest with the three of you. You coming here like little boys who just found out Santa isn't real is not doing what you want it to. You fired me. *You* called me vile!" Scowling at Noah, I took another step backwards. "If it was just you believing your father over me, I might've been able to at least look at you three again, but it wasn't just that. You let him ruin my career. I have a daughter to take care of and you threw me out of that building like I was lower than trash. You didn't care about me. You didn't care about Lily."

"I'm fucking sorry, Sophia!" Noah reached out and took me by my wrists but withdrew like I'd burned him when he looked down at my arms. "Fuck. I'm sorry. I... I'm not like him. I would never hurt you like that. I didn't mean to grab you."

A cold chill washed over me. "You don't have to be like him to hurt me just as deeply. You think he's the one who hurt my wrist. Why?"

"We saw." Ethan went pale. "We saw him grab you. We heard him threatening you. He saved the security feed of it. We have it. If you want to use it, we'll give it to you, Sophia."

My stomach turned violently and barely managed to turn away from them before I threw up. I felt one of them try to help me and came up screaming. “No! I don’t want your help! Don’t fucking touch me.”

Ethan held up his hands as he backed away. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, Sophia.”

“Delete the video. I don’t want it to exist anywhere. Get rid of it and don’t come back here. I’m done. I don’t want anything to do with your family ever again.”

“Sophia, *please*.” Alex moved into my space and took my face in his hands. “Listen to me. We’ll fix everything. We’ll take care of everything. Just give us a chance.”

I stared into his pale gray eyes and felt tears burning the back of my eyes. “No.”

Twisting away from him, I turned and walked up the driveway. I could see Ava standing in the doorway, her face pinched. She stepped out of the house when I got closer and wrapped her arm around my shoulder. “You okay?”

I shook my head. “No. Not even a little bit. I have to be, though.”

“Hold on a second, Soph.” She caught my hand. “You need to process what just happened.”

“I don’t. I need to find Lily and play with her. That’s all I need to do.” I didn’t let myself look back to see if the guys were still there. I didn’t want to know.

Davis looked up at me from where he was sitting on the floor with Lily. “Why don’t I cancel my date and just hang out with Lily tonight? My favorite girl deserves some one-on-one time with her dad. Isn’t that right, Lily?”

I shook my head. “I’m fine. Go on your date.”

“Really, Soph, I don’t mind. I-”

“Go on your date, Davis. I’m fine. Everything is fine. I just need everyone to stop acting like I’m going to shatter. I can handle this.” I noticed my hands were shaking and squeezed

them together. “Should we have a pool party, Lily? Just you and me?”

Lily jumped up. “Really? You won’t let Aunt Ava come? She’s being bossy today.”

Ava pointed at her. “You haven’t seen bossy yet, little girl. I’ll come to the pool party if I want to. I *am* the pool party!”

I forced a smile and patted Davis’s arm. “See? We’re having fun here. Go on your date!”

Milo stood up from where he’d been sitting and patted the front pocket of his vintage Hawaiian shirt, the place we all knew he kept his happy grass, as he liked to call it. “Don’t worry. I’ve got just what Soph needs to let go of some of that tension.”

“Milo!” Ava growled. “That’s not the answer to every problem.”

Davis made a noise that said he disagreed. “Maybe not to every problem, but to most of them.”

Milo fist bumped Davis and wagged his brows at me. “What do you say, Soph? It’s always four twenty somewhere.”

A real smile replaced my fake one and all I could do was shake my head at him. “No, Milo. I’m going to a pool party with my seven-year-old, not Woodstock.”

“Kids are better when you’re flying high, Soph. Trust me.”

I turned to Ava but she was already grabbing Milo’s ear and pulling him with her towards their room. I could hear her scolding him the entire way.

Davis hugged Lily and then ruffled my hair. “I’m here if you need me.”

Lily grabbed my hand. “Come on, Mom! Pool party!”

I smiled. “I’m good.”

*****NOAH*****

“**Y**ou need to calm down before we go in there, Noah.”
Ethan stared at me from across the elevator.

I laughed bitterly. “Why? What’s the fucking point?”

“If you get thrown in jail, any hope you have of taking over this company is going to be trashed. I don’t want it but you do. Get your shit together before you lose everything you’ve ever wanted.” Alex flexed his hands at his sides, a sign that while he was trying to calm me down, he was ready to fly off the handle himself.

“I’m not going to hit him.” Even as I said the words, I felt like they were a lie.

“No one said anything about hitting him. The fact that that thought even popped into your head tells me everything I need to know, Noah.” Ethan had been uncharacteristically silent on the ride back from Sophia’s house. I could feel his anxiety and pain rolling off him in waves.

The elevator doors opened and I stalked out. “I’m not going to hit him.”

“Here we go.” Alex held up his hand to silence Dad’s assistant who stood up at the sight of us. “He won’t be taking any calls right now.”

“You can’t go in there! He’s in a meeting!” The woman tried to get in Alex’s way, but he just brushed past her.

Alex barged in first with me on his heels and the sight that greeted us was something I’d never get out of my head for as long as I lived. Sitting at his desk with his pants around his ankles and a woman on his lap was our father.

“What the fuck?” Alex’s shout shocked Dad into action and he pushed the woman off his lap and rushed to fix his pants. Alex grabbed the woman’s dress from the corner of the desk and tossed it to her. “Leave.”

“Ethan. God, yes. You feel so good.”

Dad slammed his fist down on his keyboard and the sound of Sophia’s voice shut off but it was too late. The only sound in the room for a few deafening seconds was of the woman leaving. Then chaos erupted all at once.

Ethan was across the room, landing a solid punch to our father’s face before any of us could react. He grabbed Dad up by his collar and we all watched as Dad’s face went red. “You sick bastard. Erase the fucking tape. Erase it right now or I swear to god, I’ll throw you off the top of this building. Erase it!”

Alex pulled Ethan off and held him by his arms while he struggled to hit Dad again. I stood still, rooted in place with fire burning every part of me. The man I’d loved and respected was just cheating on our mom and watching the revenge porn he had of our girlfriend. In the blink of an eye, it was like my entire life up until that point was different, dirtier.

Dad jabbed at his computer again and Sophia’s sweet voice filled the room once more. “Fuck!”

My feet finally moved. I shoved Dad away from the computer and stopped the video. Then I went through the computer while Dad silently watched and erased every trace of the video I could find. Instead of taking chances, I yanked the cords from the computer and stacked it on top of his laptop so I could take it with me and give it to someone who could be sure the thing was erased.

“What the hell are you doing, Noah? Put my computers back!” The shock had worn off for Dad and he was regaining his characteristic big guy persona. “Fuck, Ethan! What the fuck do you think you’re doing?”

“What is wrong with you?! Why were you watching that?” Ethan struggled to get out of Alex’s hold but Alex was hanging on tight.

“Let’s just talk about this in a reasonable way. Jesus. How the fuck am I going to explain a black eye to your mother?” Dad sat heavily in his chair and rubbed his face. “Little shit. You pack a punch.”

“Why’d you do it?” I didn’t recognize my own voice as I stood over my father. “Why did you lie to us and turn us against Sophia?”

“What are you talking about?”

I moved closer and gripped the back of his chair. “Was it because she didn’t want you? Was that why you chose to punish her?”

“What makes you think I was punishing her?” His voice was cold, devoid of the warmth he spoke to us with around other people.

“I saw the video of you attacking her!” I slapped his chair and watched him flinch. “Her assistant’s wife is a women’s rights attorney. I think she’d be interested in that tape. Mom sure was. Your reign of terror is over. You’re done. I’m not going to let you hurt another woman I care about.”

“Disgusting pig.” Ethan’s voice shook. “You belong in prison for what you did to her.”

“Can we all just grow up? I’m a man. I have needs and I’m not going to apologize for those needs! You boys are the same. You twisted little shits are all fucking the same woman. You think that’s not disgusting to some people? How’d you figure it out?” Dad looked at me with a smirk. “I know it wasn’t you, my golden boy.”

I punched him without thinking. I felt his nose break and knelt so I was in his space. “You’re not sorry for anything you

did, are you?”

Holding his bloody nose, he shoved out of his chair and faced off with me. “I didn’t do anything! Your girlfriend doesn’t loosen up for anything less than a group fuck, apparently.”

Alex’s voice was dangerously calm. “Call a board meeting. We’ll present the evidence against this sick fuck and they’ll vote him out. We won’t hurt him by letting him see our disgust. We’ll take away the thing he loves instead.”

“No, the fuck you won’t. The board won’t remove me. Half of those guys would’ve done the same thing I did, but worse. You’re just as powerless as you’ve always been.” Marching over to his liquor cabinet, he poured himself a few fingers of scotch. “I try and I try. I built this company. I prepared you boys to take over and rule the fucking world. You have everything you could ever want at your fingertips because of me. And this is how you repay me?”

“We have everything. The theft accusations, the fake PI, the assault. The board won’t have a choice.” Alex’s cold stare was punctuated with a dark smirk. “We won’t give them a choice, *Dad*. They might be sick fucks, just like you, but they love their money. If half the shit you’ve done goes public, they’ll lose everything, especially after the three of us give a public statement and several highly televised interviews about how we went to them first, hoping they’d do the right thing.”

*****NOAH*****

Dad threw back his scotch and then stared down at the glass before chucking it across the room. It shattered against the wall a few feet from Alex's head. "What do you want? You want me to hire your little girlfriend back?"

"We want you out." I held his glare. "Out of this company. Out of Mom's house. And out of our lives."

He laughed. "You're crazy if you think I'm just going to walk away from everything I've built."

"You either walk or someone will roll you out on a stretcher, old man." Ethan finally yanked away from Alex and I had to step in his way to stop him. "Move, Noah. He deserves it."

I grabbed his face and patted his cheek roughly to get him to look at me. "He does. So let's do it in a way that leaves him suffering for the rest of his life."

