

PAYING DADDY'S DEBT

YES, DADDY: BOOK 3

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PREVIEW

I should be scared beyond belief when a hulking behemoth comes bursting into our apartment and demands my dad pay him his money.

Then he says, "If you don't get me my money in a week, she's mine...forever."

I don't know why my dad owes this man money, but I actually feel like I owe him a debt of gratitude, in some weird, and twisted way.

It's as if every responsibility I have, all those shifts I work, all the bills I pay at the house to help my dad, have suddenly disappeared.

One minute I'm watching Beauty and the Beast, and the next I know I think I've found my Beast or maybe my Daddy...

This is definitely not the way I was planned on losing my innocence, but something tells me I might actually...enjoy it. Enjoy being this man's little girl.

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"Where is he?" the hulking behemoth snarls as his eyes scan the room, looking for the unnamed person in question.

The popcorn falls from my mouth as I sit frozen on the couch of the apartment dad and I just moved into last week. The one that, until a few seconds ago, had a perfectly functioning front door. But that front door is now completely horizontal, flush with the floor and underneath the soles of the biggest boots I've ever seen.

One minute my eyes are on Disney's Beauty and the Beast on our TV and the next they're taking in the sight of a gigantic man putting his shoulder through the door, the hinges tearing away with ease.

"H...hhh...who?" I manage to get out from behind rattling teeth.

"You know who. Your father. Mike Martin," he growls, his dark orbs focusing in on me as if I'm hiding him somewhere. As if I know exactly where he is. And I do.

Here we go again. Dad promised our new move was going to "solve all our problems" only to find out what he really meant was it was going to solve all his problems, as in his inability to not screw over business partners, long enough to maintain a residence to start receiving mail there.

I make myself as small as I can on the couch, which is really saying something considering I am small for my nineteen years, and I was already curled up tiny enough to practically fit into a FedEx overnight package.

It's my only day off this entire month and instead of focusing on a movie or two, I need to focus on staying alive. But even though I'm terrified, the thought briefly slips from my mind as my eyes scan over this intruder's huge frame, coming to rest on his very much protruding groin.

Swallowing hard, I start to wonder what this behemoth has planned for me after he takes care of my dad. I've never actually seen what a man keeps in his pants, but something tells me this giant is ready to give me a front-row seat, and a whole lot more.

This is definitely not the way I was planning on losing my innocence, and the surprise is exponentially greater given the fact that something in my mind is telling me I might actually...enjoy it.

"Get your sorry ass out here, Mike!" he calls out. "The longer you make me wait the more I'm going to pummel you."

Not a sound from my dad, who unbeknownst to the imposing figure who's threatening my dad in his own house, is cowering behind the couch at this very moment. If he's not still passed out.

"I know you're here you douchebag," he continues. "Don't think your pretty little girl is going to save your ass. Oh, and by the way, what kind of man leaves a woman to fight his battles? Loser."

"Hey! That's my dad you're talking about," I pipe in, a shot of courage causing the mouth that seems to always get me in trouble, to come flying open. The truth of the matter is that my dad isn't exactly the best dad or the best anything. Loser? Depends on who you ask, but blood is thicker than water and nobody calls my dad a loser to my face and gets away with it.

I spring from the couch and start pounding my fists above my head into the chest of this good looking, muscular, extremely masculine, alpha hole. And all it does it cause him to tip his head back and roar in laughter.

"You gotta do a lot better than that," he cautions, grabbing both my wrists in one go, his big calloused mitt easily lifting

me straight up off the ground.

"I have your kid, Mike. What do you have for me?"

"Turn the TV down already," a raspy, hungover voice calls out from behind the couch just before an arm wraps over the top and slowly my dad's face appears.

His look immediately goes from annoyed to scared out of his pants, which is fitting considering he rarely wears pants, preferring to lounge around the house in his tighty whiteys. No wonder I don't have many friends, let alone consider ever having them over.

"Elijah," he swallows. "I thought you were—"

"Released early due to good behavior, and overcrowding. And my fist is gonna crowd your jaw with some really bad behavior if you don't cough up my cash, pronto," he demands, redirecting my dad's sentence to fit his annoyed narrative.

"We don't have any money," I shout, bringing my knee up quickly, trying to catch him in the groin, but he only extends his arm out farther, keeping me at a literal arm's distance as I miss wildly, and my body swings like I'm attached to some sort of human amusement park ride.

How in the world he can support my entire weight with his arm locked out straight is beyond me. Then again it's the same shoulder he just used to crumble a steel-reinforced front door without breaking a sweat, as he entered ready to break my dad in more pieces than a jigsaw puzzle.

"Give. Me. My. Money," he commands.

"Dad, just give him everything in the Ziplock bag in the freezer. It's all we got."

"Shut your damn mouth," my dad threatens, pursing his lips. "Now he knows where to look."

"No, Mike. You're going to be the one looking, for a way to get your head outta your ass if you don't get me what's mine right...fucking...now."

Dad scratches his head and appears to instantly sober up, or at least less inebriated than I've seen him in weeks. Granted I'm

typically pulling twelve-hour shifts every day, plus the commute time, so I don't see much of him at all. All I hear is his snoring when I'm coming and going. And he wonders why mom left years ago.

"We've got security cameras here. If you try anything the cops will find you and put you in back in jail," I say.

He crooks an eyebrow at me as he turns me in his grip so he can get an even better look at me. "I just spent a year in a half in *prison*, you think a county jail scares me? That's like a country club visit."

"Prison?" I swallow hard.

"Yeah, a place pretty little girls like you can't even fathom."

That's twice now that he's referred to me like that. And it's also the second time I've learned something about myself in the last few minutes, more than any psychology class in high school could have ever taught me. Fear is one hell of a turn on.

"You have no idea what I can fathom," I counter.

"Because of that imagination of yours from reading all those books and watching those kid's movies," he knowingly replies.

"You think you know so much about me, well you don't. My boyfriend's going to be here any second and he's the captain of the football team, the college football team, a linebacker and he's bigger than you."

The corner of his lips turn up and he smirks at me, completely calling my bluff. "I know enough to know you don't have a boyfriend. Never had and never will."

"Oh yeah. And how do you think you know that?"

"Because I ordered it so, demanded it be that way, and I'm not a boy...I'm a man."

The words ricochet off my brain, not sure I'm understanding exactly what he's saying.

"You're not my boyfriend."

"Exactly, because I'm a man." He pauses, his gaze moving from me to my dad. "And she's mine until you give me what's due to me."

"You can't take her. She's all I got," dad pleads.

"I got her now," he informs my dad. "And if you don't get me my money in a week, she's mine...forever."

I should be scared beyond belief, but strangely a relief washes over me. It's as if every responsibility I have, all those shifts I work, all the bills I pay at the house, have suddenly disappeared. All my dad's nagging about when my next paycheck comes in, so he can spend it, of course, is gone.

I don't know why my dad owes this guy money but I actually feel like I owe him a debt of gratitude, in some weird and twisted way.

And just like that, I feel my body twisting as he throws me over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes, marching right back toward the front door as he puts his hand on my back and he lowers his body down so I don't scrape the threshold of the door.

Surprisingly considerate for a kidnapper.

And maybe that's it right there...I never got to be a kid. I had to grow up fast and the thought of all the responsibilities I've carried with me for years suddenly go away, allowing me to be a kid for the first time in my life, sounds pretty doggone good.

"I'll get the money, honey," dad says.

I flex my back and look up, as the sight of my dad, and the apartment quickly become smaller and smaller due to my kidnappers' long strides.

I open my mouth to tell my dad 'hurry' but the word never comes out. If anything I'm tempted to say 'don't.'

And I still don't know what's happening, what this guy's name is, or literally anything.

But for the first time in my life, I feel there's a real man here to protect me and keep me safe, which is a complete oxymoron considering the circumstances.

Suddenly some of the thoughts I've always had about being taken care of flood my brain and I feel like one of the heroines in the Lena Little books I've read on my Kindle countless times.

And for the first time, I have a pretty good idea who my first time is going to be with if my dad doesn't come up with the money that is...or maybe even if he does.

"Where are you taking me?" she asks as I pull up to the harbor.

"In our bed. Against the wall. Pressed against the tiles in the shower. Every-fucking-where humanly possible on God's green earth."

She cowers slightly in her seat, but as I soak in the sight of her it's not fear in her eyes, but more one of questioning. It's as if she's testing me to see if I'm a man of my words, or I'm just bluffing. I guess it makes sense, seeing that she's Mike's daughter. The guy bluffs more than a poker pro and he clearly never backs it up. The sorry sack's been playing with an empty hand his entire life until he met me at least, and then tried to take me to empty along with him.

"Well, I hope your bed has a blankie," she squeaks out innocently, like a lost child.

"A blankie?" One eyebrow raises at a word so effeminate I can't believe I was even able to pronounce it. Hell, just thinking it in prison would have got me shanked.

"A super-soft blanket that I can cuddle while I sleep," again but more confidently she pipes up.

"Who says you'll be getting any sleep?"

"I work a lot. Today's my only day off and I didn't sleep in today so I was planning on taking a big nap today. I might just pass out at any moment."

Bluffing, just like her old man. Her pupils are dilated, and I caught her staring at my groin twice on the ride down here.

"You can cuddle with me," I offer.

"You're too big." As soon as those words are spoken I see the pink hue of her cheeks blush. Cute.

"I'll put my arm around you. We'll make it work."

My words are off-handed, but I'm not kidding. I need her in my arms, always. It doesn't matter if she's sitting on my lap, in my bed, on the couch watching her favorite movies...I don't care. I need her close to me at all times, and not just to protect the collateral, which she's currently serving as.

Truth be told she's anything but. No way Mike comes up with the cash and even if he does I'm never giving her back. She was mine the first moment I laid eyes on her, about ten seconds before the Fed's came busting in and next thing I know I'm serving time.

