



Restrain Me

• CORRUPTED ROYALS •

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
MICHELLE HEARD

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Dedication

Sheri,

You're the best PR in the world and stuck with me for life.

Congrats on your 5-year anniversary for Candi Kane PR.

Songlist

Click here - [Spotify](#)

Heroes Never Die – UNSECRET, Krigarè, Skrybe

Monster – Hidden Citizens, Ryan Innes

Somebody Else- Ruelle

If Our Love Is Wrong – Calum Scott

Someone To You – Roses & Revolutions

Lights Go Out – River Atley

Flaws – Calum Scott

Synopsis

My hobbies consist of shopping, eating, and sleeping. Yeah, I know, it doesn't sound like I have much going for me, but what is a girl to do when she has an overbearing father who doesn't allow her to be anything but a socialite?

I'm used to being in the spotlight, but when my father starts getting threats on my life, he hires a bodyguard.

Maxim Levin, the Russian God with intense eyes and a face carved from stone. I don't think the man has ever cracked a smile. He's domineering, broody, and scary as hell.

The more time I spend with him, the more his secrets come to light.

Turns out he's not just a regular bodyguard.

My father hired an assassin.

An Assassin! Aka, a man who unalives people for a living.

Maxim has one more secret yet to be uncovered, and when I finally crack the hard shell of his unforgiving exterior, I'm in for the shock of my life.

Restrain Me

Mafia / Organized Crime / Suspense Romance

STANDALONE in the CORRUPTED ROYALS

Book 4

Authors Note:

This book contains subject matter that may be sensitive for some readers.

There is triggering content related to:

Abuse and violence.

Loss of family.

Mention of depression.

Gunplay.

Max isn't an anti-hero, and this is not a story where the hero changes for his woman.

18+ only.

Please read responsibly.

“The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”

— **Sun Tsu.**

Chapter 1

Max

Maxim Levin; 38. Camille DuBois; 27.

I stare at the file my best friend, Nikolai, sent over last week. I was dead set on not taking the bodyguard job until I saw who the charge was.

Camille DuBois.

Fuck.

I'm an assassin by trade. I take lives, not save them.

Guilt rears in my chest as I stare at the woman's beautiful face.

Our paths crossed once. Christ, it's almost been ten years since I last saw her face. She was seventeen and just starting her life.

And I almost took it from her.

Where her blonde hair used to reach her ass, it's now cut into a short, choppy bob. The style suits her heart-shaped face. Her features have lost the last of her teenage look, leaving in its wake a woman who will have any man breathless and hard as fuck.

It's the first time I see the color of her eyes. Green. The shade of moss. They're so fucking bright it feels like she can see into the dark depths of my soul where my demons live.

And I'm only staring at a photo.

What would it feel like to come face-to-face with her?

I ban the thoughts and read over the details of the death threats her father's been receiving. If he doesn't step away from politics, Camille will be killed.

Nine out of ten times, they're nothing but empty threats.

Again, my eyes find the photo of Camille, whose path was never meant to cross with mine. Yet, here she is for a second time.

You owe her. This will be a chance to pay her back for almost killing her.

I let out a heavy sigh as I lean back in my chair. I glance out the hotel room window, wondering if it wouldn't be best to stay out of her life.

She never saw my face and has no idea who I am. Neither does her father.

Not even Nikolai knows about the one fuck-up in my career as an assassin.

No one knows. It's a secret I plan on taking to my grave.

An assassin's reputation is the most important thing. If you fuck up and people find out, it doesn't bode well for your career.

You should stay away from the woman. Don't play with fire.

But if I don't take this job and she ends up dead, it will only increase the guilt I already feel.

I let out a heavy sigh and rub my hand over my forehead.

You already made up for what you did. You got the woman medical help. It's been a decade. Forget about her and refuse the job.

I let out a sigh as I pull the folder onto my lap and read over all the information again. There are copies of the death-threat letters and recordings sent to Maurice DuBois, who's currently the Minister of Agriculture. If all goes as planned, he'll become the Prime Minister of France next month.

Nikolai Vetrov, the only friend I have, wants a solid foothold in France for his diamond-smuggling business. Maurice can give him that in exchange for his daughter's safety.

Maurice might straddle a thin line between the underbelly of my world and politics, but he's not a criminal by a long shot. The man wants to create a better and greener world, and it has forced him to negotiate with the bratva to

make it happen. The bratva owns land where wind turbines can be erected, and during the sale, a relationship was formed.

But that has nothing to do with the reason why I'm considering this job.

Besides the guilt I've carried around for ten years, I owe my best friend a favor. Fifteen years ago, my little sister was diagnosed with leukemia. Her dying wish was to marry Nikolai. When I asked him to give my dying sister her wish, he didn't hesitate. Not once did she doubt whether he really loved her.

During her final days, she was happy. I owe Nikolai, and this is the favor he wants.

There's no saying no.

Accepting my fate, I inspect the death threats. The letters are old-school. Cut-outs from magazines and newspapers were used for the words. Honestly, I haven't seen that shit in years.

The recordings have been put together with different voices, so there's no use in trying to trace the voice. With an endless supply of videos on social media, it's so fucking easy to put together a threat like this.

It's the first time Maurice has received a threat against Camille, and apparently, there's nothing on this planet he loves more than her.

He wants someone with a name in the criminal world to protect her, figuring it would scare off the fuckers threatening his daughter.

Besides the previous head of the bratva, I'm the best assassin in the world. If the person threatening Camille's life is from the criminal world, he will definitely know who I am.

The person would be stupid as fuck to attack her once they've seen her with me.

You owe Nikolai.

You owe Camille.

“*Blyad’*,” I mutter while rising to my feet.

Grabbing my jacket from where it’s draped over the back of the chair, I shrug it on. With my guns safely in the vault, I leave the hotel room.

It’s not like I need a weapon. I’ve been trained in every fighting style and can kill a man with my bare hands. I’m the predator the worst of the worst hires and the good people of the world avoid. I’m the nightmare you don’t want to come face-to-face with.

And for the next couple of months, I’ll have to be Camille’s guardian.

As I make my way to the lobby, I pull my phone from my pocket and send Nikolai a text.

Maxim: Fine. I’ll babysit the girl.

Nikolai reads the message immediately, and soon his reply comes through.

Nikolai: I owe you. I’m going home this coming weekend. Join me so we can catch up and discuss the contract.

It’s been a while since I’ve visited the island situated near Finland that Nikolai calls home. His parents, grandparents, and sister also live there. The island is nothing short of a fortress where the Vetrovs run their billion-dollar diamond-smuggling empire.

Maxim: I’ll be there Saturday morning.

I tuck the device back into my pocket and walk toward a conference room situated on the ground floor of the hotel where I’m staying. A function is being held to raise money for global warming, and every socialite in France should be there.

Including Camille.

Just like with any other job, I need to get to know Camille’s routine. I want to see what she’s like when she’s out in public.

There are two guards stationed at the door, and after showing them the

very expensive ticket I purchased, I'm allowed to enter the room.

Most of the funds made at this event will be embezzled, and global warming won't see a dime. That pisses me off. Even though I've made millions being an assassin, I hate wasting money.

Classical music fills the air while people stand around in small groups, discussing shit I have zero interest in.

My gaze lands on a sexy-as-fuck ass that's plump enough to handle a good spanking. A black silk dress fits her body like a second skin, the fabric falling to the curve of her lower back.

Jesus Christ.

I feel a physical blow in my gut from seeing Camille DuBois in the flesh. My eyes stop on the scar in the middle of her back where the bullet hit.

It punctured her lung and missed her heart by the width of a hair strand.

I shake my head so the memory of that day can't take root and drag me down to the pool of guilt that's been festering for ten years in my chest.

I have no problem taking a life if the person is an evil fuck who deserves a bullet to the head. But killing an innocent doesn't sit well with me. It's the one thing I won't do.

Camille turns, and I catch sight of a polite smile as she nods at the couple she's talking to.

Christ, she looks like an angel.

Her beauty shines from her like the sun, and I can see people gravitating toward her as she glides across the floor in the direction of a group of girls. Her smile brightens a little as she joins them.

Camille looks like a wet dream in heels.

I walk to the bar and order, "Vodka. Neat. No ice."