"This is ridiculous. After all I've done for you three." Dad laughed and pulled out his phone. "I'm calling security. You don't know what you're doing to yourself right now. I'm not too old to have another kid and start over. I'm sure I've got a couple more around here somewhere that I can give the world to, since you ungrateful bastards don't want it. Alex can't be the only mistake I made along the way."

“You don’t get it. You have nothing left to offer anyone. We’re going to make sure of that.” Alex walked closer to Dad. “This mistake is going to ruin your life. You want to know the best part? I’m going to do it for nothing. I don’t want a dime from this company. I don’t want your money. I just want to watch you pay for a lifetime of sins.”

“You can’t.” Dad stepped backwards and bumped into the cabinet, causing liquor bottles to rattle as they knocked into each other. “You can’t do this.”

Ethan seethed. “We can and we will. If it wasn’t Sophia, it would’ve been someone else. No one will be safe until you lose the power that you hide behind. You’re not our father anymore. You’re a problem that needs to be solved.”

“All of this for some pussy? I knew your mother was too soft with you three.” Dad held the phone up to his ear. “I need to have three intruders removed from my office.”

I shook my head and pulled out my own phone to arrange an emergency board meeting, but before I could do anything, I heard Dad’s voice go higher.

“Excuse me? What the fuck do you mean? Get up here right now and remove them or you’re all fucking fired!” Dad listened a second more and then threw his phone across the room with a shout. “What did you do?”

There was a moment of confusion as I looked back and forth between Ethan and Alex. None of us had done anything yet.

The office door swung open and Tiffany hurried in, followed by our mother. She’d changed from the soft clothing we’d always known her to live in, into a white pantsuit. She looked more like a CEO than any of us.

“It looks like I’m late to this party.” Mom passed a briefcase to Dad’s assistant and then made the rounds, kissing each of us on the cheek like she hadn’t seen us just hours earlier. When she got to Dad, she just stood back and stared at him. “Congratulations, Gerry. You finally shit the bed so thoroughly that nothing you can say or do will change anything. It took you nearly fifty years, but you finally pulled it off.”

Dad's face went an even darker shade of red. "Mary? What's going on? What are you doing?"

Mom looked back at Dad's assistant, who rushed forward and opened the briefcase. Mom's smile was serene as she pulled out a sheet of paper. "Thank you, Tiffany. You're a doll."

"Tiffany?" Dad cleared his throat. "Someone had better tell me what the hell is going on!"

"Calm down, Gerry, I'm getting to it." Mom's southern drawl was even more pronounced than normal. "I have a few things for you to look at, Gerr-Bear. First, I'd like to remind you of where you come from."

Alex settled against Dad's desk with a smile on his face. "Well, this is fun."

"Your family business was holding on by a hope and the worn string of an old G-string. My money saved this place, Gerry. My family poured itself into this place to keep it from going belly up. Something your daddy might not have told you all those years ago is that my family wasn't doing it just because I loved your daddy's idiot son. He sold them shares, Gerry. Lots and lots of shares."

Dad shook his head. "No. I know all the shareholders. You're lying."

"You know who I want you to know." Mom pushed her shoulders back and adjusted her jacket. "I've been a good, docile wife through decades of your bullshit, honey, but I've got to tell you... I'm getting pretty sick of your shit. I love you and that's a character flaw I've never been able to get rid of, but you hurt my boys. I've always told you, Gerry, I can stand by your side through almost anything but my boys were off-limits.

"Anyway, Gerr-Bear. I called a quick emergency meeting with the board about an hour ago. Those men can really make it somewhere on a dime when their livelihoods are at stake. I was honestly impressed." Mom looked over at us and laughed.

“If only I’d been able to get y’all up in the mornings like that back in the day.”

“You did *what?*” Dad glared at Tiffany. “Did you help her call an emergency meeting?!”

Mom held up her papers. “Leave Tiff out of this. She had a decision to make and she made it. People really do choose themselves most of the time where you’re concerned, Gerry. There are two letters in my hand right now. You get to make your own choice. Just like Tiff.”

NOAH

I had never seen my mom project so much power and authority. I felt a wave of sickness at the idea of how much she'd given up over the years to be our mother.

“Choice one. You sign your name at the bottom of this resignation letter and you walk out of here with your head held high, even though you don't deserve to. It saves the company some time and trouble and you can retire peacefully.” Mom tilted her head to the side and smiled. “Choice two is my favorite. You act like an asshole and you get treated like an asshole. We fire you, effective immediately. We make a public statement regarding the firing, bring to the forefront the issues we need to work on as a company, like the sexual harassment and assault in the workplace. You retire in shame with nothing to your name except all the fond memories of what you once were.”

Dad swallowed as he looked over the papers and that *gulp* said it all. He ran his hands down his face and threw his arms around Mom, hugging her. “I'm sorry, Mary. Please, let me explain everything to you and make it right. I'll get therapy. I'll be better. You can't do this, though. This company is my-”

Mom's eyes were strained when she pushed him away. There was so much pain on her face as she reached back and took out another stack of papers from her briefcase. “Divorce papers. I'm done with you, Gerry.”

Dad went to his knees and wrapped his arms around Mom's legs. "Mary, no! Don't do this. I can make it right. I can fix this!"

Mom snapped her fingers and a handful of security guards rushed in. They pulled Dad off of her and held him as he turned himself into dead weight. "Make a choice, Gerry."

"I can't! I won't!"

Mom put her hands on her hips and nodded. "Choice two it is. Effective as of right now, you're fired, Gerald. You're no longer allowed in this building and you'll be charged with trespassing if you ever come back. Someone will pack up your office and drop it off at your house."

"You can't do this to me! I made this company what it is!"

"Exactly, Gerald. You made this company what it is. You filled your highest positions with men you could manipulate into letting bad things slide. It's going to take a lot of work to clean up the piles of shit you've kept around for so long. Lucky for me, I've got free time and until I have grandkids, I'm going to use it to help around here. I just think it needs a woman's touch."

"Don't do this, Mary! I love you! You know I love you! Please, Mary!" Dad's voice faded as the guards hauled him out of his office. His shouts could still be heard from down the hall, but they turned angry. "Let go of me, you piece of shit! I paid your salaries! I gave you this job!"

"Tiff? Be a dear and shut that door, will you?" Mom moved towards Dad's chair and ran her fingers along the back of it. "Call the board and tell them Gerald chose the hard way. They might want to start cleaning up their acts now because this entire place is about to be under a microscope."

Tiffany hurried towards the door. "Yes, ma'am."

"And Tiff?" Mom sat down slowly, letting her body melt into the opulent leather. "You chose correctly. I'll be glad to keep you on, but if I see you take one wayward step out of line, you're gone. Your lies helped hurt my kids. You're good

at your job, though, and I'll need someone I can depend on. Should I forgive you?"

Tiffany glanced at us and then down at her feet as she nodded. "Yes, ma'am. I'm sorry for what I did. It won't happen again."

"Lovely! Bygones, then. After you call the board, go home and rest up. We've got a mess to clean up."

As soon as the door shut behind Tiffany, mom rested her elbows on the desk and let out a bone deep sigh. I pulled her up and into my arms, hugging her tightly. "Are you okay?"

She hugged each of us as tears streaked down her cheeks. "I love him, but I won't let him hurt you boys. I should've stepped in years ago."

"Mom, that was...amazing." Alex shook his head. "I didn't know you had that in you."

I agreed. "I will gladly work for you. All this time, I thought Dad was the CEO that I strived to be like, but fuck that. It's you."

"Okay, okay. That's enough excitement for one day. Watch your language." She wagged her finger at us, all signs of the CEO replaced by just one hundred percent Mom. "I saw your father's face. I didn't raise you boys to resort to violence. Now that I'm your boss, I'll send you all to anger management as part of your training if I need to."

Alex hugged her again. "As the only kid who didn't punch his father today, I'm exempt from that, right?"

Mom cupped his face in her hands. "You're exempt because you're fired, honey."

I snorted. "She's already making much better business choices than Dad."

Alex frowned. "What the hell?"

"You don't belong here, Alex. I know all about your studio." She laughed at his surprised expression. "I know everything. The sooner you all realize that, the better. You're fired, too, Ethan."

Alex laughed. “Ha. I’m not the only one.”

“If you think about it and decide you really want to be here, I’ll rehire you, Ethan, but I don’t think your heart’s in this. Take a month or two and just think about what you want.”

“I do want this, Mom. I…” Ethan looked away. “I don’t know what else there is. I just figured this is where I’d end up.”

“Well. Change of plans.” Mom turned to me. “And you, Noah. You’re going to get sick of me because we’re going to run this ship together. I’m not leaving until I die or one of you gives me grandbabies. Maybe that’ll incentivize you to hurry up and make babies.”

At the thought of kids, the room went somber. I sank back into Dad’s desk and scuffed my foot along the floor. “That’s probably not going to happen anytime soon.”

“Your visit with Sophia didn’t go well?”

I shook my head. “She hates us.”

“Hates you?” Mom scoffed. “Yeah, right. No one could look at these cute faces and hate you. You just didn’t try hard enough.”

Ethan grunted. “Thanks?”

“Did you take her flowers? Did you do anything other than show up with your tails tucked between your legs?” Mom saw our faces and nodded. “Thought so. You three have a lot to learn about groveling. Thankfully, you have me as your boss now. I’ll lead you into success.”

“Success? Is that how you’re pronouncing babies these days?” Alex laughed when Mom swatted him.

“Get a notepad, boys. We’re going to brainstorm.” The phone buzzed and Tiffany announced that Dad’s appointment had arrived. Mom clapped her hands. “Okay, work first, I guess.”

*****SOPHIA*****

“Are you seeing this, Soph?” Ava sat on the edge of the couch, her eyes glued to the TV. “This is wild, right? I mean, this is *them*?”

I stared at the TV with the same mixed feelings I’d had since Randal called me the day before and told me that Mary Anderson had called his wife and hired her immediately to help the company. It was strange to be on the outside of such a huge news story about Anderson Inc.. It was bittersweet. I would never complain about not working for Gerald but something huge was happening at a company I’d devoted five years of my life to. I’d had plans to be there for years to come. Yet, I was unemployed, at home, completely disconnected.