I remember it like yesterday. Mike and I had been smuggling Cuban cigars on speedboats for years, getting them into the States for resale. Sure, the Cuban ban on cigars was lifted back in 2014, but that was just for personal use and only allowed up to a hundred bucks a pop when you entered U.S. Customs. There are single cigars that sell for well more than that, enough that it was worth purchasing a high-speed cigarette boat, loading it up in Havana, and then high-tailing it to Miami to deliver to underground buyers like high-stakes illegal poker places, gentlemen's clubs, even congressman got in on the action, which I strictly told Mike was an area we wanted to avoid.

And sure enough, when the governor, who'd turned into one of our best clients, was up for re-election and his numbers were fading with voters, he popped us and I got made the example of. Or more accurately I allowed it as no way in hell I was letting that little princess, Emma, find her way into foster care while her dad and I served time.

I took the rap with the understanding Mike would keep a cool mil on ice for me until I got out. A mil was nothing, we were

pulling in the same in profits every month. So to get out only to find him living in that apartment, that rundown box, told me right away he'd already blown through everything. Not only that he'd put his daughter to work when he should have broken off a piece of that money and put her through college. I could wring that man's neck right about now. No way his daughter ever goes back to that situation, to him, even if he does miraculously find a way to rob a Brink's truck in the next week. And not get caught in the process.

The only reason why I gave him seven days was I figured that was enough time for Emma to decide if what she wanted was the same thing I need. I want her to make this decision of her own free will, and if she doesn't...well then, she's still mine anyway.

I haven't been able to get that image of her out of my mind. It was the first time I'd ever been to where Mike lived in all our years of knowing each other. We always met in public places like parks or shopping malls, and we'd always walk and talk business, making sure neither of us knew where the other lived or that the cops could link us to the other's address. We just looked like two guys out for a walk.

Until he invited me over to his house for his daughter's birthday party which coincided with her high school graduation.

I barely even knew he had a daughter, and the invitation wasn't even really about her. It was just a cover to get me over there to move a large shipment we'd brought in, as it had to be out by morning and his car was in the shop.

As we sat in the backyard I lit up a Cohiba, and the second I did that angel in the white dress stepped out onto the grass in those small, thin shoes that ballerinas wear. Her hair was up and as those blue eyes of hers danced around the garden in Mike's back yard, I tracked her with my own dark orbs like a hunter, the cigar between my lips falling right onto my linen shirt.

I couldn't take my eyes off her, and all I could think about was putting my hands on her. Everywhere.

"Freeze," filled the air that day and I swear it was because I thought her dad was yelling at me because my shirt had caught fire, only to see a dozen A.T.F. agents point guns at my face and another dozen blocking all the exits.

Now, eighteen months later, and countless nights jerking off in solitary confinement, I'm where I was always meant to be. With her by my side, protecting her just as I'd protected her father, making a deal with the feds telling them the cigar smuggling was all my idea and I'd just brought in Mike because he was a down-on-his-luck friend with a daughter to feed.

"I don't even know your name."

Daddy. That's what you can call me.

"Elijah," I offer, getting out of the car I hot-wired and quickly moving over to her side of the car to help her out.

"I can get it myself," she says, but I'm not giving her the option. Reaching in I scoop her out of her seat and use my foot to kick the door shut, carrying her down the dock to the boat I've got registered under a Trinidad and Tobago flag, which is wrapped up in numerous LLC's. Fortunately, I paid the slip in advance for two years right before I got busted, so she's sitting there swaying in the tide just as she always did. She needs a bath, but other than that she looks as beautiful as the day I won her in a card game.

I carry Emma onto the boat as she squirms in my arms, pretending to try and break free but not pretending well enough.

"Put this on, little one," I say, handing her a life vest as I carefully put her feet down on the deck.

She doesn't acknowledge me so I gently press the life vest into her side, needing her to know her safety isn't an option. Instead, she yanks it from my grasp and tosses it into the water in the harbor.

"You'll pay for that, brat."

She crosses her arms and sulks, refusing to make eye contact with me. Instead, she moves to the edge of the boat, pouting,

but her mood softens when she sees some turtles pop their head up next to the boat.

"Sea turtles! Look," she says pointing at them.

"You want to feed one a hot dog?" I ask, grabbing a spare life jacket for her.

She nods and I move in behind her just as she leans over the railing of the boat. I'm ready to wrap her up in the lifejacket before she knows what happens, but I freeze. As she leans I can see right down the back of her pants, her butt cleavage on full display. I want to slap those firm globes, bury my face inbetween her ass and lick her from clit to cornhole, tasting every part of my angel, and all at once.

Perverted thoughts fill my mind. Thoughts of grabbing her ass and spreading her cheeks as I claim her backside just after claiming her pussy. That's what she does to me. She creates this drive, this need, to fill every hole in her body. To own her completely. To possess her. To show her she belongs to me, and by belongs to me I mean all of her belongs to me. Mind, body, soul.

I lean forward, catching a glimpse of the bow at the top of her little white panties and my dick throbs in my pants, the fucker demanding to be freed only to be caged again...buried deep inside her.

I've been waiting to claim her for eighteen long months, five hundred and forty days and nights of my mind fixated on her and nothing else. It's a wonder I don't yank her pants and panties down in one motion and slide inside her right here and now. The only thing holding me back is the other guys working on their boats and the fact that I'm not going to force myself inside her with only spit and muscle, knowing I'd rip her to shreds. She's a virgin, but I'm not about to make her my virgin sacrifice, drawing blood in the wrong kind of ways.

I'd never hurt my little girl, my pride and joy, my angel.

"Yeah, I want to feed it," she says, turning around in one quick motion, her hands clapping until she sees the life vest...and me just inches from her.

"Lifejacket and I'll give you all the hotdogs you want so you can feed them."

I know she doesn't want to wear it but she has to learn what's good for her. I have to keep her safe even when she thinks she already is, but isn't.

"I don't want to."

"No hot dogs for the turtles then," I put my foot down.

She turns back to the turtle and I keep my hands ready to put the life jacket on her if she starts to lean over the railing again. "He looks just like Squirt from *Finding Nemo*."

"Looks more to me like that turtle from the Tootsie Pops ad."

"Huh?"

"You know. How many licks to get to the center of a Tootsie Roll tootsie pop."

She shoots me a quizzical look.

"They had turtles and owls," I mumble. "Never mind. It was before your time." Wasting no more time I say, "Here," and hold the life jacket out, Emma slides her hands through.

"Good girl."

I motion to the old man who runs the little food stand on the harbor and hold up my hand for five then call out, "Hot dogs, no buns."

Being that I'm six foot five he doesn't question the order and seconds later I'm handing Emma a plastic plate with five hotdogs on it, watching her break them into pieces and toss them to the turtles, which now number closer to a half dozen.

I take a step back, seeing how youthful, free, and exuberant she looks. Pride swells in my chest, knowing I did this. I was the one who gave her the things that allowed her to be this happy. This is how it should always be between us, and exactly how it will. My baby girl comes first, always.

I've always put myself first in life, caring little about others, but that all changed the moment I took the heat for the crime her father and I committed. I didn't do it for Mike. Screw him

and his desire to throw his life away and make his daughter work her fingers to the bone. I did it for her, the girl I knew instantly would be mine.

One day.

And one day has finally arrived. Little does she know I would have served every day but one of my life in prison, if that single day I wasn't locked up I could spend it with her.

All that from one initial glance, and not that I ever doubted those thoughts that overpowered me, but seeing her now just reaffirms them...solidifies everything I already knew.

She's my princess and once this week is over she's going to see that she's meant to be my queen.

I lean in closer, the tip of my nose brushing against her golden locks as I inhale hard. This is what freedom smells like. This is what perfection smells like, her. I can't stop myself from groaning as I inhale for a full six-count before my hand rises and I can't stop myself. I fist a section of her flowing locks, and bring it to my face, inhaling even deeper and I feel a small squirt of seed leave my cock.

My heart is hammering in my chest as the front of my body presses into her, my need firmly telegraphed by the bulge in my pants pressing right up against her ass.

Turning back to face me her fingers find my chest, sliding across the taut fabric that's threatening to tear from the expansion of air in my lungs.

"I planned on sitting at home today watching a Disney movie, but right now I feel like I'm in one."

"You're definitely beauty then, and I'm the beast."

"You're not the beast, you're something...else."

"What?"

She pauses, her eyes looking me up and down before coming to rest back on mine. "You're not a beast, you're just misunderstood."

"I don't know anything about Beauty and the Beast, but I can guess that being misunderstood is the premise of the beast's troubles."

"Maybe I'm misunderstood too. Maybe there are things I've been thinking, things I've been wanting, that I didn't really know how to understand, how to express, until now."

"What things?" I ask, my head slowly drifting down as my lips move dangerously close to hers.

"I think you know exactly what kind of things...Daddy."

His body jerks back like the recoil of a cannon, and all just because of that one word. A word that's been in my mind, in the Kindle books I read, yet never actually said in my real life.

Until now.

"We need to get going before sunset," he says, shaking his head from side to side as if to snap himself out of a dream. And he's not the only one dreaming. This is the dream I never knew I had until I lived it, but still, this whole thing is crazy. I've been kidnapped for Pete's sake. My dad owes this man a large sum of money, or at least it seems like it's a large sum, and unless he comes up with it in a week then...well...I'm not exactly sure what.

Just like I'm not exactly sure what to make of all of this.

I could cry out to someone on the dock but that would just put my dad's life in danger. But am I really going to go out on the water with my captor? Isn't there some rule about international waters after you're a certain distance away from land? If someone slices you up and dumps you in international waters do all the governing bodies just ignore you since you don't fall within their jurisdictions?

"I'm going to pull the anchor and fire up her engines," he says, dismissing himself before things get too heated, not that I don't want that.

I move across the deck of the boat where I see a harpoon and some other spearfishing type of equipment. They could most certainly serve as convenient murder weapons should my dad not pay up.

"Is anyone else coming with us?" I ask, throwing a last-minute Hail Mary.

"What do you think?" comes back, although I can't see where he's at or what he's doing. The water really does cause your voice to carry and I know a scream would work great, but not out to sea.

"I think I drank too much water."

"Wait until we get out of the harbor then you can use the head."

"The what?"

"The toilet."