The bartender nods, and while he pours the drink, I take in all the other people before scrutinizing Camille's *'friends.'*

To Camille's left stands Juliette Faure, the redhead who's set to marry the son of a billionaire. The other three '*friends*,' Brigitte Bancel, Sophie Renoir, and Liliane De Rothschild, are beneath Camille and Juliette in status and tend to follow the two women around like lapdogs.

I say *friends* because none of those women give a shit about each other. It's all about status. Who you're seen hanging out with is printed in magazines and newspapers the next day, and that shit's important to these people.

I guess it's the same in my world. It's seldom you're lucky to have a real friend.

My eyes lock on Camille again, and I take in every exquisite detail of her. How she carries herself around other people. The fake smile. The stiffness in her spine. The half-full champagne glass that looks more like a prop than a drink she's enjoying.

She's not enjoying herself.

I catch her glancing at her phone, and relief flickers across her features.

When Camille says goodbye to the other women and sets the flute down on a table, I forget about my own drink and follow her out of the conference room.

The moment she's away from prying eyes, her shoulders slump a little, and she takes a deep breath.

She looks exhausted.

I tail her out of the hotel and watch as she walks toward a Bugatti. She doesn't look around her, then climbs into the vehicle and drives away.

She's an easy target.

I could've killed her ten different ways in the five minutes it took her to reach her car. Never mind, taking her out on the way to her home.

Christ, this job is going to take patience I don't have.

Chapter 2

Cami

(One week later...)

Walking into my family home, where every nook and cranny is filled with memories from my childhood, my body relaxes.

There are only two places on this planet where I don't have to pretend – my penthouse and my father's house.

Everywhere else, I have to be the perfect socialite.

The aroma of roasted chicken and garlic hangs in the air. My stomach grumbles, and I head to the kitchen, where Philippe is busy preparing my favorite meal. He's been my father's chef for over twenty years and is practically a member of the family.

Walking into the kitchen, a smile spreads over my face at the sight of the golden roasted chicken.

Philippe spots me and instantly shakes his head. “No, *princesse*. You can wait ten minutes and eat with your father.”

I press a kiss to his cheek and bat my eyelashes, which draws a chuckle from him.

He holds up his pointer finger. “Only one potato.”

I don't waste time and grab a crispy roasted potato from the tray. “No one makes these as good as you do,” I praise him before sinking my teeth into the crunchy goodness.

I enjoy food too much to be a stick insect like the other socialites. I tried to diet several times but was always unhappy, so I gave up and made peace

with my body. Plus, life's too short to starve myself when there's so much goodness to be found in food.

Philippe lets out a sigh, but a smile tugs at his mouth.

After devouring the potato, I ask, "How are you?"

"Same as the last time I saw you," he mutters while cutting the chicken into pieces.

Philippe has always been a man of few words, so I'm not bothered by his answer.

He uses the carving knife to point to the door. "Your papa is waiting."

I give Philippe a smile before leaving him in his sacred space and head to the informal lounge where Papa usually sits in the early afternoon sun while catching up on the news.

When I hear a man's voice rumbling, my eyebrow lifts. Papa didn't mention that we're having company for lunch. Usually, it's just the two of us.

As I enter the room, I see Papa sitting in his armchair, a serious expression on his face. I follow his line of sight, and the moment my eyes land on the stranger, I freeze.

Mother of God.

If I had to take a wild guess, I'd say the man is in his early or mid-thirties. He has chestnut brown hair that's cut in a neat style, with a week's worth of bristles covering his jaw. His nose could've been broken at some point, but it only lends character to his attractive features.

What has me staring like an awe-struck idiot is his eyes.

God, his eyes.

I'm not sure if they're gray or the lightest shade of green I've ever seen. I'll have to get closer to be sure.

His dark eyebrows make the color pop and lend them an intensity that has me squirming.

Piercing is the only word I can think of to describe his penetrating gaze locked on me like a heat-seeking missile.

Jesus.

I swallow hard, and it takes more willpower than I have to tear my eyes away from the attractive man and look at my father.

A smile wavers around my lips as I walk toward my father, and leaning over him, I press a kiss to his cheek. “Hi, Papa,” I whisper before clearing my throat. “I didn’t know we’re having company today.”

Papa gestures at the armchair next to his. “Sit, *mon amour*.”

I give Papa a questioning gaze, and as I take a seat, I glance at the imposing attractive force who’s still staring at me as if he’ll find the answers to the universe inside me.

Papa places his hand on mine and gives it a squeeze, then looks at me with a world of worry. “This is Max Levin. He’ll be your bodyguard.”

A wave of shock hits from the unexpected news, and I feel it ripple over my body.

What?

My mouth drops open, and my eyebrows furrow.

“Why?” I manage to ask while my eyes lock on Max Levin.

Max Levin.

His name doesn’t suit him. I expected Hunter or something more predatory.

Max.

Such a normal name for such an intense man.

Papa clears his throat, then explains, “I’ve received death threats. If I don’t withdraw from politics, you’ll be killed.”

My eyes widen as the shock of my father’s words hits like a ten-pound hammer. This time my heartbeat speeds up, and my breaths grow shallow as

an eerie sensation ghosts over my skin.

What the ever-living hell?

The air wooshes from my lungs. “But...that’s insane,” I gasp, unable to think of anything else to say.

It’s not every day a person hears there’s a threat against their life. I don’t know how to handle the news.

Papa pats my hand again and leans in my direction, his eyebrows pinched together. “I’m sorry, *mon amour*. Mr. Levin is the best there is. He’ll be able to protect you from anyone who wants to harm you.”

The bubble of safety I’ve always had wobbles.

It’s terrifying to know there’s someone out there who would kill me if Papa doesn’t do as they demand. It’s so unsettling, I don’t know how to process it.

Do I become hysterical and hide?

Do I go on with my life and hope to God nothing comes of the threats?

Jesus, how am I supposed to react?

Then again, I knew it was only a matter of time. The higher Papa rises in politics, the more dangerous it’s bound to get, and he’s planning on running for president at some point.

There’s also the fact that Papa has a billion-dollar company that manufactures solar panels. Our money is reason enough for someone to try and kidnap me for ransom.

Making it to twenty-seven without a bodyguard is a feat in itself.

Still processing the bomb my father dropped on me, I shake my head. “What does it mean for me?” My eyes dart between my father and Max. “Will I still be able to move around freely?”

Papa nods. “Max will be by your side twenty-four-seven. You’ll still attend all the events and keep up appearances as if nothing is wrong. I don’t

want the media catching wind of the threats.”

I wave a hand in Max’s direction. “But having a bodyguard will draw attention and raise questions.”

A patient expression settles on Papa’s face. “It’s acceptable for my daughter to have a bodyguard. Soon I’ll be the Prime Minister. Whenever you’re asked to comment on why the sudden change, you answer it’s a normal precaution.” Papa shakes his head. “I should’ve arranged protection for you sooner.”

If my life is in danger, I’m not going to argue. That would be stupid of me.

“For how long will I have a bodyguard?” I ask.

Papa leans back in his chair and shakes his head. “I can’t give you a time limit. Go on with your life while I deal with the threats.”

Movement by the doorway draws our attention to Philippe. “Lunch is ready.”

I take a deep breath as I stand up. I’m overly conscious of Max and the fact that he hasn’t said a single word.

Needing to ease some of the tension in the air, I force a polite smile to my face and hold my hand out to the man.

For a moment, his eyes flick down before settling on mine with a sharpness rivaling Philippe’s favorite paring knife.

I once used it and almost severed the tip of my finger. After that, I was forbidden from touching Philippe’s knives.

Max’s fingers wrap around mine, his grip firm and cool.

A nervous sensation tightens my stomach as I say, “It’s nice meeting you.” Not knowing what else to say, I pull my hand free from his.

“Pleasure is mine,” he murmurs, his tone low but commanding.

It feels like the deep timbre of his voice ripples over my skin, making

goose bumps erupt over my body.

I swallow and quickly leave the sitting room.

Is he staying for lunch?

Of course. He's going to be by your side twenty-four-seven.

My eyes widen at the realization, and feeling uncomfortable, I head into the dining room where all the delicious food Philippe prepared is waiting to be devoured.

When I'm nervous, I eat. I have an unhealthy relationship with comfort food. Or healthy. It probably depends on how you look at it.