“You okay?” Ava looked over at me and frowned. “I’ll change the channel.”

“No!” I blew out a shaky breath and shook my head. “Leave it on.”

Lily ran into the living room and crashed into my legs. “Mom! Guess what?”

I scooped her into my arms and smiled. Being unemployed wasn’t all bad. I’d gotten to spend so much more time with Lily. “What?”

“Chicken butt!” She threw her head back and laughed at the new joke Milo taught her.

“Chicken butt? Gross!” I tickled her before dropping her on the couch. “Go wash up. We’re having lunch in just a few minutes.”

After she ran off, the news report caught my attention again. Looking up, I saw Mary standing at a podium with the guys behind her. My heart ached at the sight of them and I bit my lip to keep my emotions down.

“As I’m sure everyone has already heard, Gerald Anderson has been fired as CEO of Anderson Inc.. An emergency board meeting was called yesterday and after viewing evidence of behavior unacceptable by Anderson Inc., there was a unanimous vote to take the company in a different direction. I will be stepping in as interim CEO until my son, Noah Anderson, is ready to take over.

“The accusations against Gerald have rocked our family, but we stand with the truth and we stand with women. It’s been a long time coming but Anderson Inc. is moving into modern times. We’ve hired a team of people that we feel will help us in reconstructing the top. Things will be different, but our teammates and employees can rest assured that Anderson Inc. will be around for a long time to come, but it will be better.”

There were questions shouted out from around the room but Mary stepped back and nodded at Noah. He stepped forward and stared stony-eyed out at the crowd of reporters until they went silent. His suit was perfect and he looked so good it made my body hurt. I missed him. I missed all of them.

“Our family is going through changes at this time as well and we’d appreciate privacy. It’s not everyday you find out your childhood hero isn’t the man you thought he was. Someone told me once that they hoped I never had to find out the truth about our father. At the time, I was angry and I thought I already knew the truth. I didn’t listen and I let my faith in the truth I thought I knew hurt someone I care about. While the truth is ugly, I’m glad it’s out there now. I want to run a company that appreciates its employees, no matter their

sex. I want to run a company that I can be proud of. I'll be honest." Noah looked around at the crowd before his eyes focused on the camera and I felt like he was staring into my soul. "We still have a lot of house to clean. We won't promise perfection right away but I promise you that we'll never stop trying. Thank you for your time."

I dropped onto the couch and covered my mouth with my hand as I replayed his words in my head. I didn't notice Ava turn the TV off or the knock on the front door.

I believed Noah. He would take care of things at Anderson Inc.. The company would get better and women like myself would be able to work their way up to the jobs they deserved without having to compromise themselves to get there or stay stuck somewhere they didn't belong. The changes were exciting and I could imagine the energy in the office was electric. It would be a beautiful thing. It just wasn't *my* thing anymore.

"Soph? Can you come here?" Ava called from the front door. "There's something for you."

Walking absently to the door, I was surprised to see several huge vases of flowers sitting just outside. A man in a suit held another one in his arms and smiled. "Ms. Sophia? I was instructed to bring these in for you. They're a little heavy."

My pulse shot higher. "No."

Ava gasped. "What the hell, Sophia? Don't be rude to the poor man."

I shook my head. "No. Not to you, but to the flowers."

He struggled to keep his smile in place. "I don't understand. You don't want the flowers?"

Tears blurred my vision and I shook my head. "No. I don't want the flowers. They don't change anything."

"Sophia! Be reasonable. At least take the flowers and read the cards!" Ava groaned when I turned and walked away. "I'm sorry, sir. Just leave them right there, please. I'll have my boyfriend bring them in later."

I went to the kitchen and began plating sandwiches. My hands shook and I couldn't stop the steady leak of tears that was happening, but I had to do *something*.

Ava stomped in after me and put her hands on her hips. "You don't want to know what they have to say?"

"No." I shook my head harder. "What good would it do? I already told them that whatever it was between us is over."

"Is it?" She sighed. "Sophia, I'm not blind. I can see you fighting the urge to crawl back into bed and stay. I hear you crying in the shower when you think no one else is awake."

"I'm upset about my job, Ava. I can't support my family!" I dropped the plate on the counter too hard and it broke in half. "Dammit!"

"Just stop for a minute, Sophia." She grabbed my hands and pulled them to her chest so I had to face her. "This isn't just about your job. You care about them. They hurt you, but they were confused and lost in their dad's bullshit. It seems like as soon as they knew the truth, they came back to you. I heard that speech Noah just gave. He was talking about you, wasn't he?"

"You hated them a few days ago, Ava! What changed? Why are you suddenly team Anderson brothers?"

"Let me paint you a picture." She saw me start to say something and held up her hand. "Yeah, paint a picture. Ha. Ha. Listen to me. Noah has worked his entire life to get to where he's standing today. He's a few minutes away from being CEO and running a massive company. He's probably stressed. He seems heartbroken about his dad. Yet, he's up on that stage, talking about you. In his biggest moment, he's thinking about you, Soph. That's huge."

I swallowed. "You weren't there. You didn't see their faces. They thought I was a monster, Ava. They were willing to hurt my family."

"Get out of your own way. Forgiveness is a beautiful thing, babe." She picked up the sandwich from the broken plate and

took a bite. “We’re keeping those flowers. I can do a lot of shit with them.”

*****SOPHIA*****

Lily's scream woke me up the next morning. I jerked out of deep sleep and ran out of my room to find my daughter and save her. I ran into Ava on the way my anxiety hit a new level when I saw the front door open. "Lily!"

"Mom!" Lily was sitting in the front yard with Milo and two fluff balls. "Ginger and Jasper! Ethan brought them back!"

I searched wildly for Ethan, half terrified of seeing him and half hoping I would. He was nowhere in sight, though, and the disappointment that I felt made me sink to my knees next to Lily.

"Oh, my goodness, Mom! I need to swear! This is damn awesome!" Lily held Ginger up to her face and nuzzled her belly. "Look at her, Mom!"

Milo held Jasper and looked at his collar. "Huh. I think this is for you."

I shook my head and held up my hands. "No. I can't. This is... He can't do this."

Ava stepped past me and took the puppy. "He can and he did. Are you going to make her give them away?"

Lily snapped her head around to me and instantly, she was crying. "No, Mommy! Please, let me keep them! Please!"

I glared at Ava, who just looked smug, and stood up. “Fine. It’s not like I have a job that would keep me too busy to watch them. Although, food and vet bills might get interesting.”

“Soph...” Ava handed the puppy off and jumped up to chase after me. I went straight to my bed and climbed in, feeling around to find my phone, and when she saw me, she groaned. “No, Soph! You can’t go back to bedroom zombie barbie. Please!”

My fingers connected with my phone and I brandished it at her. “I was just looking for my phone!”

“Oh, good.” She sighed and then gasped. “What for? You can’t make him come take them back, Sophia! You already told Lily she can keep them.”

I grabbed a pillow and threw it at her. “I’m not getting rid of the puppies. I’m furious, though, Ava. I told them that I couldn’t take care of a puppy and they just dropped off two, knowing I couldn’t do anything about it. I’m panicking about not being able to take care of the mouths already existing in this house and they just dropped off two more! They didn’t listen to me and if they thought this would help, they were sorely mistaken.”

“Here.” Ava held out a plastic bag. “This was attached to the puppy’s collar.”

I took it and immediately dropped it. “What the hell?”

Ava snatched the bag up. “Are you crazy? Do you know what this is? You can’t just throw this on the ground.”

“Get rid of it, Ava.”

She threw up her hands, which still clutched the plastic wrapped AmEx black card. “You’re impossible! You were just complaining that they didn’t listen and how you can’t afford puppies, but they took care of it. And you’re still not happy!”

“I won’t be bought!” I pushed her out of my room and slammed the door. Turning to go back to sending an angry message, I growled when Ava swung my door open again and came right back in.

“First of all, don’t slam your door at me. Second of all, you need to do some soul searching about why you think you hate these men.”

“I don’t hate them!”

“Because you love them?” Ava laughed at my shocked expression. “People make mistakes, Soph. They seem genuinely sorry. When I punched Alex, he practically leaned into it.”

“What did you just say?”

She grinned. “Yeah, Jack and I paid them a visit. I got rough with them. Punched Alex right in his eye and he brought me an ice pack for my hand. That’s a pretty gentlemanly thing to do. I tried to punch Noah, too, but he moved too fast. Noah was being a giant asshole, but he was hurting, Soph. The three of them looked like shit and Ethan was practically in tears when I told him about the sex tape.”

“You didn’t tell me any of that. Why did you go there, Ava? You know their dad was already threatening me. You took a huge chance.”

“No one hurts my sister without hearing about it. I was brutal to them. I pulled no punches. I even told Noah that he was just like his father.”

Squeezing my eyes shut, I sat down on my bed. “Ava...”

“Yeah, yeah. If you ever forgive them like you should, I’ll apologize for that one.” She sat down next to me and held my hands. “I love you so much, Soph. You’ve carried me since our parents died and you’ve always been so strong. When Davis cheated, I thought you’d crack then, but you never did. This, though? You broke. And you can say it’s all over the job, but it isn’t. I saw you with them. They made you happy. Sure, they have a lot more groveling to do, but you don’t have to lose them if you don’t want to. It seems like the ball is in your court and I think you’d be a fool to pretend like you’re not dying to be back in their arms.”

I bit my lip hard to keep from crying and leaned into her. Resting my head on her shoulder, I admitted to one of my

biggest fears. “I’m scared, Ava. They tossed me aside like I was nothing. I’m supposed to be older and wiser, but I feel like a dumb kid when I’m with them. I don’t protect myself the way I should. I don’t protect my heart. I didn’t protect my family. I let them close to Lily and didn’t think twice about how it would hurt her if she got close to them and then they vanished. I’m scared of how deep they would get inside me. They’re young with the world at their fingertips, Ava. I’m a single mom who lives in the suburbs and fights with her neighbors. What happens if I let them in and they decide to go off and live their lives? I don’t think I could do this all over again, but with *more* feelings involved. I just want to let this be the end. The pain has to get better soon and then I’ll be able to move on.”