Isn't head a military term for the bathroom? Just how much of a well-oiled well-trained killing machine is this giant of a man?

I'm really getting tired of all the questions running through my head and am starting to think running away is my best option here. At least if I can get back home I can get to my dad and we can bolt from our apartment before any damage is actually done. It's not like we have anything to pack. The hardest part will be dragging dad out of there if he's had a drink to calm his nerves after Elijah most surely rattled them.

"I found you a blanket," a voice comes from behind me and I jump.

"Oh. Thank you," I say, as that same giant hand of his that held me up now holds up a blanket as if it's nothing, just as it had me.

"I'm not sure if it qualifies as soft and comfortable, or at least as much as you're used to, but we can stop and buy you a new one when we get back to land."

"When we get back to land?"

"Yeah," he nods, wrapping a rope up and I can't help but notice the thick cord resemble an extension of his forearms as he flexes to get the job done. "That blanket will come in handy. It gets cold on the open water at night."

"We're spending the night out there?"

"She's all I got right now," he says, sweeping his hand out in the direction of the boat's deck.

I feel a ting in my ribs and strangely I feel jealous of an oversized piece of fiberglass and wood. I don't count? And what's up with referring to your boat as a woman? It's not like his boat could ever love him like... Never mind.

"My dad will most likely come up with the cash before morning," I lie. "Why don't we just get a hotel or something?"

"Your dad coming up with the money?" he laughs. "He doesn't stand a chance."

"Why are we going out to sea then?"

"We've got somewhere to be."

"Where?" I ask, thinking back about dad's business deal with Elijah. Wasn't that around the time dad was making money hand over fist smuggling cigars out of Cuba? I don't have a passport, let alone permission to visit there. And the last thing I want is to be locked up in a prison on some island in the Caribbean. An island that's not exactly friendly with America and where I most likely won't ever be found again.

"Do we really need to take the boat out?"

"What I need is for you to give this a chance."

Ok...what is 'this'? Anything I was feeling deflates like a water balloon that's been pierced with a safety pin.

Elijah moves toward the control center of the sleek vessel and I take two steps and jump onto the plank and take off in a dead sprint down the pier as fast as I can.

"Emma!" I hear behind me, my name laced with the sound of someone missing me, a strange feeling to say the least. But I keep running, not even thinking of looking back over my shoulder.

In technical terms, I'm hauling ass as fast as I can until I reach the front guard shack to the harbor...and the ten-foot-high fence that surrounds it.

It's only now that I realize this harbor isn't exactly the type that holds boats who are in town visiting from Monaco for the weekend. This is more of an industrial type harbor, focusing more on cargo and things of that nature, making the presence of Elijah's cigarette boat all the stranger.

Two Doberman Pinschers and a German Shepard come flying out from behind the shack and I freeze, but the dogs which look like they're out for blood don't. They sprint right up to me, slamming on the brakes just a foot or two from me as they continue barking and showing their teeth.

"Emma!" I hear in the background and know Elijah is hot on my heels.

I've gotta find a way to get out of here and get back to dad pronto.

"Where you running off to so fast, good lookin'?" a wiry man spits through one missing front tooth, and the other stained in a dark shade of yellow bordering on brown.

"I need you to open the gate," I huff. "Now."

"Aren't we the bossy one. How about you come inside and tell me what's troubling you and I'll see if I can give you a hand," he says, waving his hand at me as he laughs like a hyena. "Or at least get my hands on that tight little ass of yours," he mumbles under his breath.

"Oh my, God."

I look down and see a piece of broken off pipe not more than a couple of feet behind me and then look at the fence, which doesn't *appear* to be electric. It's now or never.

I take a step back and kick the pipe as hard as I can, my toe immediately telling me I made the wrong decision until I see all three dogs give chase. Darting at an angle away from the man I make a mad dash for the fence, jumping just as I reach it, my body slamming into the chain link and I quickly try and get my footing, scaling it as best I can.

"Oh no you don't, you little shit," the man says, grabbing me by the ankle and jerking me downward. My fingers hold on for dear life as he yanks me back toward the earth until my grip gives out.

"Got ya!" he says as I slide down the hot steel, which has been getting nuked from the Florida sun all day, and into his arms.

"And I got you, you son of a bitch," a deep baritone says, as I feel my body rising just before the man releases me.

A big arm wraps around my waist and pulls me in tight, easing my feet to the ground. Stumbling backward I watch as Elijah holds the other man by the collar in one hand before his other hand grabs him by the back of his pants and he heaves him right into the fence.

"Let's see you climb that fence and get away," Elijah continues.

The security guard, or whatever he is, ricochets off the fence and stumbles back to it before trying to scale it. If his wobbling head is any indication he has no balance and no chance of getting away from Elijah...who wastes no time grabbing him by the back and yanking him back to the ground.

"You think you can act that way around women? Around little girls? Around my little girl?"

"I didn't know she was your daughter?" he cowers, bringing his hand up to his face.

"She's not my daughter. She's my everything," he growls into the man's face. "Now apologize to her before I apologize to the property manager for snapping his supposed security guard in half."

"I...I'm sorry," he says, and from his trembling, I believe it.

"Sorry for what?"

"For scaring you. For threatening you."

"For acting not like a man, but like the little bitch that you are," Elijah adds, looking down at him in disgust. It's only then I notice the three dogs have returned but aren't barking or doing anything aggressive. They say in the animal kingdom

the alpha predators are recognized, and despite there being three dogs that are known to be used for security and defense, they clearly recognize that Elijah is the leader of the pack. "Now get the fuck outta here," he adds and the man drags himself to his feet and scrambles to the guard shack, pressing a button and the fence opens and he's quickly a relic of the past.

I watch him go before turning back to Elijah, who's eyes are throwing daggers in my direction.

"Don't even think about following him, or trying anything like that again," he orders, his stance wide and his hand on his hips as a vein in his neck ripples.

Before I even have a chance to get away Elijah closes the distance between us, picking me up and throwing me over his wide shoulder for the second time in the last hour. After what just happened I don't even consider putting up a fight, instead just melting over his thick levator scapulae, that muscle that connects from his neck to his shoulder, like a clock in that famous Salvador Dali painting.

"Why, princess. Why did you run away from me?" he asks almost into the air as he lumbers back inside the harbor. "Are you scared of me?"

"You think I didn't see what you just did to that guy? Or how my dad looked when he saw it was you in our apartment?"

"Those are men or more accurately sorry representations of the male species. They deserve what they get. You are a little girl, precious, tiny, and you need to know I'd never harm you, just like I'd never lay a finger on any woman."

My mind shifts right back where I don't want it to, to the idea of him putting not just a finger, but his hands, all over me... everywhere.

"Still, you can't just go kidnapping people and beating up people who scare the person you kidnap." I burst out laughing, hysterically. How messed up did that last sentence just sound. What in the world is going on right now?

And why do I now know, with one hundred percent certainty, that I am safer with him than anywhere else on the face of the

earth?

I feel my body tilting like I'm attached to a spinning medieval torture device but instead of finding pain, my feet simply find the deck of Elijah's boat. The thought of taking off once more rises up within me, but considering it's nearing sunset already and I've seen the harbor a bit better, and the kind of shady characters that hang out in it, I decide better. Or at least I think it's the better option.

"Here," Elijah says, handing me the life jacket. "Put this on, sit down, and hold on."

He fires up the boat and gets us ready to take off, again. This time there's something different about him. His body language is slightly hunched forward, not defeated by any stretch of the imagination but also not the triumphant alpha male that he's seemed to be since he broke down my front door. He seems... genuinely hurt that I tried to run away. Am I reading this situation correctly?

He looks at me one last time before we slowly leave the harbor, keeping a slow speed as required by all the signs that are seemingly posted everywhere, but the minute we're past the last marker he hits the gas and I practically swallow my tongue, my heart in my stomach as we speed up the coast, not a word between us, although at these speeds I don't think either of us would be able to hear if we even tried.

An hour passes by quickly and the design of the boat surprisingly whips the wind all around me. It's like being in the world's most aerodynamic convertible, without the messy hair.

Suddenly the boat slows and a few seconds later Elijah is throwing the anchor overboard and motions for me to stand.

He does some kind of nifty move with the bench seating and a submerged bed appears out of nowhere.

"This boat isn't really meant to sleep in, but it'll do for tonight."

I nod, looking back at the coast and taking in all the lights, before sliding into 'bed.'

Elijah grabs the blanket and drapes it over me. He's right. It's not the softest, but it's thick and warm and I'm thankful.

"Are you going to sleep too?" I ask, wondering if he really is going to cuddle up against me.

"Sleeping would be the furthest thing from my mind if I slid in next to you right now."

My eyes are immediately drawn to his groin and I immediately understand exactly what he's referring to. This is a speedboat, no question, but from the looks of his pants, he definitely packed a sail, at least the way his gigantic poll is pointing out exactly horizontal, trying to puncture his zipper.

"This blanket is more comfortable than I expected," I lie, going for broke. I slide out of my top, lifting it out from underneath the blanket and tossing it next to me where he can see. "I like to let my skin breathe at night when I sleep. It's healthier that way. I read it on the Internet somewhere."

"It must be true then," he deadpans, the moonlight illuminating his clearly twitching cock.

"About as true as how much you care for me." I pause. "Thank you for saving me back at the harbor even though I was trying to get away from you."

He mumbles something along the lines of, "It was nothing," and goes back to trying to ignore his very visible urges, failing miserably.

I reach down and slide out of my pants and panties, discarding them with my top and then unhooking my bra and going completely without clothes, the blanket the only thing between my body and him.

"Do you have anything to eat?" I ask, tossing out anything to try and get him to talk to me.

"You hungry? I can pull up anchor and head in. We can buy something at one of the fill stations along the coast."

"I'm actually not, but I thought you might be. You're...big."

Finally, he turns and looks at me, his eyes unapologetically raking over the blanket in the spots that cover me.

"Oh, I'm hungry all right, but not for the kind of food one consumes to stay alive. I'm hungry to taste that special kind of fruit that's never been touched. That blood-red cherry that's pure, innocent, from a virgin tree, the fruits of which are unknown to any other man."