I love food, and unlike men, it never leaves me feeling unfulfilled.

Papa takes his usual seat at the head of the table while I sit down on his left.

I notice a place that's been set for Max. It's across from me, so I'll see him every time I look in front of me.

Awkward.

When Max pulls out his chair, I take in his pristine black suit. He shrugs off his jacket and drapes it over the back of the chair. I catch sight of the gun tucked behind his back, and my mouth instantly goes dry.

Reaching for my glass of water, I take a sip before I continue to inspect the man who's been hired to protect me.

Not a hair is out of place, and his dress shirt is white, with not a single stain on it. The man is as put together as they come.

At least he's something to look at. I won't get bored of seeing his face.

My friends are going to be jealous. Juliette will probably demand that her parents get her a bodyguard as well. She'll see it as another accessory she has to have so I don't outshine her.

I shake my head while letting out a sigh.

My timing sucked because Max tilts his head slightly, then asks, "Do you

have a problem with the arrangement?”

“Huh?” the word pops from me, and for a moment, I’m confused before I realize what I did. I shook my head and sighed while staring at Max.

“Oh no. I was just thinking how Juliette will probably demand to have a bodyguard as well.” I wave a hand. “She’s a...friend, for the lack of a better word.”

Papa lets out a chuckle as he looks at Max. “The socialites always try to outdo each other.”

The conversation doesn’t get a reaction from Max, who pins me with his light...green eyes. Now that I’m closer to him, I can see they’re definitely light green.

Wow. I’ve never seen eyes like his before.

Becoming curious about the man, I ask, “Have you been a bodyguard all your life?”

He doesn’t have an accent. At least not one I can place.

Max shakes his head. “I’m in the security field. Tracking people is my specialty.”

Interesting.

As I pick up my knife and fork, I ask, “Are you at least trained to protect people?”

Max just gives me an unnerving stare while Papa launches into a detailed explanation of why Max is the right man to protect me.

“Mr. Levin is highly trained in all types of fighting styles. He has an impressive record of not missing a target. I believe there isn’t a person alive you’ll be safer with than him.”

It feels like Papa’s leaving out a vital piece of information, but I don’t mention it.

Wanting to satisfy my curiosity, I ask, “Where are you from, Mr. Levin?”

Lightly, he shakes his head. "Call me Max."

I cut a piece from the center breast of the chicken and pop the meat into my mouth.

"I was born in Moscow," he answers.

Russian?

Why does that impress me?

"You don't have a Russian accent," I mention.

"I've traveled a lot. I lost it along the way."

Something tells me that's not the entire truth, but seeing as we're talking about an accent, I don't question his answer.

Turning my attention to Papa, I ask, "How will everything work? Do I have to let Max know whenever I'm going out?"

I take a bite of a crunchy potato and almost moan from how good it tastes.

I should steal Philippe from Papa so he can cook for me.

"Mr. Levin will move in with you, so you're never alone," Papa announces.

The bite of potato goes down the wrong hole, and I start coughing, my eyes instantly watering. It feels like the potato takes up permanent residence in my throat.

Just as the panic that I'm choking hits, Max is next to my chair and yanking me to my feet. His chest presses against my back, his arms locking around me. His fist pushes against the space between my stomach and my ribs, and the potato goes flying across the room.

A coughing fit overwhelms me, which has Max ordering in a commanding tone, "Breathe through your nose."

My body doesn't hesitate and does as it's told. I manage to get some air into my lungs and cough the scratchy feeling out of my throat. A glass of

water appears in front of my face, and I take it from Max. The liquid clears my throat, and I start to breathe normally again.

Jesus.

“Better?” Papa asks.

I nod and shoot Max a glance as he returns to his seat. My legs are trembling from choking on a piece of potato, and I quickly drop down on my chair.

I take a couple of deep breaths, my eyes locking on the man who just saved me from dying an embarrassing death.

Not even an hour since I met him, and he’s already saving my butt.

“Thank you,” I whisper, my voice hoarse.

“Just doing my job,” he mutters before continuing to eat his food.

Only then do I remember what Papa said, and my eyes fly to my father’s face. “Max is moving in with me? Why? I don’t think it’s needed.”

“It’s not open for discussion, *mon amour*,” Papa says. “Until the threat has been dealt with, Mr. Levin will be by your side day and night. It’s for your safety. I can’t have anything happen to you.”

Throwing a tantrum would be childish and stupid. I’m not happy about any of this, but my life is in danger, so I’ll just have to find a way to adapt.

My father is a domineering man. In a good way, of course. He’s overprotective and insists on having complete control of my life.

Sometimes it becomes too much, and I feel suffocated, but I know he does it because he loves me.

Speaking about domineering...

My eyes flit back to Max, who’s enjoying his meal. I watch his jaw clench while he chews, and I feel slightly startled when I find it attractive.

I’ve never found the way a person eats attractive before.

Picking up my utensils again, I eat some of my vegetables while

contemplating the massive change that's been made in my life.

Jesus, this is insane and frustrating.

Having a person around me, twenty-four-seven, is going to be trying as hell. I understand it's for my safety, and no amount of arguing will stop my father from doing everything in his power to protect me.

Besides, many people have bodyguards. Just like them, I'll find a way to cope.

Chapter 3

Cami

I'm not going to lie. I feel cheated out of a peaceful lunch with Papa. With his busy schedule, the lunches we have twice a month are the only time we have to catch up.

The atmosphere was tense, and I could see Papa's thoughts were miles away.

Carrying a bag filled with containers of Philippe's cooking, I walk to my Bugatti. I prefer a smaller car, but everything I have is to keep up appearances. Maurice DuBois' daughter has to have the best of everything.

I know I'm lucky, but sometimes I crave a simple life.

I climb into the vehicle, and setting the bag on the passenger seat, I glance into the rearview mirror and see Max getting into an SUV with tinted windows.

Other socialites would throw a fit if they were in my shoes. Then again, they'd probably be over the moon to have such an attractive man guarding them. They'd flirt with him.

I shake my head as I start the engine.

I'm not happy to have a bodyguard, but I won't make a scene. It would be pointless and a waste of time.

Steering the Bugatti away from the mansion, I head toward my penthouse near the Arc de Triomphe in the heart of Paris. I seldom invite people into my sanctuary.

It's the only place where I can walk around braless and wear sweatpants. Where I can binge-watch a show while eating my fill of whatever snacks I

feel like.

Ugh.

Now Max will be staying with me.

I groan because I'll have to wear a bra all the time, and there goes my quiet afternoon. I was planning to frame the photos I took last week.

Everyone who thinks they know me assumes my hobbies consist of shopping, eating, and sleeping. Not that I don't like those things. I do. Very much.

But I also love taking photos. Mainly of random people, structures, and basically anything that draws my attention. There was a time when I thought I could become a professional photographer, but I gave up on the idea when I realized there was no getting past Papa. Over his dead body, will he allow me to work.

Now photography is just something I do for my own enjoyment.

Turning into the parking area for my building, I stop at the guard house and smile at the guard on duty. "The SUV is with me. Let him in."

The boom lifts, and I steer my Bugatti toward my dedicated parking space while Max gives his details to the guard. I grab my bag of food, and climbing out, I watch as Max pulls the SUV into the other parking space allocated for my penthouse.

Papa allowed me to move out when I turned twenty-five. It took me four years to convince him I'd be okay living alone. The day he brought me here and handed over the keys was one of the happiest of my life.

Even though Papa is controlling and overprotective, there's no one on this planet I love more. It's always been the two of us because my mother passed away while giving birth to me.

Papa loved her so much he hasn't tried dating again and threw all his time and attention into his company and raising me.

I know I'm one of the luckiest people alive, and even though I might complain at times, I wouldn't change my life for anything.

When Max climbs out of the SUV, I say, "I'll arrange a parking card for you."

"No need," he replies as he pulls his gun from where it was tucked behind his back. "From today, we'll travel together."

My eyebrows rise. "The weapon isn't needed."

His eyes flick to me then he nods in the direction of the elevators.

Ugh, a man of few words.

I tend to talk when I'm nervous, and Max's closed-off responses are only making it worse.

Letting out a heavy breath, I dig my keycard out of my handbag and press it against the scanner. The elevator doors open, and I press the button for my floor.