“They don’t seem to want anything other than you, Soph. Stop and let that sink in.” She hugged me and then stood up. “Now I’m going to go play with those adorable puppies and see if there’s a gold bar on the other one’s collar.”

I waited until she left to grab my phone and stare at an open text to Ethan. I typed out a message telling him off about the puppies and then deleted it. Putting the phone down, I stood up and paced my room, unsure of what to do. A message notification *pinged* my phone and when I grabbed it, I had to use every ounce of my self-control to not cry.

Ethan: I saw you start to type a message and I can only imagine how angry that message would be if you’d sent it. You didn’t, though. I hope that means you’re softening to us. I’m not sorry for dropping the puppies off. You only have to take care of them alone until you forgive us.

*****SOPHIA*****

A job offer came in the next day from Mary Anderson. She wanted me back at Anderson Inc. and she wanted me to have the promotion I'd earned long ago. I ignored the voicemail and spent the day with the puppies.

Baked goods came the day after. Milo had thrown his version of a tantrum when I refused to accept them. Even after giving in and letting him have the sweets, I refused to eat any of it.

It was a complete set of pirate costumes for all of us the next day. Lily already had hers on before I could say no. She'd spent the rest of the day circling the pool, playing pirates, and making Milo walk the plank.

It went on and on like that every day. I would try to get up before everyone else so I could send whatever the gift was back, but Lily and Ava beat me every time. More flowers came. Then gifts for Lily. A box of puppy toys that I could hide inside of came and then dinners started showing up. Meals that were too good to be true just appeared, still hot and fresh. There were texts, too. Every day, I received one text from each of them. Sometimes it was an apology, sometimes it was just them telling me something that happened that day. I stayed quiet.

Ava even had Jack fighting for the guys. After he saw the puppies, he told me that I needed to scoop the guys up before he did. There was hardly ever a quiet moment of my day when I wasn't reminded of the guys.

I was weakening, though. It became harder and harder to not message them back each day. I berated myself each day for being so stubborn that I wouldn't even take my well-deserved job back. I stared at the piles of things they'd sent and ate the dinners they had delivered and I had to fight to remember why I was so adamantly against forgiving them.

Two things happened a week after the puppies arrived that reignited my fears and sent me running to confront them.

A quiet knock on the front door came when Ava and Lily were in the pool so I almost cheered when I realized I'd intercept the delivery for the day. When I pulled the door open, though, it was Gerald Anderson waiting for me.

With my heart in my throat I shifted back and tried to slam the door shut. His foot was in the way and he was lifting his hands towards me so I did the next best thing. I balled up my fist and I hit him as hard as I could. He stumbled back, grabbing his nose.

"I just got that fixed! Dammit!" He glared at me through tear-filled eyes. "I was just trying to apologize!"

"Get away from my house! You shouldn't have come here!" I raised my fists to hit him again but he backed away.

"I didn't mean to scare you... I'm sorry. I just needed to talk to you, Sophia. Please."

Mr. Jimmy appeared behind Gerald and he started whacking Gerald with his cane. "Get out of here! The lady said go! I know who you are, you old pervert!"

Gerald stumbled back into the yard and held up his hands again. "Stop! I just need you to tell the guys I've changed! Please, Sophia. Tell them I apologized and that I'm sorry. Tell them they can forgive me."

"Excuse me, Soph." Milo eased past me and stood in front of me with one of his biggest chainsaws in his hands. "We all

know who you are around here and you'd better leave."

"They took everything from me! I've got nothing. I took a cab to get here. Please, Sophia!" Gerald went to his knees and began openly weeping. "Tell them to help me."

I wrapped my arm around Mr. Jimmy and directed him inside. Gently pulling Milo with us, I shook my head at Gerald. "Look at yourself. You're not sorry, you're just broke. If you come back here, I'll press charges and testify to everything you've ever done to me. Do you understand me?"

"Sophia, please..."

I slammed the door shut and locked it. Milo put his chainsaw down and jogged to the back of the house. I heard him telling Ava and Lily to get inside and panicked at the idea of Gerald going around the house.

Mr. Jimmy squeezed my hand. "Milo's getting them in, sweetheart. Everything's okay."

We all spent the rest of the day in the living room with the curtains drawn, having what we told Lily was an epic movie day. I held Jasper to my chest the entire time and tried to focus on anything but the way my hands still shook.

The sun had finally set when Ava gasped out of nowhere. "Look at what Jack just sent me!"

I glared at her for scaring me when my heart rate had just gone back to normal. "Jesus, Ava."

She waved me off. "Save your drama. Look at this! Jack has been stalking the guys' social media, of course, and Alex just made a public post for the first time in...ever, maybe?"

I turned my face away. "No, Ava. I don't want to see it."

"Shut up and look, Soph." She shoved her phone in my face and squealed. "Push play!"

I pushed her away and watched as a silent clip started to play. Alex's bare chest appeared in the frame and my breath caught.

"I know! Milo is about to have to get tatted up for me."

Ignoring Ava, I watched closer. Alex's face came into the frame when he bent forward to get something, but then it was just a video of his chest and his hands with a tattoo gun in one of them. I held my breath as I watched him tattoo something over his heart in the one mostly blank space there was.

"It's your name!" Ava gasped again and jumped up and down. "It's your fucking name, Sophia!"

My eyes widened and I skipped to the end of the video to see my name in perfect script over his heart. Just before the video cut off, the camera moved over two more freshly tattooed chests. Ethan and Noah. My name was tattooed over each of their hearts.

"It's romantic! I mean, it's not traditional, but neither are you! If you don't see how much they care about you now, Sophia, you're insane." Ava grabbed Lily's hands and they danced in place. "Tell Mommy to forgive and forget, Lily."

Anger overpowered my self-preservation. I stood up and stumbled through the dark living room. I shoved my feet into the first shoes that fit and grabbed my keys.

"Yay! Mom's going to get her groove back, again!"

I glared at Ava. "They can't do that! They can't just mark themselves like that."

She let out a loud groan. "Oh, my god! You're insane."

"Be careful!" Milo called out just before I slammed the door shut behind me.

It was unfathomable that they would tattoo my name on their bodies. That was the craziest thing I'd ever seen. We weren't even together. Did they think that I'd see that and take them back? I was going to burst their bubbles if they did.

*****ALEX*****

“**T** here’s a guest here to see you, sir.”

I glanced over at Ethan and licked my suddenly dry lips. “Who is it?”

“It’s Sophia, you dick! What were you thinking? Tattoos are permanent! Let me up there so I can kick your ass!”

“Ma’am, please don’t grab the-”

“Let her up.”

Noah looked up from the book he’d been reading with a smile on his lips. “That worked.”

I stretched my legs out in front of me, doing my best to look calm when really I felt like there was a war happening in my stomach. “Thank fuck. I was starting to think she would never talk to us again. We can’t grovel if she won’t talk to us.”

“Think she’ll actually kick our asses?” Ethan turned his head to watch the elevator doors open after the door buzzed.

Sophia barely waited for the doors to open wide enough to let her through. She came flying out of the elevator like a bat out of hell. Her eyes were wide and wild when she spotted the three of us relaxing in our living room. Her hair was tied up in some sort of bun and she was completely bare-faced. Her tank top was thread-bare and she hadn’t bothered putting on a bra before racing over, clearly. The cardigan she wore over that

tank top was hanging off her shoulders and catching on her elbows. Her shorts were the silk pajama kind and on her feet were two different crocs that didn't look like they fit her. They had to be Milo's with how big they were on her. She was an unbelievable mix of chaos and sexy that threatened to tent my pants instantly.

Fuck, I'd missed her.

We were spread out on the couches, shirts off so she could see the new tattoos on our chests, and I felt a wave of satisfaction when her eyes softened and her body relaxed as she looked at us. Then, she shook her head and she was full of fire again.

"What the hell were you thinking?" She stomped over to Ethan and leaned over to rub at her name on his chest.

He winced and grabbed her hand. "Easy, Soph."

She growled and smacked the new ink before going to Noah and doing the same. When he didn't react, she kicked his foot and then came at me. "You. This was your idea, wasn't it?"

I sat forward and nodded at the tattoo on her thigh. "I like tattooing."

Her cheeks turned red but she turned away from me and I watched in horror as she wiped at her eyes and refused to look back at us. "I told you guys we were over. Why won't you listen?"

I was on my feet and standing behind her in a beat. "We don't want to."

She spun around and shoved at my chest. When I didn't budge she tried again to the same results. There were tears in her eyes as she finally looked up at me. "It won't change anything. I don't want to be with you."

"Liar." I bent forward so we would be eye to eye when I told her what I needed to tell her. "Even if you stick to that lie and refuse to be with us, I'll never regret this tattoo, Sophia. You own us. You have since that first night. It seemed right that your name should be here."

She stared at my hand over my chest and her breath caught. A tear escaped and rolled down her cheek. “You don’t mean that.”

I grabbed her hand and held it over my chest. My heart was racing under her palm and I hoped she could feel it, so she’d know just how much she affected me. “I mean every word. I’ve been miserable without you. I’m sorry, Sophia. I promise you, if you give us another chance, I’ll prove to you that you can trust us again.”

Noah and Ethan stood beside us. Ethan brushed away her tears as they fell. “We don’t deserve you. We never have, not even before we hurt you. I want to try, though. I want to earn your trust and respect and...”

Noah cupped the back of her neck. “Love. We want to earn your love. I’ll never forgive myself for how I hurt you. I should’ve known better. I’m sorry that I failed so miserably, Sophia. I care about you so much and nothing else matters if I don’t have a chance at feeling your love. Even if you don’t want me now, I can wait. I’ll earn your love. Just tell me I have a chance, Soph.”

“You were so mean.” Sophia broke down finally and her body shook as she cried harder. “I hate this! I sound like an idiot over you guys. I can’t do this. I can’t walk into pain.”