He says nothing else, just moving closer to me until he's hovering over me to the point I can't see him properly, only gazing up at the underside of his chin.

I reach out over my head and take his thick hand, needing both of mine to guide it underneath the blanket as I brush his knuckles over my mound.

"It just so happens I have that exactly. And until today I never knew I was saving it all these years for you...Daddy."

ELIJAH

A guttural growl forms deep in my belly and rolls off my lips, the sound of that one word, that title, making me aware of something deep within me. Something paternal. Something that wants me to take care of, provide for, and own my little girl forever.

"You know why I brought you out here on the water?" I grunt.

"Because this boat is all you have?"

"That and I wanted a place where we could be how we're meant to be. No nosy neighbors. No prying eyes. We can be as loud as we want, as free as we want...to be who we really are. Who we need to be." I pause. "And right now Daddy needs you to play with your naughty little pussy."

I slam my hands inside my pants, fisting my cock. "Come on, now. Be a good girl and play with that pretty pink pussy for Daddy. Show him how wet and ready it is for his tongue, his cock. Daddy needs to get a good look to see what's going to be coming all over his dick later."

"Yes," she whimpers.

"Yes, what?" I correct.

"Yes...Daddy," her breath catching on my title.

Gripping the edge of the blanket she pulls it aside to reveal her bare flesh. I suck in a breath of air through my teeth, a hissing sound filling the air as if I just put my hand on a hot stove. And oh is that tight little hole red hot.

"Were you touching yourself before Daddy told you to begin?"

"Uh huh," she nods, rubbing two fingers over her opening in a circular motion. "Was I a bad girl, Daddy?"

"Oh, you've been very bad. First, you tried to run away and now you play with your pussy without letting Daddy watch. Your pussy is Daddy's reward for keeping you safe. And Daddy knows a thing or two, too. He can show you things, make you feel things, you can't on your own. You need your Daddy, always. Understand?"

"Yes, Daddy," she answers compliantly and my heart jackknifes in my chest. She's learning. Fast.

"Tell Daddy what you're doing," I say, as I unzip my pants, the relief instant as my cock springs free, and I stroke the fucker from root to tip.

"I'm giving Daddy a show by playing with my pussy."

"Do you like playing with your pussy, princess? Does it feel good?"

"It feels very good, Daddy, but there's something else I need?"

"What do you need, baby girl? Just ask and Daddy will give it to you, always."

"I want Daddy's mouth on my private parts. I want Daddy to tell me how I taste."

"Are you sure you're ready for that, precious?"

She nods. "Yes, Daddy."

"Because once Daddy starts he won't be able to contain himself. He'll want more. He'll need more. He'll demand everything."

"I'm ready for that, Daddy. Take what's yours."

"What's mine?" I growl.

"This," she says, her eyes moving from mine to her center. "All of me."

Wasting no time I strip off my clothes and move in closer, one hand grabbing her knees as I spread them wide before kneeling on the deck. I grab one of her ankles, jerking her body back to the edge of the makeshift bed. I rise, kissing her lips hard, aggressively, letting her know exactly who she belongs to before my kisses trail down her neck and across her collarbone and then between the valley of her small yet pert breasts.

I continue south until I'm inches from her freshly shaven mound. It's as if she knew I was getting out of prison today, to come and get her, to claim her, to make her mine forever.

"Mine," I growl, just before I run my tongue straight up her slit causing her hands to immediately knife in my hair. I press on her opening with the tip of my tongue before diving deep inside, flick the tip, and then dragging it out, up and down her soft folds like a paintbrush with long coarse strokes.

When I reach the top I take her bump into my mouth, sucking her clit before engulfing her entire pussy in my mouth, sucking it in as I swirl my tongue over her nub.

Her fingers dig into my scalp as the inside of her thighs slam shut against the sides of my head. I can't tell if it's the sea or her body that has me rocking back and forth in this moment, and I don't care. I'm lost inside her, tasting her musky goodness that I and only I will ever know. Tipping my head back I let loose of her flesh, howling at the moon like a deranged wolf before diving right back in for seconds.

Her toes curl into my back and the inside of her thighs quiver.

"Yes, Daddy! Right there. It feels so good when you eat my pussy."

I smile into her opening and continue devouring her cunt.

"I'm close, Daddy."

"You don't come without Daddy's permission," I growl into her opening, and apparently my message is received.

Her knees spread and the quivering subsides...a little, as she grabs the blanket, clutching it over one of her breasts while she grabs the other, kneading it in-between her fingers.

Sliding my hands up underneath her I cup her ass, grabbing her globes hard as I tilt her in a direction that will allow me to

consume every last bit of her juices when I tell her the time is right to explode on my face...if she can hold back that long.

I don't want to keep my baby waiting, nor myself, as I'm dying of thirst, needing to drink down every bit of the fluids she's ready to gift me.

"Can't. Hold. On. Much. Longer," she pants.

She cries out as I slide a finger deep inside, curling it against her front wall as I stroke my digit in and out. Her moans intensified as her thighs hammer against my skull.

She gasps, her back arching. "Right there, Daddy. Right there! Ummm"

I continue tongue fucking her pussy while I add an extra digit, two fingers inside her priming her for when it's time to take my fat cock.

Her whole body starts to quiver and a new kind of moan slips from her lips, one that starts deep in her chest. My other hand clamps onto my length with a vice grip, reading myself for the moment we've both been waiting for, as the speed of my tongue hits overdrive, dancing across her clit until her shaking intensifies.

I could do this all night, but we both need to put an end to this madness, to send her into another dimension with an earth-shattering climax and that's exactly what it's time to do.

"Come on Daddy's face, little girl. Be a good girl and come!"

Every muscle in her body tightens and suddenly she flops like a fish, a geyser of juice spraying into my mouth as I swallow hard in successive gulps. I bathe my face in her sweetness, using my tongue like a windshield wiper to clean my flesh, making sure not to spill a drop.

Her opening clamps down on my fingers, trying to milk the come from them only to find out there's only one part of my body that's capable of giving her pulsating pussy what she wants.

Her chest heaves but she's not done yet. "Fuck me, Daddy."

"Aren't you forgetting something, angel?"

"Please," she moans. "Don't tease me. Don't make me wait. Fill my sopping wet pussy with your cock Daddy," she demands, her arm shooting out, grasping for my dick, but from my position, there's no way she's going to reach it despite being nine inches of pure hard steel.

"Is this what you want?" I ask standing and fisting myself.

"Yes! I need it, Daddy. Please slide that big cock inside me and fuck me hard. Please, Daddy, please," she begs.

When she asks like that I lose all control, despite enjoying every second of hearing her beg. Truth be told I'm just as desperate to be inside her as she is for the same.

And I can't wait to bury every single inch of my thick cock deep inside her virgin pussy, claiming her once and for all. And making her mine. Forever.

I feel my body being flipped over onto my stomach and Elijah's big hand comes down with a sharp smack on my ass. I moan loud enough that the sound carries across the top of the water, likely for miles.

I rotate my shoulder and reach for his cock, this time finding it as my tiny hand strokes his massive length, before I run the tip of my thumb over his crown.

"Can I suck it, Daddy?"

"Later. I need to bury every inch of my cock inside you and breed you, fill you with my child, and start a family with you. Right here. Right now."

Elijah takes my hand and pulls it from his cock, pissing me off from the void that's been created, but he doesn't leave me waiting long.

Sliding in behind me I arch my back in anticipation as he lines up his cock with my slit, slicing it up and down through my slick folds. The teasing is too much and I brace my hands and push my body back, trying to impale myself on his rod, but his hips are too quick and he doesn't enter me...yet.

I can feel the slick wetness from his precome coating my pussy and combined with my dripping hole I'm more than lubed up and ready for all that he's ready to give.

"Please," I beg yet again, trying a second time to thrust my hips back so he'll slide inside me.

"Tell me you've never been with another man," he orders.

"You're my first, my only, my everything. This tight little hole is yours and only yours. Only my Daddy will know what it feels like to own me."

I look over my shoulder as he continues running the crown of his cock through my lips, but now his eyes roll back in his head as his neck tips back.

"Please, Daddy. I need you to fuck me and fuck me good."

"It's time to give my angel what she wants, what we both want," he says, his head snapping back forward as he eases the head inside me.

The prick of pain is intense and I inhale a breath of air, holding it as every part of my body feels like it's being filled.

And then suddenly I'm filled more as he thrusts everything he's got inside me, filling me so deep I feel the tip of his rod bottom out inside me.

I yell something incoherent as my walls are already trying to milk him for all his seed.

"So. Fucking. Tight," he moans. "And such a greedy little pussy."

He fists my hair, pulling it back as his other hand slaps my ass, leaving a red mark no doubt, before his hand comes around and grabs me by the hip as he begins pulling my body back into his as he slams in and out of me in rhythm, his balls flopping up underneath and slapping my clit as he claims my innocence from behind.

I grit my teeth and brace myself for the thrashing that feels oh so good. The single tear that fell when he first entered me is long gone, replaced by a pleasure so deep I didn't know I was capable of experiencing.

I feel like when I come again I'm going to melt into a puddle...if and when I have permission to release. Daddy's in complete control of everything...my pleasure, my safety, my well-being in all ways. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

"Fill me up with your hot sticky come, Daddy."

He drives into me, finding an even faster speed as he slaps my ass again as he gives me his wide girth causing me to crawl at the boat cushions below.

"Naughty girl," he reminds me as he slaps my ass over and over again. "Daddy's going to put you over his knee later, but first..." His words trail off as he grunts, his other hand grabbing my other hip and he really lets loose, fucking me with reckless abandon.

I feel weightless, boneless, like a rag doll as he has his way with me as his come-filled balls continue to slap my clit to the point I can't hold back much longer.

My jaw clenches as my forearms tighten, his big body doing whatever he wants with mine...which is exactly what I want too.

Suddenly he bends forward, biting the back of my neck like a lion does when it mates and then whispers in my ear. "Come for Daddy, little one," before nibbling my earlobe. "Come for Daddy if you like his big cock filling you up, his seed breeding you, and your belly getting big with his baby."