The space feels impossibly small as we stand in awkward silence. Nearing my floor, Max moves in front of me, and I get a good look at his back and broad shoulders.

Not bad.

When the doors open, he steps out of the elevator and into my home, commanding, "Wait here."

I almost roll my eyes as I watch him search every possible hiding space in my living room and kitchen before heading up the stairs to the bedrooms.

The bedrooms.

Shit.

Breaking out into a run, my heels clack on the tiles. I fly up the stairs, shouting. "Don't go into the main bedroom!"

Max stops just short of my bedroom door, and I dart in front of him so he can't go inside.

His eyes meet mine, and with a clenched jaw, he orders, “Move.”

I shake my head. “No. There’s no one hiding in my bedroom.”

Only a ton of laundry, the packet of pretzels and box of chocolates I cuddled up with. Oh, and a Christine Feehan novel.

His features tighten with warning, and it makes my muscles tense. Suddenly it feels like I’m face to face with danger, and it has me swallowing hard.

“My room is a mess,” I admit.

“I don’t care.” Max nods to the side. “Move so I can do my job.”

Fuck my life.

Not happy that he’s determined to invade my privacy, I shoot him a glare as I step out of the way. Max opens the door, and the first thing I see is the bunch of bras draped over the back of the armchair.

Yep. Fuck my life.

Then I spot the panties I wore last night lying at the foot of my bed. I took them off right before I went to town on my clit while imagining a shapeshifting badass claiming me.

The vibrator.

Jesus.

I launch into my room like an Olympic athlete and tackle my bed. Grabbing my vibrator, I shove it beneath my pillow before burying my face in said pillow.

“All clear,” Max says with a hint of amusement in his tone. “You can go about your normal routine.”

Thanks. I’ll die now.

I hear the door shut, and lifting my head, I let out a groan as I glance around the mess that’s my bedroom.

Getting up, I shove my vibrator in my bedside drawer before grabbing all

the underwear from the floor and armchair. I put them in the laundry basket then kick my high heels off.

Well, the damage is done.

It's not like you have to impress him. He's a hired bodyguard.

Just go on with your life.

“Sure. Easier said than done,” I mumble as I take off the pink and gold mini dress.

Upset that Max saw the mess in my bedroom, I pull off my bra and grab the nearest t-shirt and shorts.

Screw this. I'll be comfortable in my own space. He can adapt to me.

Sitting down on the edge of my bed, I grab the bag of pretzels and pop one into my mouth while I scowl at my closed bedroom door.

What am I supposed to do with him in my space every second of every day?

I let out a sigh while digging in the bag for another pretzel.

I should put the food Philippe gave me in the fridge.

I drop the bag on my covers, and getting up, I walk to the door and open it.

I hear a scraping sound, and as I head down the hallway, which has a wall filled with framed photos I've taken on the one side and a glass railing on the other, I see Max moving my couch away from the windows.

“What are you doing?” I gasp, and picking up my pace, I race down the stairs. “You can't just move my furniture around.”

I've done my best to get behind this bodyguard thing, but this is taking the cake and the freaking cherry on top.

Hell no.

Anger creeps over me as I come to a stop in front of Max. “What the hell do you think you're doing moving my stuff around?”

Now that I'm barefoot, I have to tilt my head back to meet his eyes.

Damn, the man is built like a mountain.

Max gestures at the window. "Anyone can take a clear shot at you with the couch in front of the window."

Oh.

His eyes lock with mine. "Stay away from the windows. Stay off all the terraces except for the one by the kitchen. You can use that one."

I stare at the man as if he's lost his mind. "Still. You can't just move my stuff around. The least you could do is ask my permission."

Max seems to think about what he said, then he nods. To my surprise, he asks, "Where do you want the couch?"

I glance around the open space, and taking the window into account, my shoulders fall because there's only one spot it can go. "It's fine there," I mutter.

Turning around, I grab the bag with containers and walk to the kitchen. I pack the food into the fridge, and when I shut the door, I jump at the sight of Max standing right behind it.

"Can you make a sound when you move around?" I snap, my good mood from earlier long gone.

Instead of commenting on what I said, he murmurs, "It would be easier if we kept the curtains drawn whenever you're home."

No sunlight.

"I'm not a vampire." I immediately regret my snappy tone and let out a sigh. "Sorry, this has all been sprung on me. I'm not used to having people in my place."

Max's features don't soften and remain unreadable.

God, is he made of stone?

"Close the curtains if it will make you feel better." I start to walk toward

the stairs, then pause to say, “Help yourself to anything in the kitchen and...” I wave over the apartment. “make yourself at home.”

Needing to be alone, I take the stairs up and walk to the room I’ve converted into a darkroom. I shut the door behind me and flick the light on. My freshly developed photos hang where I’ve left them to dry.

I take a deep breath of the metallic-like odor caused by all the chemicals I use when developing a photograph. Many might find it unappealing, but I love it.

My nerves settle as I inspect the photo I took of an elderly busker playing guitar. The lines on his face are pronounced, while his features are caught in a dream-like state. It’s as if his love for his music transported him to another world.

I move on to the next photo I took near the Eiffel Tower. I captured a little girl sitting on her father’s shoulders. It reminded me of how Papa used to carry me when my legs got tired.

When I inspect the photograph of a man standing on a bridge and looking down at the water below, my eyes widen. I pluck the photo from where it’s pinned up and set it down on my counter. Grabbing my magnifying glass, I take a closer look.

Is that Max standing in the background?

He’s staring in my direction, which means he was watching me last week.

A knock at the door has my head snapping up. “Yes?”

Max opens the door then says, “When you’re not developing photos, leave the door open.”

I gesture to the image I captured of him. “How long have you been watching me?”

A faint frown line appears between his eyes as he walks closer. He looks at the photo then answers, “A week. I needed to see what you were like in

public.” His eyes touch on the other photos before settling on mine. “I’m going to fetch my clothes from the SUV. Stay away from the windows along the front of the penthouse.”

My eyes follow him out of the room, and when I hear him leave the penthouse, I step out into the hallway and look down at the living room. I usually curl up on the sofa in the late afternoon sunlight streaming through the window and read a book until I drift off into a nap.

Frustration bubbles in my chest, and I suddenly feel like crying. Things are changing too fast, and it’s rattling the living hell out of me.

I’m trying to be accommodating, and I understand why I have to have a bodyguard, but I don’t like it one bit.

In a matter of hours, my life has been turned on its head.

I don’t know anything about Max Levin. I know my father wouldn’t employ someone without vetting them first, but having a stranger in my personal space feels uncomfortable.

Walking back into my dark room, I close the door partially and try to ignore that a stranger is moving into my home.

Chapter 4

Max

I'm used to being alone for months at a time. I'm not a people person, so it's going to be trying to have someone around me twenty-four-seven.

It will be difficult for Camille as well.

While I carry the garment bags containing my suits to the guest room, my thoughts turn to the hurricane that's Camille's bedroom. Christ, I'm pretty sure there were more clothes on the floor than in the closet.

And the pink vibrator.

I almost let out a chuckle at the memory of Camille hiding the device beneath her pillow. Her embarrassment hung heavy in the air.

There's nothing wrong with a woman satisfying herself.

Seeing this side of Camille, the ordinary woman who's not wearing a mask of sophistication to impress everyone around her, impresses me a hell of a lot more than the socialite act.

The socialite I saw at the event last week fits with the luxurious penthouse with overprized décor.

The girl in the shorts and T-shirt is much more down-to-earth and relatable.

Honestly, her life seemed so superficial. Then I found out she loves to take photos and develops them herself. She loves binge-watching *Big Bang Theory* and *How I Met Your Mother*. She doesn't count the calories she puts in her mouth.

She's human.

It's fucking refreshing.

Even though the penthouse is bathed in expensive furniture and tasteful décor, the packets of half-eaten snacks lying all over the place make it feel homey.

I've drawn the curtains shut, but there's still a lot of natural light coming in through the skylights in the high ceiling.

When she came downstairs, wearing a t-shirt with a chocolate stain on it and a pair of shorts that were so tight around her plump ass, I was hit with a wave of attraction I haven't felt in a long time.

The dress and heels she wore to lunch did nothing for me. But damn, those shorts...