Noah pulled her into his chest and wrapped her in a tight hug. “Don’t. We won’t be perfect, but we’ll never hurt you like this again, Soph. We’ll protect you and love you. Your family, too.”

“Why? Why didn’t you just stop and let me go?” She shook in his arms.

“Because we’re fucking crazy about you, Sophia. Ava said something that hit me like a bag of bricks.” Noah held her face and stroked his thumbs over her cheeks to wipe away more tears.

“When she said you’re like your dad? That’s not true. I know that, Noah.”

“No, that was true for a minute there. That’s not what I’m talking about, though. She said that we didn’t deserve to stand in your sunshine. She’s right. We don’t. I can’t go back now, though. Being with you *is* like standing in the sunshine, Sophia. I don’t want to feel anything else ever again. I just want your sunshine.”

Sophia pressed her head into his chest. “What about your dad?”

I grunted. “What about him? He’s an asshole who’s lost everything. We won’t let him hurt us again.”

She shook her head. “He was at my house today. Even if we were together, I can’t be around him. I won’t. Parents, even shitty ones, matter, though. I don’t want to be the reason you can’t see him if you choose to.”

“He was at your house?” Noah’s voice was harsh enough that Sophia lifted her head to look up at him.

“Yes. This morning.”

Noah gently passed Sophia to me and pulled out his phone. “If I have a detective come here, will you fill out a report? We need to take out an order of protection so if he tries to come near you again, we can throw him in jail.”

Sophia stiffened in my arms. “I don’t want to do that to you-”

“He’s doing it, Soph. Not you. Never you. If he ends up in jail, it’s *his* fault. We told him to stay away from you.” Noah took a deep breath. “We will do whatever it takes to make sure he never hurts you again, Sophia. You’re what matters to us. He used us to hurt you before and that’ll never happen ever again.”

She extracted herself from my arms and walked a few feet away. When she turned back to face us, she took a deep breath and stood taller. “Okay.”

Ethan let out a relieved sigh. “He can’t-”

“No. Not okay to calling a detective over. I mean okay to doing *this* will y’all.” She looked down at her shoes and

frowned before kicking them off. Standing in just her bare feet, with her toes painted purple, she held her hands out by her sides. “I’ve tried to stay away. I’ve tried to be strong. I just... I’ve been taking care of everything for a really long time and I want to be cared for, too.”

*****SOPHIA*****

Ethan looked perplexed. “Noah’s speech about our dad worked, but not the puppies?”

I leaned into him. “No. It’s everything. It’s...you. Each of you. I’m tired of being sad over missing you when you want me and I want you. I’m terrified but...I don’t want to wake up in ten years and wonder what might’ve been if I hadn’t hidden from this.”

“We still need to call the detective, Soph.” Noah gripped his phone. “I don’t want him anywhere near you again.”

I pressed myself into his chest and wrapped my arms around his waist. His warmth seeped through the thin tank top I had on and the feeling of his arms wrapping around me felt like I was coming up for air again. My body responded to his instantly. “Tomorrow.”

He swore under his breath. “Now, Sophia. I want to protect you.”

I ran my hands up his back and around to his chest, feeling the muscles as they reacted to my touch. Trailing my hands up and around to the back of his neck, I slowly pulled his mouth down to mine. “*Tomorrow.*”

Noah’s lips were firm as I kissed him and I could feel him struggling to stay firm in his plans. I’d been torturing myself

for weeks, though, and I needed them. I went up on my tiptoes and ran the tip of my tongue along the seam of his lips. His hands tightened on my hips so I kissed along his jaw and throat, tasting his skin as I went.

He growled and picked me up by my ass. I wrapped my legs around his waist and his bulge nestled against my sex. “First thing tomorrow, Sophia.”

I kissed him again and then leaned back to shake my cardigan off. I yanked my top over my head next and pressed myself to his bare chest. My nipples were hard against his hot skin and the sensation made me moan. “Can you focus?”

Alex laughed from behind us and then pressed into me. Running his hands up my side, he pulled me against his chest so he could cup my breasts and tease my nipples. “I don’t know if you understand how much we missed you, Soph.”

I rested my head on his shoulder and rocked my hips against Noah. “I missed you, too. And now I feel like it’s been so long since you’ve touched me that I’m going to die if it doesn’t happen right this second.”

Noah watched Alex pinch my nipples until I cried out and met my eyes. “You were stubborn.”

Ethan kissed my shoulder and ran his hand down my stomach. “And gone for way too long.”

Noah shifted his hips away from mine and watched Ethan’s fingers slide under the hem of my shorts. “I know it’s wrong but I want to punish you for not coming back to us sooner. You hurt yourself by dragging this out.”

I tried to narrow my gaze but Ethan’s fingers slid over my clit and I called out his name with a desperation that didn’t even sound like me. “Ethan, please!”

Alex pinched my nipples harder. “You’ve been bad, Sophia. You need to be reminded of one of the reasons you need us.”

I nodded. “Now, *please*.”

They helped me to the ground and stepped back. Noah unbuttoned his pants and slowly stepped out of them. He

grunted when I wrapped my hand around his dick and stroked him. “Fuck, Sophia.”

I took off my shorts and went to my knees between them. Completely naked, I looked up at Ethan. “*Please.*”

He licked his lips. “Spread your knees open wider, Soph. Yeah, just like that. Show us how much you’ve missed us. Make yourself come on your fingers and we’ll give you what you want.”

Feeling emboldened, I circled my clit as I watched Ethan and Alex undress. Ethan shifted closer and stood over me, slowly stroking his hard dick. My fingers moved faster. Noah and Alex followed Ethan’s lead and the three of them stroked themselves as they watched me. I moved my fingers lower and pushed two inside.

Ethan brushed his tip over my lips and grunted when I opened my mouth and stuck my tongue out. He rested himself on my tongue and moaned. “Where do you want us to come, Sophia?”

My orgasm drew closer. “Anywhere you want.”

Noah growled about not being able to last and I turned my face towards him so he could have my mouth if he wanted. He stroked himself harder. “Open wider, Soph.”

He pressed into my mouth and shouted my name as he came in my mouth. Before he was finished, he pulled out and covered my chest, too. I cried out and came on my fingers while grinding my clit against my palm. Alex and Ethan came with me, covering my chest and neck with their come.

Ethan picked me up off the floor and bent me over the arm of the couch. “Reach back and hold yourself off for me. I need to fuck you and I want to see everything.”

I was in a daze from coming and couldn’t believe they were all still hard. I held myself open and as I felt Ethan slide deep inside me, I screamed his name. “Ethan! Yes!”

Alex settled on the couch in front of me and held my face. “For the woman who told us she wasn’t loud during sex,

you're pretty vocal. Tell me how Ethan feels inside you right now. Use that pretty voice."

"Big. So big." I moaned as he bottomed out in me and pulled back to do it again. "Oh, fuck!"

Noah ran his hand down to my ass and I felt his finger teasing me. "More, Soph. How does it feel?"

"Like he's filling me completely. I can feel him everywhere." I stretched forward so I could reach Alex's cock. Sucking at the tip, I listened to them moan.

Ethan fucked me in long, deep strokes and left me sucking harder at Alex from the pleasure. Alex pulled back and cupped my face. "Easy, Soph. I'm not coming until I'm inside you this time."

I took it as a personal challenge. As they took me together they found a rhythm that had them both thrusting into me at the same time. I reached forward and dug my fingers into the couch as pleasure rocked me. I'd missed them and they were right there finally.

Ethan pulled me up so my back was pressed into his chest and cupped my breasts while he continued to thrust deep. Noah ran his fingers down to my clit and stroked it fast while lowering his mouth to mine. Heat flooded my body as pleasure built in me and it exploded as Ethan pinched my nipples. Noah swallowed my cries of pleasure but didn't stop playing with my clit, even as I twitched and groaned. It was too much.

"Come again and I'll slow down, Soph." Noah's voice was stern and his teeth were rough when he scraped them over my neck. "Pleasure as a punishment is a beautiful thing in the right hands. Come. Again."

I twisted and bucked as a bigger orgasm hung over my head, just out of reach. My body burned and my clit throbbed with my pulse but just when I thought I would scream from the torture, pleasure crested and I came so hard my vision went dark at the edges. The release was euphoric enough that I went limp in Ethan's arms.

“You’re not finished, Sophia.” Noah’s lips pressed into my ear as he spoke. “We’ve got time to make up for.”

*****NOAH*****

I carried Sophia to my bedroom and laid down with her on top of me. My feelings for her had been filling my head with too-loud white noise for so long that having her in my arms again felt surreal. I knew I was pushing her but I needed to know it was real. “Ride me, Sophia. Now.”

She pressed her hands to my chest and sat up. Her eyes were heavy from coming multiple times in a row but the way she caught her lip between her teeth as she smiled told me everything I needed to know. She had room for my pushing. She met my desires at any level.

I grabbed her ass and lifted her enough for her to grip my dick and line it up with her entrance. When I felt my tip press into her tight core, I pulled her down hard and fast. The feeling of her walls rippling around my dick was paradise. The way her mouth fell open and her chest flushed just made it even better. I squeezed her ass tight. “Take my dick how you want it, Soph.”

Her right hand flattened over my heart, over her name. I watched her eyes drop to the spot. “It’s so permanent...”

Alex knelt on the bed next to us as he gripped her chin in his hand. “Fuck yeah, it is.”

Sophia ground her hips down on me while Alex kissed her. Her nails bit into my skin, leaving crescent shaped scratches

over her name. Lifting her by her ass, I planted my feet on the bed and drove my hips into her from below. I watched her body bounce and her tits sway as I fucked her.

A quiet hum went unnoticed by Sophia but when Ethan pressed a small vibrator against her clit, she went off like fireworks. Her head snapped back and she screamed our names at the ceiling and a flood of her come soaked my dick. Her pussy gripped my dick so tight that I had to stop moving until the orgasm eased up.

She collapsed onto my chest and moaned incoherently as aftershocks continued to wash over her. I broke out in a sweat while straining to stay still when she was milking my dick so well. Sophia's hair had escaped from the top of her head and it stuck to my chest.