I didn't need to be told twice, but his words only intensify that tsunami in my stomach that was already cresting.

I explode on his rod.

"Come on Daddy's dick," he shouts and I do exactly that as his body stills and then he thrusts twice more, flexing his hips forward just before he unleashes a volcanic eruption inside me, one so tense I lurch forward, my body never having known what this could be like as my pussy drinks up his warm seed.

My back arches more, instinctively pushing my ass in the air so his gift has nowhere to go but to stay down, inside me, making sure I'm carrying his firstborn as I milk him even more, feeling his thick white ropes being thrown inside me as I deplete everything in his balls.

Suddenly his big body collapses on top of mine, two breathless souls miles from humanity trying to catch our breath. He rolls onto his side, pulling me in close, cuddling me just as he said he would as I snuggle into his big muscles, his dick still inside me.

"This feels almost as good as the naughty thing we just did, Daddy."

"It wasn't naughty, sweetheart. It was natural," he says calmly into my neck. His big hand comes around cupping my small breast as he rolls my nipple with his thumb and forefinger.

"What names do you like?"

"Yeah, we have to do something about that. We have to come up with a name for the boat so you stop referring to her as a... well, her. I should be the only girl in your life."

"I was talking about our baby, and our first could be a little girl." He pauses. "But you'll always be Daddy's little girl...in other ways."

A smile covers my face from side to side, the thought of my belly swelling big and carrying a child has my face glowing off the reflection from the moon on the water.

"It doesn't matter as long as he or she is happy and healthy."

"Or maybe they?"

"Come again?" I ask before I realize the double entendre.

"Oh, we will, tonight...much, much more."

"I'm serious!" I say, reaching back and over to playfully slap him, but realizing it's like slapping a giant oak tree. I can't do anything to harm him, not that I'd want to.

"It might be more than one you know. I really filled you up."

"I'm not so sure it works that way," I laugh. "And by the way, I think you're still filling me up." I wiggle my hips to remind him he's still inside me.

"That's the plan. That was always the plan."

"So if my dad comes up with the money?"

"Who cares? What I have in my arms right now is priceless."

We go silent just taking in the soft sound of the tiny waves slapping against the side of the boat, the ocean breeze cooling us from our lovemaking session until Elijah pulls the cover back over us a bit later. But soon it's off again, and Daddy's showing me more things about myself that this little girl couldn't have ever learned on her own.

Together...we make a great team.

ELIJAH

I guide the boat toward the shore, seeing a place where we can dock for a bit in order to get out of the sun.

I damn near run over the guy standing on the sand as I pull the boat in. I'm still so fired up over last night and how everything's going with Emma. Each and every one of those days I spent in prison is worth it a million times over now because I've got her.

Claiming her multiple times last night was everything I thought it would be, yet it's only left me hungrier for more, as evidenced by my raging hard on as I try and step out of the boat.

"What about me?" Emma playfully asks, turning up her lower lips. She's too small to step out, as I knew, which allows me to reach in and grab her as I literally lift her out of the boat and onto the sand.

"I'm supposed to be at work in a few hours."

"Well, you better call in to quit."

"To quit? You mean call in sick."

"I mean quit," I correct her right then and there. "You're never working another day in your life unless it's something you're passionate about and something that makes you a lot of money, not that you're going to need it. Daddy's going to take care of each and every one of your last wishes, always."

"Sir," the man says, clearing his throat. "How long will you and your daughter need the boat parked here?"

Emma giggles, but I don't correct the man. It's not worth it, plus he doesn't deserve to know what we do in our free time. He wouldn't understand. All he understands is he heard me refer to myself as Daddy and he filled in the blank, in the capacity that his realization of how things in the world work, will allow.

"We'll be back by sunset," I inform him, giving a wink to Emma so she'll know what to expect again tonight, not that I'm going to be able to keep my hands off her during the day. We'll just have to be more discreet.

I offer her my hand and she takes it. We walk along the sand up to the station to pay, where a lollipop rack on the counter catches Emma's eyes.

"Can I have one?"

My stomach does a summersault and I buy her two. One for now and one for later. I pay the daily dock fee, although we're technically just on the sand, and throw in the extra buck for the lollipops. Thank God I had the foresight to hide ten grand on the boat, and nobody touched it or at least found it. Ten large will get me through for a month or two until I've got a new way to make money to take care of my baby girl.

I hand the lollipop to Emma and she strips it of the cellophane wrapping and gives it a big lick. My hand drops below the counter and I adjust myself out of sight of the employee. If she licks that thing again I might explode.

We leave the dock and enter the little beach town. It's a tranquil place and I could see us settling down here one day. It would be a heck of a place to raise a family.

Speaking of family, her dad hasn't called yet. Good. Even though she tried to run from me last night, she seems to have settled into the idea that I'm her Daddy, and she likes it. That said, she was the one who stuck up for her dad at their apartment yesterday. She's clearly loyal to her dad, which is why she supports him even though that should be his job. I need to make sure he doesn't get in her ear and try to manipulate her, getting her back and trying to convince her that she doesn't belong with me...whether he pays up or not.

If she thinks I'm going to let her go just because her dad miraculously manages to find the money, well, she's greatly mistaken.

"Elijah?"

"Yes, darling."

"Can we get something to eat, and maybe some new clothes?"

"Absolutely. How about a shower too?"

"I need one, two actually. One to clean up and one with you."

"That's how Daddy likes to be thanked," I say, teasingly poking her in the side. She continues licking her lollipop and I continue trying not to unload right here on Main Street, the pressure building up beyond belief.

"I plan on thanking Daddy a lot," she says in-between licks. That does it. I dart inside a gas station and get directions.

Not ten minutes later we're checking into the penthouse suite of the nicest hotel in town, and one with an ocean view. That ten grand is gonna go quick, and I'm going to enjoy every minute of it. I could sleep on the sand on the beach and shower in one of those beach showers if I wanted to. Not a problem at all. But when it comes to my little girl I can't wait to spoil her and show her what she means to me.

And I'm tempted to spoil the counter clerk's year when he gives me a cheeky smile as we walk away from the counter. "What's that supposed to mean?" I growl, and he throws his arms up like the effeminate hipsters that he is. "Just wishing you a nice day, sir."

"Sir. That's right. Get used to addressing me that way, son."

"Let's go," Emma says, grabbing me by the arm. "People don't understand what we have. They never will so we just have to ignore them."

"You know, little girl, I plan on teaching you a lot of things. But the nice thing is I can learn a lot from you too. You're right. I can't get bothered over things I can't control." "Exactly," she says, cupping my balls in the elevator. "Just like how you can't control your need to be inside me, Daddy."

"I'm definitely bothered by the fact I'm not buried deep inside that tight little pussy of yours right now," I reply, grabbing her and lifting her up, her legs wrapping around my waist.

But when I get her into the room I see her wince a little when I drop her on the bed and realize I may have gone a little too hard last night, my need taking over good judgment.

"Let's take a break for a few hours. Let your body adapt a bit, process, what happened last night."

"Are you sure, Daddy," she says, pealing her lips open with her fingers.

I rub my hand across the back of my neck and then my face. "Yeah, we have to," I unwillingly admit.

"How about instead of sucking this," she says, taking one last lick of her lollipop before tossing it to the side. "I suck something else."

"Fuck," I moan, as she slides off the bed and crawls over to me, unbuttoning my pants and yanking my fly open.

She looks up at me in hunger mixed with admiration. I look down on her wanting the world for her and I'm going to give it to her...right after she gives me the warm gift of her mouth wrapped around my throbbing need.

"Is this how you do it, Daddy?" she asks, licking up the underside of my shaft and I damn near pop from that alone.

"That's it, sweetie," I say, running my hands through the top of her hair, as she wraps her lips around my girth, and takes in as much as she can before I hear the sound of her choking before she tries again.

"You're so big, Daddy," she says licking again.

My eyes roll shut and she continues taking as much of me as she can. I hope she realizes I was put on this earth to give her everything, in all ways, for the rest of my days.

And that's exactly what I'm going to do. Forever.

"Perfect, baby doll. Just like that."

"Like this, Daddy?"

"Just. Like. That."

Walking into the restaurant across the street from the hotel, Elijah has his hand possessively wrapped around the back of my neck as he guides me into the front. For someone who's been self-sufficient their whole life, I would think this kind of controlling behavior wouldn't sit well with me yet strangely I like it.

I like that he's claiming me as his in public for the whole world to see.

I like that he gives me direction, even if that direction is nothing more than the path I was walking in any way.

I like that he's a man and a borderline caveman at that. There's no asking where I want to eat, who's going to pay, or if the bill will be split, taking out a calculator to determine who ate what. No hemming and hawing. Elijah knows what he wants at all times, and what his desires start and end with is always me.

Sure, there's probably plenty of people who would say I have Stockholm syndrome. Let them. I say I have a man who loves me, truly cares, and takes the time to make the decisions and make sure they fit my needs, relieving me of those burdens to focus on other things. If that isn't love I don't know what is.

But by the looks on some of the faces in this swanky restaurant, they don't exactly love us being in here.

We picked up some simple tourist clothes in the gift shop of the hotel, so it's not like our outfits are dirty or stink. But from the turned-up noses all around us, they think our relationship is what's smells afoul. Elijah seems to ignore the whole scene, picking a table for us that's right out in the open for all to see. But just as I think he's not noticing he reaches in and says softly in my ear, "If you're uncomfortable sugar, we can go eat somewhere else."

"We'll stay here and stand our ground."

"Atta girl," he says, giving me a kiss on the cheek and I swear I hear a few pearl-clutchers gasp.

It's the third time today people have had a problem, whether they knew it or not, accepting our relationship. First, when we brought the boat in and the guy referred to me as Elijah's daughter. Then the hotel receptionist who gave Elijah a knowing look, although he was completely wrong in knowing anything, that Elijah was my sugar daddy or he might be paying for me. Daddy? Yes. Sugar daddy? I'm not for sale. Never have been and never will be. I could always support myself, but I welcome Elijah because he's a real man that knows money doesn't buy love, but caring and thoughtfulness are definitely the way to a woman's heart. And being well-endowed certainly doesn't hurt either. Throw in possessive as a feral beast and how could I ever have eyes for anyone else?