I remove my suits from the garment bags and hang them in the closet. Opening the duffle bag, I remove the weapons, and taking two guns, I hide one beneath the mattress and another on top of the cabinet in the ensuite bathroom.

I grab the duffle bag, and heading out of the guest room, I go downstairs and strategically hide weapons in the living room and kitchen while memorizing the layout of the penthouse.

Not wanting to step on Camille's toes, I head back to the first floor and knock on the door.

"Yes?"

I push the door all the way open. "I need to hide a weapon here and in your bedroom."

She blinks at me for a moment. "What?" A frown forms on her forehead. "Nevermind." She waves a hand around the room then continues to frame the photo she took of the busker on Thursday night.

I place a Magnum on top of the cabinet containing all her supplies. "If you find a weapon somewhere in the apartment, just ignore it."

Her features tighten, but instead of arguing, she nods and continues with

her work.

An uneasy feeling settles in my chest, and my eyes sharpen on her face.

She's unhappy.

I take a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I'll try my best to stay out of your way."

Her fingers stop fidgeting with the frame, and for a moment, she just stares at her desk, then she says, "This is all very sudden." Glancing over her shoulder, her eyes meet mine. "I understand my father employed you, but I'll feel better if I could get to know you. Right now, I have a strange man in my personal space, and it's really unsettling."

I respect her honesty and gesture to the doorway. "Coffee would be nice while I tell you about myself."

Surprise flickers on her face, and she quickly gets up from her desk chair. When I follow her down the hallway, I glance at the photos covering the entire hallway wall, which overlooks the open space of the living room and kitchen below. "Did you take all of these?"

"Yes. It's something I like to do in my spare time."

Before she can head down the stairs, I ask, "Where's a safe place to hide a weapon in your bedroom?"

"Not my drawers," she answers immediately.

When I walk into her bedroom, I notice all the underwear is missing. I stop by the side of her bed and ask, "Are you okay with a gun beneath your mattress?"

"The cleaning staff might find it."

Christ, Maurice didn't tell her.

I shove the gun beneath the mattress then say, "The cleaning service has been canceled until I have time to do background checks."

A frustrated expression tightens her features, but not saying a word, she

turns around and walks out of the room.

As much as I prefer to do my job and not interact with Camille on a personal level, I know it's impossible.

Honestly, it's downright unsettling being around the woman, knowing I shot her, and she has no idea who I really am.

She'd fucking lose her shit if she were to find out I'm an assassin by trade and the person responsible for the bullet that almost ended her life.

I follow her to the kitchen and say, "I'll make the coffee." While I take two cups from the cupboard, I ask, "What do you want to know?"

"Do you have family? Are they in Russia?"

I shake my head. "I lost my sister to cancer fifteen years ago, and my mother died the year after. My father passed when I was young, and I don't remember much of him."

In my world, it's a rare thing to grow old. Eventually, the lifestyle catches up to you, and the hunter becomes the prey.

Silence follows my words, then Camille murmurs, "I'm so sorry to hear that. It must've been hard."

I shrug as I watch the cup fill with dark liquid. "It's life." Not wanting to come across as the coldhearted bastard I am, I add, "Sure, I'd love to still have them around, but it is what it is. I've moved on."

There's an uncomfortable silence before she clears her throat. Her tone is filled with compassion when she asks, "Do you have friends?"

I set the coffee down in front of her, my eyes meeting hers. "I have one friend."

She looks relieved as she picks up the cup to take a sip.

"So you grew up in Moscow?" she asks.

I nod. "Until I was thirteen. I attended a private school in Finland, and after that, I spent a couple of years in Switzerland."

Camille seems to relax, her green eyes bright with interest where they're glued to my face. "Do you like traveling?"

"It loses its appeal after a while," I admit.

Honestly, I plan on retiring at forty-five and finding an island or a cabin in the woods where I don't have to interact with people unless it's during a trip for supplies.

She draws my attention back to the conversation with her next question. "How old are you?"

"Thirty-eight."

"Really?" she gasps. "You look younger. I thought you were thirty-three-ish."

I drink the last of my coffee then start to load the dishwasher with the plates and cups littering the counter.

"You don't have to do that."

I almost let out a chuckle but quickly suppress it. "Judging by your bedroom, you're not a fan of chores. I like things neat, so I'll keep the place clean."

I feel Camille's eyes burning on me, and when I look at her, it's to see anger tightening her features.

She seethes for a moment before she snaps, "I didn't ask for any of this. I'm happy with my life and don't need you criticizing it. If I want to do dishes every other night and leave my clothes lying around, then that's what I'll do." Standing up, she walks away before stopping and laying into me. "I was happy. I could do what I wanted in my own space, and now I have to share it with a mountain that's colder than the North Pole."

When she pauses to take a breath, the corner of my mouth lifts, and I mutter, "I was starting to worry you didn't have a backbone."

Shock flutters over her features, and she blinks at me like I've lost my

mind. “Seriously?” She takes a step closer to me. “My entire life has been turned on its head, and you’re worried I don’t have a backbone?” A look of disgust pulls at her mouth. “You can go to hell.”

Camille spins around and hightails it out of the kitchen, then I hear her mumble, “What the actual fuck? I can’t believe this.”

I continue to load the dishwasher and wipe off the counters. Just as I complete the chore, Camille comes barreling back into the kitchen.

Her cheeks are flushed, and her eyes shimmer, giving me the impression she’s trying hard not to cry.

“I didn’t ask for any of this. I love my privacy. It’s something I need so I can cope with all the fake shit in my life. My home is the one place I don’t have to pretend I’m something I’m not. I tried to be welcoming and even pleasant toward you, but if you’re going to judge how I choose to live, you can leave.”

When she’s done with her rant, I say, “I wasn’t judging you. I said I’ll take care of the cleaning.”

“You said by the state of my bedroom it’s clear I don’t like chores,” she hits back.

“It was an observation I made.”

She crosses her arms over her chest and commences to have a stare-off with me.

Her eyes turn dark green when she’s upset. It’s pretty.

After an awkward minute, she lets out a huff. “I have a backbone. I just choose not to throw a fit over every little thing that goes wrong.”

“Noted.”

It’s something I like about her. She’s not full of shit like most socialites.

Again frustration flutters over her features then it looks like the fight drains from her. “I’m trying to make the best of a bad situation. Today is very

stressful. It's no fun finding out someone wants to kill me, and now I have you in my space all the time. It's a lot to process, and now I have to worry whether you feel comfortable. All I want to do is eat my body weight in snacks while watching TV."

Christ. Communicating with people isn't a skill I possess. Unless I'm torturing some fuck to get information out of him.

Leaning back against the counter, I lock eyes with Camille. "This is a job, Camille. I don't expect you to entertain me. Grab all the snacks you want and go watch TV."

Again her eyebrows furrow with frustration, but instead of saying anything else, she helps herself to a packet of ham and cheese chips, a packet of salt and vinegar Lays, and a chocolate bar, then comes to the fridge to grab a soda before leaving the kitchen.

Why does it feel like I fucked up?

Chapter 5

Cami

God, it feels like I'm trying to communicate with a brick wall.

I switch on the TV and continue watching *Big Bang Theory*. I love comedies and sitcoms, and this is probably the fourth time I'm watching this show.

Opening the pack of Lays chips, I start to eat while doing my best to focus on the TV. The moment Max comes out of the kitchen, my eyes are drawn to him.

The man is infuriating. His closed-off and downright cold demeanor aren't giving me anything to work with. It feels like I'm trying to interact with a robot.

I suppress a sigh and pop another chip into my mouth while watching him head up the stairs.

I actually got my hopes up when he allowed me to ask questions. But then the man had to insult me, and now I'm frustrated and pissed off.

So what if I'm not a neat freak? I hate being judged, and being a socialite, I have to deal with it often.

That's why I don't invite people over to my place. This is supposed to be a no-judging zone.

I glance at the closed curtains that are obstructing the view of my potted plants on my terrace.

After setting the packet of chips down on the coffee table, I press pause on the show and get up off the couch.

I've never felt claustrophobic in my penthouse. Not until today. And it's only day one.

This is for your safety.

I've already been shot once, which was traumatizing enough to last me two lifetimes.

As soon as the thought pops into my mind, I shake my head and shove it back into the box.