Alex moved behind Sophia and I wrapped my arms around her. Ethan had turned the vibrator off but as Alex began preparing Sophia's ass, I felt it come back to life.

"Oh, god! I can't!" Sophia shifted her hips but the movement pressed her ass against Alex's fingers. No matter how she moved, she was being stimulated.

I held her tighter as she twisted her hips. "You can."

Ethan nodded at me to take the vibrator so he could kneel beside us. "Can you handle us all, Sophia?"

I felt Alex slowly pushing his dick into Sophia's ass and watched her face pinch. Pressing my hand between us, I took the vibrator and angled it over her clit. The expression on her face shifted to pleasure and she nodded eagerly at Ethan.

He helped her twist around enough so he could grip her hair and feed her his cock. His moans mixed with Alex's, who'd managed to fully seat himself in her ass. I held my breath and closed my eyes to keep from coming at the tightness of Sophia's pussy. With Alex stretching her ass, she was almost painfully tight. The added vibrations against the base of my dick weren't going to help me last, either.

"Good girl, taking all of us, Soph." Ethan pressed his dick deeper into her mouth. "That's it. Relax that jaw so I can fuck

your pretty mouth.”

Sophia somehow tightened even more and she made garbled sounds around Ethan’s dick as she came again. Her eyes rolled back and her hands balled into tight little fists on my chest as she rode out another powerful orgasm. The three of us held still to keep from coming with her. The moment she relaxed, we moved, though.

Alex and I fucked her with opposite thrusts so she constantly had one of us stroking deep. Ethan fucked her mouth, making her gag every couple of strokes. He held her hair in his fist at the top of her head and cupped her jaw with his other hand, holding her steady. With the vibrator still working over her clit, it didn’t take long to have Sophia twisting and contorting herself as another orgasm built.

“Let it happen, Sophia. Come hard for us. Squirt all over this bed.” I roughly ordered her. “You’re not getting away from it.”

I barely managed to last through that orgasm and by the time the next one tightened her body and made her scream, I knew I couldn’t last. My thrusts grew frantic as I hammered myself home in her pussy and growled.

Ethan swore and thrust deep into her mouth. “Swallow me, Sophia.”

I thrust deep once more and my come shot from deep in my balls to fill her already stuffed pussy. At the same time, I shifted the vibrator and the new angle sent Sophia into an instant orgasm. It was too much for Alex, too, and I felt him bury himself deep and come.

Sweaty and breathing heavily, I went limp under Sophia. When she collapsed on top of me, I had to use all my will to pull the vibrator out from between us and toss it away. Ethan sank down next to us and Alex moved to the other side. No one said anything as we all tried to catch our breath.

I wrapped a weak arm around Sophia and grunted. “It’s going to be fucking embarrassing when I’m found dead at

twenty-six after fucking you one of these times. Magical pussy, Soph. Killer pussy.”

She groaned and I felt her teeth close down on my nipple. I swore at the sting and heard her muffled laugh. “Don’t call it magical pussy.”

“Killer pussy is okay, though?” Ethan still sounded winded as he spoke.

“That would be a great band name.” Alex flopped his arm out and mumbled an apology when his forearm connected with my forehead. “We need a bigger bed.”

“What happened? What was that sound?” Sophia seemed like she was using all her effort to lift her head. Her eyes were unfocused at first.

“Alex hit me. It was probably on purpose as punishment for not getting my head on faster. We missed too much time doing this.” I stroked her back. “Never again.”

She let out a weak snort. “If I did this particular act more than once a week, I think I’d actually die. I’m older than y’all.”

“Not in sex years.”

We all looked over at Alex. Sophia snorted and then groaned. “First of all, sex years is not a thing. Second of all, don’t make me laugh. I’m broken.”

Alex slowly rolled off the side of the bed and stood up. “Sex years are a real thing. And we’re the same age in them. I’m going to run a bath for you. When Noah showed us the security video of you sneaking out after the first time we did this, you were walking like an old cowboy.”

“Oh god, I love you for that.”

We all froze at once. I was sure Sophia could hear my heart hammering away at those words. I’d never wanted to hear those words before and I realized I desperately wanted them to be true from Sophia.

“Um, I mean... I just meant...” Sophia pressed her face into my chest and groaned. “I’m mortified.”

Alex leaned over the side of the bed and slapped her ass. “I don’t care if you didn’t mean that the way I want you to. I’m taking it.”

She sat up. “What does that mean? You’re taking it?”

He smirked. “It means that you love me and you told me first.”

“You can’t just take it. And what if I did mean it? Is this your response? Just that you’re taking it?” She crawled closer to him and went up on her knees. “That would be a pretty shitty response if I-”

He kissed her hard and gripped her ass. “I fucking love you, too, Soph.”

I watched her melt into him and smiled. “Well, you can’t leave us now. If you love him, you definitely love us.”

Ethan grunted an agreement. “Yeah, Alex’s attitude makes him the hardest to love out of us three. You must be crazy about us and frankly, I don’t understand how you stayed away for so long.”

Alex picked Sophia up and carried her towards the door. “Fuck you guys. I’m loveable. And I’m stealing Sophia so she can tell me how she loves me more than she loves you two idiots.”

Sophia giggled in his arms and waved at us like we weren’t already getting out of bed to follow them. If she hadn’t already figured out that we would follow her anywhere she went, she would. She’d come back and I would make sure she never had a reason to leave us again.

“Wait! I need to call Ava and tell her that I’m coming home late.”

Ethan laughed. “Late? Try tomorrow. And that’s only because I miss Lily and the puppies.”

“Or we all go tonight and curl up in your smaller bed.” I shrugged. “Either way, you’re stuck with us tonight.”

Sophia’s smile was pure sunshine. “Just tonight?”

I basked in that sunshine. “And every other night for the rest of my life. Because, you know, I love you. Probably more than Alex does.”

Her eyes filled with tears and she smiled even wider.

“If it’s a contest, I’m going to win.” Ethan brushed his knuckles over her cheek. “I love you more than both of these fools.”

Sophia blinked and two fat tears streaked down her cheeks. “I love...that y’all love me.”

I scoffed as she laughed. “That’s mean.”

Alex put her down on his bathroom counter. “Well?”

She rolled her eyes. “I love y’all. Happy?”

I cupped the back of her neck. “More than you fucking know.”

EPILOGUE I

Sophia

Six Months Later

Mary held up her glass of champagne and smiled at me across the crowded event space. “Thanks to Sophia Bennett, we’ve closed out this year over our projections. I’m not just saying that because she’s going to be my daughter-in-law someday, either. Since she stepped in as Managing Director of Acquisitions, we’ve seen exponential growth. Her connection to business owners is second only to her ability to close a deal. I consider us very lucky to have her here. As most of you know, we almost lost her, but I’d like to think my charm won her back.”

I tipped my glass to her and cringed when she motioned me forward. She had become like a mother to me as soon as we got past the whole thinking I’d slept with her husband thing. I loved her, but she loved speeches so I was nervous about how everything was going to go. I made my way through the busy room, smiling and excusing myself as I went.

“Isn’t she beautiful? She makes beautiful babies, too, so this potential grandma is pretty excited about that!” Mary blushed and let out an embarrassed giggle. “Sorry! Noah says I have to stop being so pushy about kids, especially at work. How can I help myself, though? This is a party, so it’s like it doesn’t count!”

I heard Ava’s loud laugh coming from somewhere farther back in the space and made a promise to boob-punch her later. Just before I reached the stage, Noah took the microphone from his mom.

“And this is why we don’t invite the press to our events anymore, ladies and gentlemen.” He flashed a charming smile at the crowd but when his eyes met mine, it shifted into something even better, something that spoke to the happiness he felt because of me. His eyes brightened and one side of his lips tipped up just a bit more, making it less perfect but more mine.

“Oh, hush. Half the people here are so sloshed, they’ll never remember anything I said.” Mary shrugged her shoulders. “Thankfully.”

Someone from the crowd shouted out. “Thanks for the open bar!”

I stopped at the bottom of the stage, hoping Mary would change her mind about inviting me up, but she waved me forward. I lifted the bottom of my gown in one hand as Noah appeared at my side to hold my other hand and help me up the stairs. I smiled up at him and when our eyes caught, we stole a private moment. “Save me.”

He pulled me closer and brushed his lips over my ear. “It’s too late. This is happening.”

Mary wrapped her arm around my waist and held the microphone between us. “You changed Anderson Inc. this year, Sophia. Even if I didn’t love you like a daughter and favor you over everyone, I would still think you deserve this. You were the catalyst for change that this company needed.”

Ava and Milo cheered loudest as I was presented with the award for Changemaker of the Year. The Dallas Chamber of Commerce Director stepped forward with the plaque and I listened with a red face as she said a few words about the annual award and why they'd chosen me. I couldn't make out anything she was saying through the blood rushing through my ears, but I smiled and nodded like I thought I was supposed to.

When the microphone was handed to me and Mary looked up at me with wide-eyed excitement, I could see her mouthing the word 'speech' at me and accidentally sighed directly into the mic, sending the sound out across the large room.

I heard Noah laugh from behind me and groaned, just for that to be broadcast as well. "I'm so sorry. I am not a public speaker, not for a crowd this size, anyway."

"You're doing great, sweetie." Mary winked and stepped away, leaving me on my own.

"No one mentioned I'd need to make a speech..." I cleared my throat. "I guess I'll just talk and someone will pull me off the stage with a giant hook when they think I'm done? Okay... Changemaker of the Year... When Mary told me that I'd been nominated for this award, it went about like my speech so far. I work hard and I'm good at my job, but changemaker? I still don't know about that. What did I personally change? Nothing, really. I don't think I'm supposed to say that after they already gave me this award, but it's the truth.