The waiter uncomfortably takes our order, after a wait that seems longer than necessary and after people who had arrived after us are seated and attended to, but it doesn't matter. We've got six more days and no rush to cross them off the calendar.

"Angel, I feel like I've known you my entire life like we're meant for each other. But still, I feel like there's so much more to learn about you. Daddy needs to know what makes you tick so he can make sure you always have what you need, what you want, and what you deserve."

He says nothing else, waiting attentively for my answer as he takes my hand in his, kissing my wrist.

"Well, my job right now is basically just to make money. I work at the docks back home gassing up tour boats for day cruises, things like that. It's hot work in the sun, but it doesn't require much mental capacity, which is good. I like to save my brainpower for when I get home, so I can immerse myself in the books I like to read."

I nod. "Yeah, it does."

Time flies as he compliments me and reminds me that I don't need to work but if I want to he'll support me if I want to try my hand at writing, or anything under the sun for that matter. After what seems like forever talking about myself I catch myself and find my manners, asking him about his time on his boat and his jobs with my dad.

He doesn't elaborate too much on the specifics, but I can fill in the blanks. Granted, he shouldn't have done what he did, but in the grand scheme of crimes, smuggling cigars doesn't exactly sound very life or death or harm to anyone other than older men who are old enough to make their own decision about what they want to put in their bodies or not.

If anything, the way he tells some of his stories only gives me more of a sense of wanting to be part of his wild adventures. When he reminds me that he's committed to me, to us, to our family now, I have to remind him that I'm only nineteen and a half and I've got a lot of life left to live, and I sure as heck want to live a good chunk of it in the fast lane, especially now while I'm young.

"You've mentioned your boat as she before, as if it's a woman," I question.

He lets out a suppressed laugh. "It's about as close to a woman as I've ever had."

"Really?" my head pulls back. "I find that hard to believe."

"I dated before, but I was never into it. I wasn't into the idea of going out with a bunch of strangers to have tacos, and margaritas, and mildly buzzed conversations in hope of clicking with someone. Let's just say I always knew my needs were...different. I always felt something was a bit off and I was never fully present on those dates or around women in general. What they could offer me, and no offense to anyone, wasn't what I needed."

[&]quot;What kind of books do you like to read?"

[&]quot;Stories about...people like us."

[&]quot;Just goes to show we were destined to be together."

"What did you need?"

"That's the thing. I wasn't actually one hundred percent sure... until I met you. Now I understand completely, because—"

"What you need is exactly what I need—"

"To feel complete," he says, as we take turns completing each other's sentences.

We both nod in unison.

"Sir, your steak, medium rare," the waiter says appearing out of nowhere. "And the kid's meal for your daughter, with the coloring book and crayons you asked for," he says, cocking a judgmental eye as he sets them down next to my hamburger and jello.

Thankfully, the waiter makes himself disappear and my eyes light up at the sight of my multi-colored squares of jello. I reach for the red one, like a bee to honey, but feel a big hand engulf mine before I can bring it to my mouth.

"We use our silverware in restaurants and we eat our main course first, before dessert."

"Daddy," I whine, but he's not having it.

"Let go of the jello or Daddy will pull down your pants, and spank you."

"Promise?" I test.

"You just earned yourself one spanking for challenging Daddy, and a second for doing it in public. Any more and you're on your way to earning Daddy's belt," he says through gritted teeth. He pauses. "Now takes your hands off the jello and wipe them on your wet wipe. Daddy will prepare your hamburger for you, little one."

I notice more and more eyes staring us down with disgust. As much as I want to yell at them to F-off or even flip them the bird, I just let it go. I listen to my Daddy and do what I'm told, knowing he has my best interests in mind.

Elijah cuts my hamburger up into bite-sized pieces and brings the first one to my mouth. Just as I'm taking the first bite a man stands up out of nowhere, throwing down his napkin. "That's it. I've had enough of this pedophile bullshit," he says pointing at us.

"Excuse me, sweetheart," Elijah says calmly, pushing back his chair and calmly walking over to the man, who's index finger, which was pointed squarely at us, quickly slides toward the ground as Elijah moves closer, dwarfing the man who is not as tall, but regardless, built like a professional running back for the National Football League.

"We can do this the easy way or the hard way," Elijah says as he grabs the man by the shoulder, causing him to collapse to one side. Through gritted teeth, trying to be discreet, yet failing miserably, Elijah continues, "You sit down, shut the fuck up, mind your own business, and quit talking and looking at people you know nothing about." He pauses. "Or, I carry you over to the exit right now and throw you out on your face and wipe that fucked up expression right off it when it gets introduced to the concrete outside...at high speed." Another pause. "Now, what's it gonna be...bitch?"

Calling another man a bitch in front of a full restaurant is about as much as you can embarrass a man with words and not violence. Strangely I'm proud of my man, giving the man two options and not immediately resorting to fisticuffs.

"I'll."

"That's right," Elijah says, guiding him back down into his chair, his grip on his shoulder still causing intense pain witnessed by the man's face. "You'll shut the fuck up and finish your quiche like a good little girl." He pauses. "Next time order a steak or see a doctor about getting your testosterone checked...honey," he says to the 'man' and calmly comes back to our table.

"Now, where were we? Right, the part about you becoming a famous short story author. Well, there's your first chapter right there."

"That might be better in the middle of the book, around... say...chapter seven after the characters have already gotten

locked into the story, built some chemistry, and had mindblowing sex a few times."

"Why does this sound familiar?" Elijah winks and feeds me another bite of hamburger as I eye up that jiggly jello, and the box of crayons I can't wait to get my hands on after I finish lunch.

ELIJAH

Holding my little one's hand in mine we stroll through the open-air mall, my shoulder back, my chest out and my chin high. I'm more proud of my relationship with Emma than anything else in the world and nobody and no one is going to make me, or more importantly, her, feel otherwise.

We walk with ease, making direct eye contact with each other as we joke and play, just enjoying the day. There's a gleam in her eye, an inner light, and I'm proud beyond belief to think that I was the one who put it there.

Swinging arms suddenly we stop as something in a window catches my princess's eye.

"What do you think of that dress?" she asks, pointing to the pastel-colored floral summer dress behind the glass. I flash her a knowing grin. "I think with one look I could get it off you just as quickly as you could get it on."

"I'm being serious!" she says, playfully slapping my arm.

"So am I," I smirk.

We enter the shop and the clerk, like seemingly everyone else in this town, gives us an awkward look. I thought beach towns were supposed to be relaxed places. I guess they didn't get the memo here.

The clerk finds the dress in the smallest size they have, which just might work on Emma's tiny frame, and we head toward the fitting room. Just as we arrive she freezes, looking at the tag.

"It's too much. Let's put it back and go somewhere else."

She spins on a heel but before she can get past me I grab her wrist. "Nothing is too much when it comes to my baby girl. The only thing that's too much is the way that I feel about you. The ocean and the skies can't contain everything I feel for you."

She looks up at me with those big blue eyes, blinking her thick eyelashes and it sends a jolt right to my rod. I need her. Now.

Putting my hand on her hip I guide her into the dressing room and slide in behind her, my head clearly over the top and with my wide body accompanying hers there's barely enough space to change.

"Daddy!" she says, as I slap her ass as she takes off the clothes we bought from the hotel gift shop.

"I still owe you one more from lunch," I remind her. "You're going to get it when you least expect it."

"I'll be expecting it all right," she winks. "I can't wait."

She unhooks her bra and those perfect little bee sting titties that defy gravity reveal themselves, my hands unable to stop from diving in immediately, cupping them and sucking on their taut peaks.

She moans but pulls back. "Let me at least get this on so you can practice taking it off."

"I like the sound of that."

The dress fits her like a glove, and then she does something that surprises me. "Didn't see me grab these, did ya?" she asks, pulling out a couple of hair barrettes, putting her hair up to complete the look.

I feel my palms sweat and my hands tremble so I clamp them to my chest, trying to stop the shaking. Leaning back the few inches that I can, I give myself space to drink in the sight of her. My foot taps the floor in anticipation of ripping that dress from her body, but my thoughts are conflicted.

I'm struggling to do the right thing, to let her wear that dress the rest of the day, making every other man in town jealous and giving me a proper excuse to start ripping the eyeballs out of the annoying gossipers who seem to occupy this zip code, and then to make love to her back at the hotel like she deserves after a long bubble bath where I massage her feet and comb her hair.

Or skip all that and just take her right here and now, likely damaging this changing room beyond belief as my animalistic need takes over.

Her lips part as we maintain strong eye contact just before she strokes my arm, almost as if it's a surrogate for the long, thick cylindrical flesh she really wants to stroke.

"What are you thinking?" she asks in a lowered voice.

"Everything that's on your mind is on mine."

"And if you don't mind, we'll need you to step out of that dressing room," a voice says from outside. A voice that's not the clerks.

I look over the top of the door to see two men in short sleeve button-down shirts and ties. I can smell a government employee a mile away and they reek of the kind of people who despise people like me.

"Go. Away," I growl as Emma's mouth falls open and she shoots me an incredulous stare that solidifies into a dazed look. She tries to shuffle back a step or two, but there's no room. Her hand flies to her chest and her fingers touch her parted lips in surprise at what's happening in this town... again.

"Why don't you people learn to mind your own business."

"Child abduction is our business, sir," one of the men says, and at that point, I've had enough.

Making sure my woman is fully dressed, I unlock the dressing room door and slide out.

My lip curls in disgust and I feel my tongue push slightly forward against the backs of my teeth, which are now bared. My nose clenches and I swallow hard, leaning back to give

myself room to knock these guys out with one punch if they take another step toward me.

"Sir, you need to calm down," one says, someone from this God-forsaken town correctly reading the situation for the first time today. My eyes go dead, flat as my stance widens as I violently roll my shoulder back and crack my knuckles in my palms.