I need to get out.

"Max?" I call as I rush to the stairs.

He comes out of his room. "Yeah?"

"I need to go out. It's just for a walk." I dart into my bedroom and slam the door shut behind me. My chest fills with an emotion I've never felt before. It feels like there isn't enough space for my heart to beat.

I quickly change into a pair of cream pants and a matching sweater. Grabbing my black boots, I pull them on, then check my makeup in the mirror before darting out of my room.

Max is waiting by the elevator, and when I walk toward him, he frowns. "I thought you're going for a walk."

"I am."

He scans the keycard for the elevator doors to slide open. "Wearing that?"

I let out a huff as I step inside and cross my arms over my chest. "Sweatpants won't look good on the front page of People magazine."

"Right," he murmurs as he presses the button for the lobby.

As the elevator descends, the thought strikes that I only have one man protecting me. Before I can stop the words, I ask, "You're only one man. How will you stop a group?"

Without hesitating, Max answers in a bored tone, "I can take out a group of five men without breaking a sweat. You'll be safe with me by your side."

Wow. Talk about confidence in spades.

“If you say so,” I mutter as the doors slide open. I step into the lobby and smile at Pierre, the building’s doorman.

“You look pretty as always,” the elderly man compliments me.

“And you look handsome as always,” I say with a bright smile. “How’s Geneviève?”

“Still working on my last nerve,” he mumbles.

I gesture between the doorman and my bodyguard. “This is Max Levin. He’s my bodyguard, so you’ll see a lot of him.”

The two men shake hands before I say, “We’re going for a walk.”

Pierre smiles at us. “It’s a nice day outside. Enjoy the fresh air.”

When we leave the building, I glance up and down the street, unsure which direction to head in. I think there’s a park a couple of blocks away, so I turn left and head in that direction.

“Walk closer to the building,” Max orders as he comes to walk between the road and me.

We continue in silence, and the fresh air does nothing to chase the tight sensation from my chest.

It’s because the reason for the claustrophobic feeling is right next to me.

This sucks.

Giving up on taking a walk, I turn around. “Let’s head home.”

Max’s eyes lock on my face. “Why? If you’re worried about your safety, don’t. Nothing will happen while I’m guarding you.”

“I’m not worried,” I argue as I walk back in the direction of my building. “I feel crowded, and no amount of walking with you by my side will make it go away.”

When he doesn’t comment on what I said, I ask, “You’re not a people person, are you?”

He shakes his head. “Not at all.”

“Then why be a bodyguard? Surely you should be able to get along with the person you’re guarding?”

He shakes his head again. “No, I just need to keep you alive.”

Brick freaking wall.

“Forget it,” I mutter, feeling more frustrated than ever.

The man has zero communication skills. I’ll just have to do my best to pretend he’s not here.

Hopefully, Papa will find out who’s behind the threats and have the person locked up, then my life can return to normal.

Yeah, that’s not going to happen. Even if the person is exposed, Papa won’t remove the bodyguard.

Getting back to my building, we take the elevator up.

I glance up and find Max staring impassively at the shut doors.

“What’s the longest you’ve guarded someone?”

His eyes flick down to meet mine. “Don’t worry, Camille. I won’t be around for long. As soon as your father gets rid of whoever is threatening you, he’ll arrange for someone else to guard you. I’m just here while the risk of an attack is high.”

The elevator doors open, and he orders, “Wait here.”

“Are you going to search the entire penthouse every time we get home?”

“Yep.” The single word is filled with a world of annoyance.

Maybe I frustrate him as much as he frustrates me. Our personalities clash.

I wait for him to search the apartment, and when he joins me downstairs again, he says, “Let’s go over the rules.”

“Rules?”

“You never go anywhere without me,” he states the obvious. “You don’t

lock a door, and unless you're using the bathroom or developing photos, I expect the doors to remain open."

In other words, there goes my privacy.

My frustration flares into anger, and I cross my arms over my chest while just staring at him.

"Whenever we leave the apartment, you obey every command I give without hesitation. If I say get down, you become one with the floor and don't lift your head until I say it's safe to do so."

My eyes narrow on him.

"I will search public restrooms before you're allowed to use one."

Jesus, does he even have emotions? I've never met anyone so rigid before.

"What if I have a date?" I ask.

I haven't been on one in months, but I want to hear what rules he expects me to follow.

"You're not seeing anyone right now."

"I can be asked out at any moment," I argue.

"If that happens, the man will be vetted thoroughly. Once I'm satisfied that he isn't a threat, you'll be allowed to go out with him."

My eyebrow rises. "With you joining us?"

"Yes."

My eyes narrow again. "I don't do threesomes."

There's a flicker of annoyance in Max's intense gaze, but he doesn't comment on what I just said.

The atmosphere is tense, and knowing nothing I say will get a reaction out of him, I walk away and head to my bedroom to change into comfortable clothes.

I know I should count my blessings, but my controlled life is becoming

unbearable. It's monotonous and tiring.

The shitty part is that I understand why every single detail of my life is so controlled by my father and now Max as well.

But still, I wish there was more to life than rules and an endless list of events I have to attend.

I wish there were spontaneity and excitement.

I wish there was...more.

Chapter 6

Max

It's been a shit week since I started guarding Camille.

It's clear she's taken great offense to my observation that she doesn't like to do chores, because she's kept the penthouse fucking spotless since.

Not once has she gone out to take photos but instead spends all her time between her bedroom and the darkroom.

Besides greeting each other in the morning and her making sure I eat, we hardly interact.

She's unhappy, and I'm the cause.

Ask me how to torture and kill, and I'll be able to carry a conversation for hours. But interacting with *normal* people is fucking hard.

I'm used to violence, not coddling a woman.

Killing for a living has dulled my emotions and made me anti-social as fuck. Camille's from a different world where she has to socialize often. I know my hard exterior is what's cause the rift between us, but I don't know how to fix it.

Still, it could take weeks, if not months, before the threat has been dealt with. Camille can't live like this. At some point, she's going to lose her shit.

If the tense atmosphere bothers me, it must drive her insane.

You committed to guarding this woman when you met with Nikolai on his island. There's no backing out until she's safe.

She has to attend Sophie Renoir's birthday party tonight, so she'll at least get out of the penthouse.

When we get home, I'll have to sit her down and clear the air between us.

If that's even possible.

I'm waiting in the living room when I hear Camille's bedroom door open. My eyes lift to the hallway, and when she appears, every muscle in my body tightens.

She's wearing a black dress that barely covers her ass. The black high heels make her legs look fucking long and defined.

As she comes down the stairs, I see how low her neckline is, exposing a way too generous amount of cleavage.

Camille approaches me and lifts her head. The sight of the smoky eyeshadow making the green of her eyes pop and the red lipstick around her full lips have my dick hardening.

She looks like porn in heels.

Christ, the men are going to flock to her in droves.

Her choppy bob leaves her slender neck exposed, and an image of marking her skin with my teeth flashes through my mind.

No.

Hell no.

You're not going to walk around with a hard-on for this woman.

This is strictly business.

"Ready?" I ask, my tone harsher than usual.

There's a flash of disappointment on her face before she nods.

When the elevator opens, I wait for her to enter before joining her. The doors slide shut, and the subtle scent of her perfume fills the air around me.

She smells fresh, like a crisp green apple.

Fuck, I'm never going to look the same at a green apple again.

"Wait until I tell you it's safe to leave the elevator," I order.

There's no reply from Camille which I have to admit is starting to annoy the fuck out of me.

When the door opens in the parking area, I step out first and make sure it's clear before muttering, "Come."

"I'm not a dog," she mumbles under her breath.

Walking to the car, I say, "Give me the keys. You're not driving."

Camille digs the vehicle's keys out of her purse, and for a moment, it looks like she's going to throw them at me, but then she changes her mind and holds them up in the air, the keyring dangling from her pointer finger.

My eyes lock with hers as I take the keys.

"I would appreciate it if you were less robotic and more human around my friends. The last thing I need is you offending one of them."

I shake my head. "This is as human as I get."

She shakes her head and lets out a sigh before climbing into the passenger side of the Bugatti.

When I slide behind the steering wheel, she mutters, "Would it kill you to smile once in a while?"

Before I can stop the words, I reply, "It's not my job to smile."