"Anderson Inc. did go through a lot of changes this year. I've never been prouder to be a part of this company. I had very little to do with it, however." I let out a quiet laugh and shook my head. "Mary Anderson. Rita Barnes. They're the women who stepped up and made a difference. There are countless other women who have stepped up in the last six months. Women who now fill seats on the board and offices on the top floors. Mary puts on her pantsuits and becomes such a fierce leader. Rita devours misogyny for breakfast. Candance Gore, the new Managing Director of Marketing, runs that ship like a goddess. Megan Young, Mary's newest executive assistant, can tell you an exact itinerary for a trip three months from now while changing a light bulb before maintenance can

show up to do it. There are so many other women who deserve this award.”

Alex shifted into my view in the front of the crowd and his eyes were intense as he focused on me. He nodded at me and the motion was so reassuring as I trailed off in my impromptu speech.

“So, yeah, I guess what I’m saying is that while this plague has my name on it, it’s not just for me. It’s for all of us. Maybe I was the catalyst, but we’ve all worked hard and stepped up.” I looked at the plague finally and snorted. “It doesn’t actually say my name. And on that note, I think that’s my time.”

I looked down to spot Alex again and he was gone. I couldn’t see Ethan, either. One particularly large shape moving forward in the crowd caught my eye and I smiled when I realized it was Jack. He wasn’t supposed to be able to make it to the event, but there he was. I glanced over at Mary, expecting her to take the microphone back but she was standing there, just watching me.

I widened my eyes at her and whispered. “Take this thing before I say something stupid!”

There was a collective gasp that went through the crowd and an immediate rise in noise as everyone seemed to start talking excitedly all at once. I looked down at myself, terrified the thin straps of my gown had snapped and exposed my boobs but things were still okay there. A throat clearing behind me caught my attention and I glanced back, expecting someone waiting for the mic, but what I saw instead made me shout directly into the microphone.

“Holy shit!”

Noah’s smile turned into a laugh. “Not exactly a calming reaction for a nervous man, Soph.”

“Holy shit... I mean,... holy shit.” Tears immediately burned my eyes as I took in the three men I loved kneeling on the stage in front of me. A loud *thud* echoed through the room as I dropped the mic.

Lily stepped out from behind them with a ring box in her hand. “Language, Mom!”

I covered my mouth as I laughed. I hadn’t expected a proposal of any kind, but seeing them involve Lily made my answer easier than it already was.

“I helped pick out the ring, Mom! And look!” She thrust her hand out at me. “They got me a ring, too.”

Ethan wrapped his arm around her and smiled at her with so much warmth and kindness in his eyes. It was the same way he always looked at her and I melted the same way I did every time I saw it. “We asked Lily if she would wear a ring, too. Hers is a promise from us. A promise that we will always be here for her and love her, no matter what. It’s a promise to let her know that if you let us be a part of your family we will do everything we can to make you both happy for the rest of our lives.”

“I said yes!” Lily hugged Ethan tight and then pointed at Noah. “Now your turn, Noah.”

Noah grinned at Lily and then looked up at me with a mixture of fear and hope in his eyes. “You didn’t just change the company, Soph. You changed us. You taught us how to love. You, your family, each other... You make us so happy and we don’t want to waste time when we already know we want to spend forever with you. We fucking love you, Soph.”

“That’s your one curse, Noah.” Lily wagged her finger at him and then pointed to Alex. “Your turn, Alex.”

“If you haven’t noticed, we would do anything for you and Lily. Let us spend forever making you and her happy, Sophia. Marry us.” Alex nodded at Lily. “Lily insisted she be the one to give you the ring. Said it’s practice for when she proposes to her boyfriend later.”

I dropped to my knees as Lily walked closer to me. I wiped tears away and laughed when she went down to one knee, just like the guys.

“Mom, will you marry the guys? I love them and if you don’t marry them, Ginger and Jasper will probably cry.” She

looked over her shoulder at Ethan and gave him a thumbs up.

I pulled her in for a tight hug and met the guys' gazes, one at a time as I answered. "Yes! Forever yes."

Lily pried herself out of my arms and jumped up and down. "Yay! I told Mr. Jimmy you would say yes! He said the guys should've gotten a bigger ring to make sure you said yes. And then Mrs. Johnson said-"

"Oh! That's okay! We don't have to talk about what Mrs. Johnson said." Noah shook his head at Lily and winced. "She still doesn't exactly like us."

I realized I couldn't get back up without ripping my gown and exposing some part of myself. I was desperate to hug my men, though. Before I could make a life alert joke Alex was scooping me up and kissing me. We pulled apart at the sound of Lily gagging and then Ethan and Noah were there, pulling me in for their own kisses.

"Would you like the ring, Soph?" Noah nodded at Lily. "You may need to drop the plaque first."

I dropped it like it was on fire and held my hand out. "Yes, yes, yes!"

When Lily pushed the impressive diamond ring on my finger, Mary couldn't stay quiet for a second longer. "I'm retiring! Lily is officially my first grandbaby!"

Lily skipped over to Mary, who'd become her best friend almost instantly. "Not a baby, though."

I hung onto the guys and cried as I stared at my ring. "I'm so in love with y'all."

Noah's hands slipped too low for where we were standing in front of a room full of our coworkers. "You've got thirty minutes. That's what we agreed to give Ava after a long round of negotiations. Thirty minutes to scream and celebrate with Ava and everyone else and then we're stealing you away. We've got a room upstairs for the night. Lily's staying with Mom for the rest of the weekend. Ginger and Jasper are staying with Ava and Milo. And Jack wanted me to say that he's staying with his new boyfriend, Rick."

My heart was so full it felt like it would burst out of my chest. I kissed them each again and glanced back at the crowd. I saw the support our teams had for us as they celebrated for us. I also saw Ava coming closer. Looking back at the guys, I made a show of nodding towards the exit. “Thirty minutes feels like a long time right now. If you get me out of here now, I’ll let you do that thing you-”

“Don’t even think about it, Sophia!” Ava hugged me from behind and then Milo and Jack were right there, too. Ava laughed at my expression. “You can go off and be perverts in half an hour. I worked hard for these thirty minutes and I’m taking them.”

“Twenty-nine.” Noah looked at his watch and pulled me into his chest. “Twenty-eight and a half.”

EPILOGUE II

*****Alex*****

One Year Later

“Be still. I swear to fucking everything that you are the biggest baby.” I lifted my tattoo gun from Noah’s chest and shook my head at him. “Soph sits like an angel for me.”

“You eat Soph out the entire time you’re tattooing her, asshole.” Noah winced when I lowered the gun again.

“Not the entire time...” Sophia pressed into me when I lifted the gun. “Speaking of... Is it my turn now?”

My dick hardened in my jeans immediately. I dropped the gun on my tray and pulled her down on my lap. “Eager?”

She wrapped her legs around me and nodded. “Always.”

Ethan walked in from the front of my studio and pulled Sophia off of me. “Nope. We agreed that you’d wait for another tattoo until after Ethan Junior is born.”

“We are not naming him Ethan Junior.” I growled and turned back to Noah’s chest. “And I wasn’t going to tattoo her.

But just because I can't tattoo her right now doesn't mean I can't spend an hour or two making her come on my face."

Sophia groaned and pressed her hips into Ethan. "I'm miserable. I did not have these kinds of hormones when I was pregnant with Lily. I need to be fucked by one of my husbands."

Ethan had her bent over Noah in the chair in no time. We'd all become professionals at taking Sophia in imaginative and fast ways. Living with an almost nine-year-old kept us on our toes. Before Ethan could get his pants unbuttoned, the bell over the front door rang. He swore and rubbed Sophia's back instead, something that she liked almost as much as getting fucked.

"Thank you, Ethan." She moaned. "But this child is not going to be named anything Junior."

Noah scoffed. "I personally think NJ would be a cool name."

"It's not better than AJ." I tattooed the final line of his second ever tattoo and made sure to clean it well before covering it.

"No juniors." Sophia looked up at the sound of approaching footsteps and sighed as she stood up. "Whichever one of you said getting pregnant would be fun was a liar."

"Baby, that was you." Noah pulled his shirt back on. "Do I hear the crunching of a Lily nearby?"

Lily giggled from just outside the door and peeked in with a bag of chips in her hands. "Grandma Mary said not to sneak in on y'all, but I wanted to know if you were talking about my Christmas presents."

Sophia walked out of the room with her hands on her back and her round belly leading the way. "We've already told you, Lily. If you sneak and find out what we got you, you won't get it Christmas day. Your dad agreed, too. I don't know where you got this sneaky streak, little lady."

I waited until she was out of the room to laugh. "Says the woman who could spend every day all day researching people

and companies because it makes her feel like a spy.”

“I heard that!”

Ethan frowned down at his pants. “I was so close to heaven.”

The bell rang again and Jack’s voice filled the shop, followed by Ava’s even louder one. I felt the same sense of pride I did every time we all got together, especially at my studio. Our family grew larger all the time and if we kept coming to the studio, I’d have to get a bigger place.

I cleaned up my gear as I listened to the different conversations that filled the air. Jack and his boyfriend Ricky were arguing with Ava about which one of them could do the better tattoo on the practice skins. It was always Ava. She was even considering apprenticing with me. Milo and Mom were discussing the gummies he’d given her the week before. It turned out our mother had a few things in common with Milo, one being their love of edibles.

Ethan and Noah were in a work conversation about the program Ethan ran at Anderson Inc.. After realizing how much he loved kids because of Lily, he’d pushed for the company to offer a bigger childcare program. He was figuring out how to alter the program so it aged with the kids. He was explaining something about scholarships to Noah and Noah was excitedly workshopping the idea.

“What are you thinking about?” Sophia came up behind me and wrapped her arms around me. Her pregnant belly got in the way but she made it work.

I turned in her arms and stroked her cheek. “I was just thinking about how lucky I am.”

She smiled. “Funny. I was thinking the same thing.”

“Have I told you lately how much I love you?” I pressed a kiss to her lips. “For a guy who spent most of his life feeling like the odd one out in my family, I’m pretty fucking happy with how much I’m surrounded by family now.”

“Family who loves you unconditionally.” She ran her hands through my hair. “I’ll never let you feel like that again.”