"And what makes you think I have anything to do with a child abduction?" I manage to get out through gritted teeth.

I resent rude, catty people like this whose business is other people's business. Don't get me wrong, child abduction is terrible and I'd never support it. As a matter of fact, I'd love to be a part of helping kids who've been abducted, having had first hand experience myself when my mother left my father one night when I was a few months old, only to find out my father wasn't dead last year when I was in jail. After my mother died I bounced around in foster homes so child abduction really messes with a kid's life, as I know from first-hand experience.

"We received an anonymous call."

"You mean a chickenshit coward who's afraid to put their name behind their words."

"Anonymity helps with our cases."

"But doesn't help with the accused, especially when they're innocent."

"And we also received a call from her father," another voice says as two uniformed officers come out from behind a clothing rack.

My lips pinch into a white slash, telegraphing my annoyance at this whole situation. My hands clench and I have to remind myself I can't be with my girl, can't be a positive factor in her life, if I get locked up again...especially if I served time again for something I took the fall for. I saved her dad once and this is how he repays me?

My eyes narrow and my expression pinches even further.

"Why isn't she in school today?" one of the plain-clothed men says and it's only then I realize he's a truancy officer.

"Maybe because she already graduated...a year and a half ago.

"We're going to need to see some ID," the officer says. I go to reach into my pocket, but apparently, due to my size and bulk it throws the officers off and they draw their weapons. "Slowly, big fella."

"Elijah!" Emma screams from behind me, two guns pointed at me.

"It's okay, sweetie. Just stay there and wait for me. Everything is going to be okay."

"I'm not so sure about that, Mister Ellis," the more senior of the officers says, after looking over my ID. He mumbles some codes into his lapel, which is outfitted with a two-way device that broadcasts some police codes back.

"And your young lady friend?"

"I don't have any ID. I left it at home."

The officer pulls out his cell phone and holds it at arm's length, looking at it and then at Emma a few times before he pulls on his lapel again and confirms to some superior somewhere, "Yeah, we found her."

"Sir, you're under the arrest for the kidnapping of Emma Martin. You have the right to remain—"

"No!" Emma cries out, and my heart shatters into a million pieces.

"It's going to be okay, honey. Daddy's going to get out of this."

"They were right," the officer says as he zip-ties my wrists behind my back. "You are some kinda sick fuck."

He grabs me by the wrists and I clench my fists, leaning back into him and knocking the wind out of him.

"Did you just assault an officer?" the junior officer says.

"I weight two hundred and fifty pounds and my fists are like cement blocks. What do you expect it to feel like when you go throwing me around like a punching bag?"

The first officer clutches his stomach as he forcibly leads me to the door, while I hear the other officer try and "console" Emma. "It's okay. Whatever he's making you say you don't have to say anymore. We know the truth. We're gonna get you home, safe and sound."

"I am safe with him!" she cries out, and I want to just go full Hulk mode right now and punch my way out of this entire nightmare.

I will get out of this, no doubt. It might take a few hours or a few days, but I will be a free man...and when I am her father's going to have to convince me why he shouldn't be a dead man.

I'm pushed into the back of a police car just as I watch the clerk from the shop run out. "Shoplifters! You need to pay for that dress, you thief!"

The car pulls away and the cop smirks before pulling out a pad and paper. "I'll just add that to the charge. Will give us even more probable cause for the search. Thanks," he winks at me and I make a note of his name and rank. I'll never forget who tried and will have ultimately failed, to separate me from my angel.

And they're going to meet the devil that lives inside, and I'll show them what hell really looks like.

Watching those police officers take away Elijah had the tears flowing like I was peeling a lifetime supply of onions.

"Everything will be okay," the officer says. "You're not being held against your will anymore, although we do need to take you downtown to ask you some questions."

"Taking me downtown is holding me against my will, unlike Elijah!" I spit. "Leave me alone."

"Ma'am, we just need to ask you a few questions?"

"Shoot first and ask questions later right? Seems like you got all the quote-unquote answers from my dad already."

"You'd been kidnapped. We had no choice but to respond and frankly, you're lucky we got to you in time before he took you out of state. Then it could have been much more difficult to track you down."

"Uh!" I exhale in frustration, making fists by my side as I stomp my feet. I can feel a throbbing forehead vein I didn't even know I had as I clench my jaw so hard my teeth ache. I sneer at the officer and then cock my head to one side, shaking it in disbelief.

"If you could just please come with us down to the station."

"I'll answer your questions when I'm good and ready if I'm ever ready. Don't hold your breath."

"But ma'am," he says, holding out his hand, and then I catch his eyes raking over me. Are you kidding me right now? "Am I under arrest?"

"No, but—"

"But nothing. Goodbye," I say over my should as I take off in a jog in the opposite direction before they find some lame made-up charge to book me for.

I don't have time for it. As a matter of fact, I don't have time for any of it. I keep running but it's hard to catch my breath, a sob catching in the middle of my throat and not letting go.

I race to Elijah's boat, remembering how he'd stashed cash in various places. Catching him pulling back a board underneath one of the cushions and removing five thousand dollars before pulling back a loose board underneath the floorboard and pulling out another five large. Surely that boat has other secrets, and if it does I'm determined to find them.

I'm likely going to need some money to pay his bail bond, and better yet maybe he has a fake passport that he can use to get away with. Then again considering he was trafficking illegal consumables, or at least that's how I'm guessing cigars are classified, from another country to the U.S., he's probably considered a flight risk. Throw in a fake kidnapping charge that might stick and there's no way he's getting out on bail, let alone skating out of the country.

I make it back to the boat and start knocking on all the boards and fiberglass I can, trying to detect a sound that might lead me to guess where he's hiding things. I'm not about to rip apart his beautiful boat just in hopes of finding something that might not be there.

After a solid half an hour I'm no closer to determining where he might have anything hidden than when I started.

"Why does it have to be this way!" I say, stomping my foot like a kid throwing a tantrum, my foot going through the floorboard.

"Shit! I broke his boat."

Quickly I'm down on my knees accessing the damage when I notice a ziplock bag stuffed down inside the little crack I just opened. Being careful not to pull up the floorboard more than

it already is, I wiggle my small hand down and pull the bag up, noticing a piece of paper with a very federal, official-looking seal on it. I take it out and read it and my heart drops.

There's only one thing to do now.

"Rescind the accusations you made," I demand, stomping my feet.

"Don't you get it? This is our chance," dad says, taking another swig from the bottle on the couch.

"This is *your* chance, to do the right thing for once in your life."

"Don't you question me, young lady. You know damn well the only source of income in this family is yours, and I need you back here working. Not to mention how do you plan on paying back Elijah, because you know sure as shit I don't have the money."

I shake my head. "Dad, you're trying to ruin a man's life, a man who you were once friends with, business associates with even though that business you two were mixed up in wasn't exactly legal."

"Which is exactly why he went to prison and not me. He's the bad guy here. I'm your father, trying to protect you."

My head drops and I shake it, pulling the piece of paper from my pocket and handing it to him.

"What's this?"

"This is the truth." I pause, giving him a chance to make heads and tails of it. "This is the LLC which the business was registered under. And the paper behind that is the LLC which owned that company, which was paid for by your credit card and has you listed as the primary beneficiary and owner."

"This is fake."

"No, it's not dad. I confirmed it with a quick internet search on both the Nevada and Wyoming corporate registry sites. The Internet knows everything, and I know the truth."

Dad rips it to shreds and tosses it behind the couch, taking another swig straight from his bottle of whiskey, trying to put this uncomfortable situation in the rearview instead of facing it head on.

"You think that's the original? You don't think that's the only copy I made?"

"Don't you dare use this against me."

"Just like you used me to put Elijah away? Used me as an excuse not to serve time yourself."

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, I most certainly do," I fume. "See, after I got done getting my corporate registry snoop on I decided why stop there, so I looked at some case files and although I may be about as far from a legal expert as humanly possible it's clear to see that Elijah took the rap for your crime while you sat here on the couch and drowned your sorrows with your best friends Jack Daniels, Johnny Walker, and Jim Beam."

"Young lady, you are out of line. I'm your father and you will talk to me accordingly."

"You may be my father in title, but you're not half the man Elijah is. Just having a set of balls doesn't make you a man any more than having a driver's license means you're a good driver."

My dad scratches his head. "I don't have a driver's license."

"Because you can't lay off the bottle." Okay, my analogy didn't really make sense but at least I got my point across.

"I saved you from that freak, don't you ever forget it."

"And don't you forget you're the reason I'm leaving. Dad, I've tried," I say, trying not to break down. "But you've been hell-bent on drinking yourself to death since mom left. You're not

going to find her, or any other woman, at the bottom of one of the many bottles you drink each week. Do some pushups, quit feeling sorry for yourself, and quit fucking over the few people you have in your life."

My dad gives me a stern look.

"Yeah, I said it. It's just unfortunate that I'm the one who's always been here trying to parent you when you were the one who was supposed to be my parent all along."

The door comes flying down and I spin on a heel, expecting a S.W.A.T. team, but once again it's Elijah.

"I outta f'ing kill you, Mike. You basically S.W.A.T.'ed me with that b.s. charge." He shakes his head at my dad. "You're just lucky this princess is both your daughter and here right now standing in-between me and you, or else you'd be breathing your final breath."

"I'll have your money tomorrow," dad trembles, but no one in the room believes it, and most certainly not the guy who said it.

"Keep your money and whatever baggage you have in your life. I'm here for one thing and one thing only."

Elijah drops to a knee, still standing over the door he just broke off the hinges...again. Reaching in his pocket he twists his wrist revealing a small, black, velvet box. Using a sleight of hand he deftly pops open the top to display the most beautiful diamond ring I've ever seen, in a princess cut of course.

"Baby girl, you're mine. I know it. You know it. It's time to show the whole world so they know it. I don't want anyone getting in my way ever again...no one coming between us even for a second. When I sat at the police station answering their questions all I could think about was what would happen if they took me away from you. How could I live another day without you by my side? The answer...I can't. And that's where you belong, with me always. You're already my everything now I just need one more thing from you. Be my wife Forever."