"Right," she sighs.

Honestly, I can't remember when I last smiled. Maybe when I talk to Nikolai?

I start the car and check that Camille has her safety belt on before I place my hand on the back of her headrest and reverse out of the parking.

Just as I'm about to put the car into drive, my eyes lock on Camille's. In the dim light of the parking area, she looks sexy as fuck.

I take a deep breath and get a hit of her perfume.

The moment feels intimate, which is something I'm not comfortable with.

I quickly train my eyes to the front and steer us out of the parking area. I rest my arm on the armrest and accidentally bump against Camille. She quickly pulls away and glances out of the window.

The drive to the nightclub where the party is taking place is filled with an uncomfortable silence, but I have zero intention of starting a conversation.

I seriously don't think Camille and I have anything in common.

When we near the nightclub, I say, "Don't disappear on me once we're inside. There will be a lot of people, and any of them can be a threat."

"Got it," she whispers.

When I took the job, I expected Camille to throw one hell of a tantrum about having a bodyguard with her twenty-four-seven. Instead, she's been pretty understanding.

I find a parking spot not too far from the club. "Wait for me to open your door," I order before I get out of the Bugatti.

Thankfully, Maurice got a special license for me, so I'm able to carry a concealed weapon in a public place.

I make sure my jacket covers my Heckler & Koch and glance around the area for any threats before opening the passenger door. When Camille climbs out, I wrap my arm around her lower back and pull her closer to my body so I'm able to move her at an instant's notice.

"Whoa," she gasps, her hand pushing against my chest.

Only then do I realize how intimate this might look.

"I just need you close to me until we're inside."

"Then ask."

I pull my arm back but keep my hand on her lower back. "Walk."

"Jesus," she whispers.

When we near the bouncer vetting the long queue of people trying to get into the club, Camille's lips curve up in a polite smile.

"Hi, Louis," she greets him. "This is my bodyguard."

The bouncer glances at me before unhooking the red rope so we can pass. Inside the club, we're stopped by another guard, and this time I'm searched.

The man seems a little uneasy around me.

After showing my license for the weapon, I'm carrying, we're allowed to head to the dance floors.

The club is already full, and this time when I pull Camille to my side, I don't get snapped at. I take her to the VIP section, where it's quieter, and when I spot her group of friends, I let go and fall back.

Seriously, these socialites look like carbon copies of each other. But none of them fill a mini dress like Camille.

My eyes touch on her curvy ass for a second too long before scanning every single person in our vicinity.

You have to stop checking out her ass.

When I glance at Camille again, I see as she wishes Sophie a happy birthday. She greets her other friends and takes a seat.

Juliette Faure notices me and asks Camille something. Probably along the lines of who I am.

Walking to the bar, I ask for a bottle of water. I'm just about to twist the cap off when Camille gestures for me to come closer.

"Christ," I sigh. "This is above my pay grade."

I move closer to the group of women and lift an eyebrow at Camille.

"Juliette wants to know which company you work for," she informs me.

"I'm an independent contractor," I say, for the first time not lying about my real job.

I highly doubt any of these women know what it means. They probably don't even know about the bratva, the mafia, assassins, smugglers, or sex traffickers. That's why they make such easy targets.

The thought has a memory slipping through the cracks, and there's a flash of the bullet hitting Camille's back.

I quickly squash it back down into the cesspool of guilt and pay attention

to my surroundings.

Juliette's eyes rest on me with too much interest. It makes her come across easy and desperate with not much class at all.

"Such a pity," she purrs and gestures at an open chair. "Join us. You don't have to stand by the bar."

Ignoring the woman, I lock eyes with Camille. "Will that be all?"

There's a glimmer of satisfaction in my charge's eyes as she nods. "Thank you, Max."

Interesting. She loves that I didn't give Juliette the time of day.

At least I did something right for a change.

As I walk away, I hear Juliette mutter, "He's rude. You should put your bodyguard in his place."

"His job is to protect me, not to entertain you," Camille defends me, and for the first time in a long time, I feel like smiling.

Chapter 7

Cami

I'm not going to lie, when Max flat-out ignored Juliette, it filled me with delight.

No man has ever given her the cold shoulder, and certainly not in public.

I was right, though. The moment she found out Max was my bodyguard, she wanted one as well, as if he's some kind of accessory I'm carrying around.

If only she knew how frustrating the man can be.

"I got a tennis bracelet that cost twenty-seven thousand," Sophie says to impress us. "Look."

God, I can feel my soul shriveling.

I've been stuck in my penthouse for a week, and now I have to listen to these women trying to one-up each other.

We all fawn over her bracelet, but then Juliette changes the subject back to Max.

"Why do you have a bodyguard?"

Not wanting everyone to know about the threats, I say, "My father feels it's time I have one."

The three women look at Max, where he's sitting by the bar while practically glaring at everyone in the VIP section.

The man seriously has zero people skills and too much aggression.

"He's so hot," Liliane sighs dreamily.

"Did you all see his eyes?" Sophie asks. "I got goosebumps when he

looked at me.”

“He didn’t look at you,” Juliette chastises her. “His eyes were on me.”

Dear God.

Just then, Henri Durand and his friends approach us, and I let out a sigh of relief.

Henri’s father plays golf with mine, and I’ve known him for a couple of years. We’ve hooked up on random occasions, but there will never be anything serious between us.

“Ladies.” He grins his usual playful grin. “What are we celebrating?”

“My birthday,” Sophie informs him. “Why don’t you join us?”

Henri, André, and Laurent take a seat, and the men order a bottle of expensive champagne.

André immediately cozies up to our birthday girl. Laurent pays attention to Liliane, seeing as Juliette has made it clear on many occasions that none of them are good enough for her.

She’s holding out for a marriage with Ranier Olivier, the son of a prominent businessman.

Henri rests his arm on the back of our sofa, and his fingers brush over my bicep. “How have you been, *ma chérie*?”

My eyes flit to Max, who’s watching Henri like a hawk that’s about to swoop in and devour his prey.

I actually feel a sense of danger, and the moment I lock eyes with Max, I give him a reassuring smile so he won’t ruin my chances of getting laid tonight.

There’s only so much satisfaction a woman can get from her battery-operated friend. Sometimes I need the real thing, and right now, Henri is as real as it gets.

Turning my attention to Henri, I answer his question, “The same as

always. I haven't seen you in a while."

"I've been busy at work. My father plans to retire."

I raise an eyebrow. "He's not that old. Is he?"

"He's turning fifty-five this year."

I nod. "Hey, it's good news for you. Congratulations."

The server brings the bottle of champagne, and soon the bubbly liquid is flowing from glass to glass.

We all take a flute, then André toasts, "To the prettiest birthday girl in the club. May she have many more."

After I take a sip, Henri leans in close and whispers, "Are we good for later tonight, or should I find someone else?"

"Such a romantic," I tease him.

His directness has never bothered me. I actually appreciate that he doesn't play mind games.

My eyes dart to Max again, who's scanning the room for any threats.

As much as I need a good service, it's going to be awkward with Max within hearing distance.

The image of me screaming while orgasming, followed by Max bursting into the room with his gun drawn, and shooting poor Henri by accident, has me shaking my head.

Regretfully, I decline, "I'm going to pass tonight."

There goes my sex life.

Before Henri can leave, I add, "Have a couple of drinks with us before you go on the prowl."

"Of course."

André's admiring Sophie's tennis bracelet, and Laurent is already kissing Liliane. Juliette gives me a bored look.

Ugh, I'm in no mood to entertain her.

Needing to burn some energy, I suggest, "Let's dance."

"I don't want to get all sweaty," Juliette protests, but when Henri and I start to leave the table, she quickly joins us. "Only one song."

"You don't have to join us," I remind her.

"I'm not watching the PDA at the table."

I let out a chuckle because she's about to watch it on the dance floor.

Reaching the dancing area, there's a fast-paced techno beat filling the air, and as Henri comes to stand in front of me, I lift my arms into the air and start to move with the music.

I feel Henri's hands on my hips and lose myself in the beat. Time lets go of its hold on me, and one song blends with the next until I feel sweat dampening my skin.

Henri moves in behind me and presses his body to mine, then I hear him in my ear. "Don't make me prowl for someone else. I want you tonight."