I could tell where her mind went by the way her brows furrowed. I smoothed her skin out and laughed quietly at her pout. “Stop thinking about Gerald.”

“I wasn’t.”

“Sophia.”

“Fine.” She sighed. “I was. If I could kick his ass, I would. Out of everything he did, I think making you feel like less was the worst.”

“Hardly, Soph.”

“Mary told me he’s calling for money again.” Looking over my shoulder to avoid my gaze, Sophia chewed on her bottom lip. Her heart was too big for her own good at times and that was going to be one of them, I knew. “I hate him, Alex, but I feel bad. I never wanted to take everything from him.”

“You didn’t take anything from him, Sophia. He did it to himself. You have nothing to feel bad about.” I cupped her face in my hands. “He’s fine. He’s got a place to live, he’s got enough money from us buying him out to live out the rest of his miserable life. He’s calling for money because he doesn’t think he deserves to live anything less than a rich life. He’s our father and we agreed we won’t let him die on the streets, but we’re not sponsoring a yacht life for him.”

She looked down and took in a big breath before looking up at me through her lashes, a sure sign that she was about to tell me something I didn’t like. It was the only time she ever acted demure. “I’ve just been thinking. What if you guys resent me someday? I lost my parents and-”

“Soph... Your parents were good people and don’t deserve to be compared to my father.” I kissed the tip of her nose. “We’re happy. We’re better off without him. You don’t get to take credit for ending that relationship, either. That was our decision and it’s not one I’ll ever regret. How could I? Look at our life. You’re carrying our child. This is always going to be the right choice for us.”

“If you guys ever want to seek out a relationship with him, you know I wouldn’t get in the way of that, right?”

“Woman, you’re nuts.” I laughed at her shocked expression. “I mean it. Stop worrying about things better left in the past. Focus on running a billion-dollar company and growing a baby. And keeping our delinquent kid out of trouble.”

Lily giggled as she saw me looking at her trying to take one of my tattoo guns. “Jack and Ava won’t share the other ones with me. They’re big babies.”

“I heard that, you little brat!” Ava’s voice came from the front of the shop and I was as impressed as always with her ability to hear things about herself from abnormal distances away.

Sophia kissed me once before turning away. “You know you don’t use Alex’s tattoo guns, baby. Want me to help you kick Aunt Ava off hers?”

“Hell yeah!” Lily, seeing her mom start to reprimand her, held up her finger. “That’s my one swear, Mom!”

Noah snorted from where he’d been deep in conversation with Ethan. “Bullshit.”

I tried not to laugh but the look Lily gave Noah was too good. She turned that look on me and I shrugged. “Don’t look at me, kid. I’m no snitch, but I’m also not going to lie to your mother.”

Sophia sighed dramatically. “There are days that I would kill for a snitch in this family. All the security cameras in our house and I still can’t figure out who keeps eating my ice cream.”

Ethan cleared his throat and patted his still flat stomach. “I’m sorry, Soph. I’m trying to get my dad bod on.”

She giggled and melted into his arms when he hugged her. “That’s cute. I forgive you.”

Noah flipped Ethan off when Sophia couldn’t see him. “I would’ve gotten a lecture if *I’d* eaten the ice cream.”

“That’s because I work with you all day, everyday. There are just so many more chances for you to bother me about other things. If you ate my ice cream on top of all the other things

you do to me during the day, that'd be crossing a line.” She moved into his arms and laughed at his shocked expression. “I’m teasing. You’re the best c0-CEO I could hope for. You do plenty of really, *really* nice things for me during the day, too.”

Ethan and I both mumbled our grievances about not getting the same access to Sophia all day long. Noah just looked smug, of course.

She tapped him on the nose before pulling away. “Like when you bring me food and leave me to my work.”

I laughed at Noah and watched as Sophia winked at him before leaving with Lily to go piss Ava off. Sighing happily, I looked at my brothers. “She’s fucking great.”

The End.

**FREE PREVIEW OF TRIPLE PLAY FOR THE SINGLE
MOM**

If my smile was any faker, I would've been a porcelain doll. I sure as hell felt as brittle as one while rushing through the Oklahoma Devils football stadium with my six-year-old trying to step on every line on the floor he could find. I had a job interview to be at and Jesse's babysitter, also known as his father, wasn't where he said he'd be. The stadium was huge and I could only get past so many security guards by smiling pretty before one of them started to worry that I was a crazy woman. I could feel my eyes growing wider with each minute that ticked away and I knew I was teetering into *Here's Johnny* territory.

"I think my dad's gone crazy." Jesse sang the Eminem song his aunt had proudly taught him at the top of his lungs, drawing the gaze of another guard. He loved to sing it and didn't realize his aunt had been being a dick about his dad when she'd taught it to him. He just thought he was singing about his dad.

My smile crept into something akin to clownish as I took Jesse's hand. "Remember that we talked about that song? Aunt Lydie was just playing a trick. It's not a nice song to sing about your dad, Jesse."

The guard walked over to us. "Do you need any help?"

I would've loved for him to help by hitting Jesse's father over the head with whatever weapon he had, but I doubt he was willing to offer that kind of support. "I was supposed to be meeting someone here but I can't find him. He said to meet him just inside of the north entrance, but he wasn't there. I'm hoping he's just running late after practice."

"Football?" When I nodded, the guard turned and pointed the way I'd been going. "The locker room is in that direction. That's probably your best bet. Practice just ended a bit ago."

"I'm going to see my dad!" Jesse pushed his glasses back up his nose as they slid down and flashed his brightest smile. "I haven't seen him in... Mommy, how many sleeps?"

I took a deep breath and squeezed Jesse's hand. "Too many sleeps. Say thank you to the nice man for giving us directions, buddy."

The man's expression had shifted when he heard Jesse call me his mom. Openness turned to confusion and then to judgment. I was used to it after six years of people doing the assumed math in their heads. I looked my age at twenty-one and Jesse looked a little older than six, thanks to his dad's freakishly big genes.

"Who are you looking for?" The guard crossed his arms over his chest as he studied me. "And does he know you're coming? Or is this whole thing a surprise?"

I wanted to scream. I'd arrived in town the day before with a rental car full of crap to unpack and no time to adjust before I was thrown into the thick of things. I had to get the job I was interviewing for or I was going to be playing catchup before the semester even started. I had to get Jesse registered at his new school. I had to-

"Ma'am?"

I forced my brittle smile to stretch a little farther. "Taylor Clarkson. He knows I'm coming and he knows I'm with his son. The only surprise is that he wasn't where he said he'd be."

The guard stared at me and when I thought he'd speak, he just let the silence stretch on. Jesse danced around me, unconcerned that his mother was minutes from losing her shit.

“Taylor Clarkson.” He laughed. “The quarterback who’s supposed to be the top draft pick for the NFL this spring? *That* Taylor Clarkson?”

I opened my purse and started pawing through it, trying to find some form of proof that once upon a time Taylor Clarkson had unprotected sex with me. I didn’t know what I was looking for, but with each minute that ticked by, my sanity was crumbling. “Yes, that Taylor Clarkson. My name is Olive Oakley. I’m a new student here, a transfer from a community college in the town Taylor and I grew up in. This is Jesse Oakley, our son. I don’t know what else I can say to convince you, sir.”

His radio crackled at his side and a disembodied voice barked something about a parking lot. The guard stared at me for another few seconds before shrugging. “I have to handle this. I don’t have time to worry about relationship crap. Go down to the locker rooms and wait outside with the rest of the clingers. If he comes out, good for you.”

My jaw dropped as I watched him hurry away. I’d never missed my little sister more. Lydie was only a year younger than me, but she had always been my protector growing up. She was fierce and while I’d started learning to channel her energy, I had nothing on her tongue-lashing skills.

“What’s a clinger?” Jesse looked up at me with his giant blue eyes and his gap-toothed smile. “Was that man a douche?”

I swore under my breath and took back my previous thoughts about missing Lydie. “Don’t repeat words that Aunt Lydie taught you, Jesse. Douche isn’t a nice word for a little boy to say.”

“Can a big boy say it?”

I scooped him up and held him on my hip. He was too big for it but I had enough adrenaline flowing that I handled it like

a champ and still managed to take off at a sprint towards the locker rooms. “Big boys can say lots of things that little boys can’t. Big girls, too. Like Mommy. Right now, Mommy wants to say lots of bad words.”

He wrapped his arms around my neck just a bit too tight and laughed. “Like what?”

Even in my panicked state, I had to grin at his curiosity. “I’ll tell you when you turn thirteen. How does that sound?”

I followed an arrow painted on the wall pointing me towards the locker room and rounded a corner, just to find myself at the back of a group of women who all seemed to be waiting around for the door to open. While I stood there, it did, and a wave of energy rolled through the crowd in front of me. I watched as a pretty redhead hurried over to the giant of a man and threw her arms around his neck.

“Are you listening to me, Mommy?”

I put Jesse down and knelt in front of him. “I’m sorry, bud. I got distracted. I need to find your dad as soon as I can. Give me just a second to call him and then you’ll have my full attention, okay?”

I grabbed my phone and hit the button to call Taylor again. I pressed it to my ear and swore to myself that I hadn’t made a mistake when I’d decided to follow Taylor to Oklahoma A&M. I was reciting all the positive things about the school and cursing Taylor’s name when I looked down and didn’t see Jesse.

“Jesse?” Looking around where he’d just been standing, I felt my heart drop. Instantly, mom guilt set in and I was already halfway to thinking about what I was going to say to the cops who’d come looking for him. Then, I caught sight of his curly blonde hair at the front of the crowd.

I kept my eyes on him as I wedged my way past the rest of the women standing around. Just as I was within arm’s reach, the locker room door opened and Jesse slipped inside. I didn’t think twice about dodging the man coming out and charging in after my son.

“Jesse Oakley! Get back here!” I chased him past several rows of lockers and straight into a shower room. The steam and hiss of the running water didn’t connect in my brain until I was already standing in a puddle of soapy water. As those dots connected, I looked up and locked eyes with a man standing less than six feet from me.

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