My hands come up to my face and all the crazy emotions of the last couple of days reach a climax. How did this happen so fast? Then again, this has been nineteen years in the making. I was always his, and he was always mine. It was just a matter of two crazy souls finding each other so we could unlock the things that were holding each of us back, so we could be ourselves, naturally, together.

And together is exactly how we need to be to get what we need most out of life. He's right, we both know it, and now it's time for the world to know it.

"No stopping us anymore," I mouth as waterworks begin.

"No stopping us. I've got your back, little one. And Daddy's always putting you first. Your happiness is paramount."

"Thank you, Daddy. Yes, I'm yours. I can't wait to be your bride."

I move forward and offer Elijah my hand. He slides the ring on and it's a perfect fit.

"I love you," he says softly before standing and lifting me up in the air, spinning me around like a little girl before he lowers me into his arm and plants a kiss right on my lips, gently, like lovers do. "Always and forever," he adds.

"And I love you," I freely confess, gripping his face with my hands and kissing him hard, as he turns and walks us right out of my old life and into my future, with him and only him. Forever.

EPILOGUE

One year later

"Official time," the announcer says. "One hour...seventeen minutes and three seconds, beating the old time by exactly one minute and capturing the one million dollar prize!"

I jump up and down like a wild woman, trying to be careful as little baby Ethan bounces in my arms. I grab his tiny three-month-old hand and wave it to Daddy, who steps onto the podium where he's sprayed with champagne and handed one of those big, TV game show, checks for a cool million.

After he finishes answering questions I hand Ethan off to dad and run to Elijah, jumping into his arms. "Be careful, little girl," he says, and the microphones pick it up broadcasting it to all the spectators here in Key West.

Elijah has just broken the Cuba to Key West speedboat record that's stood since August of 2017. Speed boat racing isn't nearly as lucrative as the high stakes world car racing, and F1 with its glamorous sponsorships, but a million bucks that Elijah won for breaking the record will sure go a long way... and now Elijah will be able to buy his own boat again.

As it turns out after I left his boat a year ago, with the papers I needed to show my dad I knew what was going on, Elijah showed up at his boat just a few hours later, emptied all the hidden contents, sold it to a guy who'd been trying to buy it from him for years, and promptly used the proceeds to buy me a ring.

I've felt guilty ever since knowing my ring was the speedboat he loved in a prior life. Well, now he can buy an even bigger and better speedboat and probably some more jet skis too for our burgeoning family business.

A few days after Elijah and I laid things out in no uncertain terms to my dad, and then got engaged and walked right out of his life in front of him, he woke up, so to speak. It was the wakeup call he needed, and thank God, he hasn't touched the bottle since.

These days he helps run our jet ski on the beach business. At seventy-five dollars a pop for fifteen minutes it's crazy profitable. Who knew owning a few jet skis in a touristy part of Florida could bring enough money to put food on the table, a roof over our heads, a comfortable bed to sleep in, and then some.

Not to mention decorate out baby room with the cutest crib, wallpaper, and toys for little Ethan.

And the best part is that dad met a woman from the United Kingdom who was over here on vacation, or holiday as she calls it, a few months ago and he's traveled to see her and she's traveled back since then. I see romance in the air and it's not even springtime.

I'm glad to see dad back to living life as it's meant to be lived.

And speaking of living, life with Elijah is like living in the fast lane.

The man is still addicted to me, still finding new ways to spice up our life, including a play room of our own where we can do all the Daddy and little girl playing we want, and he likes nothing more than to take me on weekend get-aways either across the country or even to countries in the Caribbean and beyond, where he spoils me beyond belief...and keeps me up all night with his need for me that sometimes we miss seeing all the sights because we have to sleep in the next day after our marathon lovemaking sessions.

But I wouldn't have it any other way.

"Daddy's going to have his way with you tonight, lil' mama," he says, after making sure his microphone isn't live.

"I like the sound of that," I say.

"And you'll like the sound of this more," the announcer says giving us a wink before putting his hand over the microphone and whispering, "I'm a daddy dom my damn self." He clears his throat and switches back into his announcer's voice. "Because the record was broken by a full minute the recordbreaking kicker kicks in...get it?" he laughs and the crowd follows along, "and the prize doubles to two million dollars!"

"I feel dizzy," I say, thinking what all that money can do, not to mention we got it honestly this time. No get-rich-quick grey area deals like dad and Daddy used to get involved in.

"I feel some new toys for our playroom," Elijah corrects.

I give him a knowing wink and wrap my arms around his neck. "I love you, Daddy."

"I love you, little girl."

EXTENDED EPILOGUE

Five more years later

I finish setting up the beach tent for my family and help Emma get our three kids, Ethan, Emily, and Elizabeth inside. We carefully applied sunscreen back at the house and I packed the picnic basket with everything we could need, including a bag with more sunscreen, life jackets, and plenty of water. It's what I do. I love protecting and providing for my little ones, and by little ones I mean everyone in my family.

"Is that an island?" Ethan asks pointing out the front of our tent to the ocean.

"No, buddy. It's probably just a boat off in the distance."

"But my teacher said there's an island close to us called Cuba and you're the fastest person to ever get there."

My chest swells with pride, but only because I know it must have made my boy happy to hear his dad being talked about in school. I don't do anything for myself, only for my family. But that, coincidentally, means I do everything for myself. Because family truly is everything, and where I draw all my happiness from.

"She did, did she?"

"Uh huh. Are you a fast swimmer?"

"I used a boat, amigo."

"How did you learn to drive a boat?"

I swallow hard. "I used to haul cargo."

Emma shoots me a look, but can't suppress a laugh.

"What's cargo?" Ethan continues.

"It just means stuff. I just brought stuff from one place to another."

"Like how mom said the stork brought me one morning."

"Just like that except I can't fly."

There's a long pause and finally, he says, "Cool."

Ahhh. To be six-years-old all over again.

"Are they asleep?" I ask, pointing at our twins, Emily and Elizabeth who are side-by-side in some sort of double baby carrying device. I can never remember the names of all these things. All I know is people go crazy when they see me carrying the two of them on the street, together in one carrying device. The first question is always the same. "Aren't they heavy, especially with you carrying them with just one arm?"

I never notice how much the weight is. All I think about is that it's my own flesh and blood, and I wouldn't tire of carrying them even if it meant I had to walk across the Mojave for days on end, as long as I kept them safe.

"Completely passed out," Emma says, checking on them.

I look over at Ethan who's wobbling from side to side. I carefully guide our little guy down on a blanket, realizing he must be dead tired already. He always has a hard time sleeping when he knows we're going to the beach the next day. Not only that he never sleeps when he hears his little sisters crying at night, saying as their big brother it's his job to stay up and watch over them until they're sound asleep. Only then can he consider getting some shut-eye.

I'm so proud of our little man, and I'm not at all surprised he's thoughtful. With a mother like he's got, the same one who does everything for our children, how can he not put others first?

"So..." I begin. "All the kids are asleep and we're the only ones on this stretch of beach."

"And we're underneath a palm tree that provides quite a bit of shade," she adds.

"And privacy from prying eyes."

We laugh as we quickly move to the front of the tent, crawling out and then zipping it shut without waking the kids, closing just the screen so air can come in the front...and importantly they're not tall enough to stand up and see out the back, where we'll be.

I squat down and Emma jumps up on my back and I race the few steps to the tree, sitting her on the branch at eye level and jerking down her swimsuit bottoms.

"Am I getting too big?" she asks.

I freeze mid-lick, pulling my head back. "Girl, have you lost your mind."

"You sat me on the tree like you didn't want to hold me suspended and take me that way."

"Oh, I'm going to take you that way too, but first I wanted to sit you on this branch so I could face you and taste your sticky sweetness. Notice how I walked past all those fallen coconuts without even thinking of drinking from those. I wanted my own special drink, my own fountain of youth, my own personal elixir. And only you can give that to me."

"Promise?"

I grab her off the branch and lift her in the air with one hand, like a mixed gymnast exhibition, or some sort of cheerleading stunt, before tossing her up in a spin and catching her in my arms as she comes back down, right where she belongs.

"Wheee, Daddy! That was fun."

"You like Daddy's rides?"

"I love them. Does Daddy have any other rides for me?"

"Oh, Daddy's got a ride for you all right." My swim trunks stretch to contain my length, and I consider writing a letter into the manufacturer about their new supposedly revolutionary stretch material. Maybe it was meant to stretch if

you're a surfer, but not if you're a hung Daddy. Or just a man who's obsessed with his wife as I am.

"How much does it cost to ride?"

"You can't pay to ride this ride?" I say.

Emma crosses her arms and sticks out her lower lip.

"It's reserved for one little girl in the whole wide world, and one girl only."

"Who's that, Daddy?"

"Why you, princess."

Her eyes light up and it means everything to me. That's what I live for, and have since the day I met her. It sounds like a Hallmark card, and it probably is, but it's true...life isn't about the breaths you take, it's about the breaths you take away. And she still takes mine away without even trying.

Just like our children and the little things they discover each and every day, reminding me what it's like to view the world through a child's eyes each and every day. I may have missed my own childhood, but I sure am making up for it in spades with our three little crumb crunchers.

"Ready to ride, angel?"

"Ready, Daddy. But where does this ride go?"

"Exactly where you'd expect an angel to go...straight to heaven, which is why Daddy's been on cloud nine ever since he laid eyes on you."

"I love you, Daddy," she says as she gets in position.

"I love you, angel," I say, locking eyes with her. "Now hold on to Daddy tight," I say making sure her hands are clasped firmly behind my neck. "We're going to play two games at once. Hold On, because you know how Daddy loses control with his little girl. And also Quite Please, because we don't want anyone else to hear."

"Okay, Daddy, but when you give me your special ride please remember I have a hard time riding it all and I usually scream." "Do your best, little one. That's all Daddy ever asks of you."

"Yes, Daddy. I'll try my best."

"Atta girl. Your best will always mean everything to me, and I promise you'll always get the best of me. Forever."

"Thank you, Daddy."

"Thank you, Precious."

THE END

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