I'm not going to lie, it feels good hearing his words.

There's no way I'm risking a disaster by taking Henri home with me, but there are many dark corners in this nightclub where we can get hot and heavy.

Taking his hand, I pull him away from the crowd and head for the hallway where the restrooms are. They aren't stalls like on the lower levels, but luxurious rooms with doors you can lock.

We've hooked up in one before, and it was exhilarating. No one can hear the moans and screams over the loud music.

We reach the restroom, and pulling Henri inside, I turn and place my other hand on his neck while lifting myself onto my tiptoes.

Henri shoves the door shut, but before his mouth can claim mine, the door is slammed open. It hits Henri's back, and he staggers forward, his body knocking into mine. We lose our balance, and a second later, Henri is

sprawled over me.

My butt and hips shudder with the pain from the fall, and stunned I struggle to make sense of what just happened.

“What the fuck?” Henri snaps, but before he can even glance over his shoulder, Max yanks him off of me and shoves him to the side.

I’m grabbed by my arm and hauled to my feet. His hand fists in my hair, and as I’m pulled face to face with Max, I see a world of danger I’ve never encountered before.

His fingers grip my hair so freaking tightly that a couple of strands are pulled out. His intense gaze burns with rage on me as he growls, “The room has not been searched.”

Because of the embarrassing situation, my anger erupts like a volcano in my chest. I try to yank free from his hold, but he only tightens his grip.

“What the hell, man?” Henri says, his voice tight with indignation. “Let her go.”

Before I can express how I feel about this insane situation, Henri steps closer to Max.

An expression I’ve never seen creeps over Max’s face. It’s deadly and downright terrifying, and instantly Henri looks uncertain, taking a couple of steps back.

The tiny hairs on my body rise from the dangerous vibe coming from my bodyguard.

Holy shit.

Max’s lethal gaze swings back to me, and instinctively, I try to take a move away from him. He notices my reaction and the terrifying look drains from his face as he reins in his rage.

What the hell was that? For a moment, it felt like I needed to be protected from Max.

“What’s going on?” Henri asks.

I have to give the man credit for not leaving me alone because he has no idea who Max is.

“It’s okay. He’s my bodyguard,” I explain.

Things are far from okay. The second we’re home, I’m calling Papa.

“Oh.” Henri gives me a sheepish smile then heads toward the door. “This is too complicated for me. I’ll see you around.”

I let out a disappointed sigh as he hurries out of the restroom, then my eyes lock with Max’s. My voice is low with anger as I demand, “Let go of me.”

He obeys the command, and when he takes a step deeper into the restroom to search the area, I snap, “Don’t bother. We’re leaving.”

I stalk into the hallway, and heading to the table, I grab my purse. I don’t bother keeping up pretenses that I’m a happy socialite. Without saying goodbye to anyone, I rush to the stairs and go down to the lower level.

I feel Max right behind me, and when a group of drunk people almost knock into me while they’re staggering to the bar, Max’s arm wraps around me and yanks me back until I’m flush with his chest.

Which is rock hard.

For a second, I’m actually impressed by the wall of muscle behind me before my anger surfaces again.

With Max still glued to my back, breathing down my neck like a vicious pit bull, I’m directed where to walk like I’m some puppet.

The moment we’re out of the busy nightclub, I pull away from Max and stalk toward my Bugatti, my body trembling from how upset I am.

Again he grabs hold of my arm, and I’m stopped from trying to climb into my car. Before I can lose my shit from all the manhandling, Max growls, “I need to check the car.”

“For fucking what?” I seethe. “It was locked. I doubt the boogeyman got in while you were screwing things up for me with Henri.”

His eyes land on mine, and it looks like he’s a second away from killing me himself. “There might be a bomb.”

I seriously doubt it, but stand next to the Bugatti while Max checks the vehicle with some kind of mirror on a stick.

Once he’s satisfied that there’s no threat, he comes to open the passenger door. Glaring at him, I climb inside the vehicle and strap on my safety belt.

The instant Max slides in behind the steering wheel, I snap, “Go to my father’s house.”

Like always, Max doesn’t respond. He starts the engine, and with his eyes on the road, he drives to Papa’s home.

What the hell? I can’t even have some alone time with a man. I’ve seen other people with bodyguards, and their protectors never embarrassed them like this.

Seriously, Max is the furthest thing from a bodyguard. Where the hell did Papa find the man?

Chapter 8

Cami

The moment Max brings the Bugatti to a stop in front of the mansion, I shove the door open and get out. I'm too upset to greet my father's guards as I stalk into the house.

Knowing Papa will be in his office this time of the night, I head in that direction. When I walk into the room, Papa's head snaps up from where he is reading a document.

"Camille? What's wrong?" he asks, concern lacing his words.

I gesture at Max, who's coming to a stop next to me. "He embarrassed me tonight and is downright impossible. I understand it's for my safety, but there has to be boundaries in place. I've been walking on eggshells the past week."

Papa gives me a patient look. "What happened tonight?"

"I went to the restroom, and he burst inside like the freaking Terminator."

My father's eyes flick to Max. "Care to explain?"

"Camille went into the restroom with Henri Durand. I've told her I have to search a room before she enters it."

I let out a frustrated sigh. "Papa, he yanks me around like I'm some puppet. He never asks permission and just does as he pleases. It's infuriating."

Instead of taking my side, Papa says, "It's for your safety, *mon amour*."

My chest bubbles with exasperation. "Does he even have bodyguarding experience?"

Papa lets out a sigh. "No, but he's the best protection for you."

Shock ripples over me. "He's never been a bodyguard?"

My father shakes his head. “No, he’s doing me a favor by protecting you, so try to cut him some slack.”

Jesus.

“I need him to cut me some slack,” I argue. “I can’t live like this. I understand I need protection, but I also need to be able to go on with my life while you deal with the threat.”

“This matter is going to require patience from everyone,” Papa says as if he’s giving one of his political speeches.

“I’ve tried,” I almost cry because it doesn’t look like the matter will be resolved.

My father locks eyes with Max. “Is there anything you can do to make this easier for Camille?”

Max crosses his arms over his chest and shakes his head. “This is the only way I can guarantee to keep her alive. I have to have full control over every situation.”

God help me.

I turn my frustrated gaze on him. “By being a freaking robot? By not allowing me any privacy?”

Max’s intense eyes flick to mine, and once again, I get a glimpse of the danger hiding in the shadows.

“What did you do before you agreed to protect me?”

Papa rises from his chair, and not giving Max a chance to answer, he says, “I’m sure we can find a way to make this thing work between the two of you.” My father looks at me, then asks, “What would make this easier for you?”

I gesture at Max again. “Some emotion from him would be great. I’m not even sure he knows how to smile.”

Max lets out a bored-sounding sigh when Papa gives him a pleading look.

“I’ll try,” Max mutter. “I can’t promise anything.”

“I know this must be an unusual case for you, Mr. Levin, but I appreciate any effort you can make to set my daughter at ease.”

“Jesus, I’m just asking for some human interaction, not for him to wait on my every need,” I mutter, not understanding why my father is treating Max differently from his other employees.

Papa pins me with a serious look. “Mr. Levin is doing me a favor, Camille. He can walk at any moment, and then we’ll be in serious trouble. You need to realize he’s all that stands between you and the person who wants to kill you.”

My father grabs photos from his desk and holds them out to Max. “I just received these.”

I move closer to Max and see that the prints are all of me. When I was out to take photos. When I attended the charity event last week. There’s even one of me when I took the short walk with Max a few days ago.

The same sentence is printed in bold, red letters on every photo.

I could’ve killed her.

Resign from politics.

Max takes a closer look at one of the photos, then holds it out to my father. “There’s a partial image of whoever stalked her reflected in the Renault. Send it to St. Monarch’s so they can track the person.”

Papa’s eyes widen, and he quickly takes the photograph from Max, also inspecting it. “I didn’t even see the reflection. I’ll send it to St. Monarch’s immediately.”

With my anger forgotten and the threat becoming more real, I ask, “St. Monarch’s?”

Papa shakes his head, and instead of answering me, he says, “You will do as Max says. I’m sorry your quality of life is suffering because of this

dangerous matter, but I can't risk anything happening to you." He comes to hug me, and his tone is softer. "I love you, Camille. I can't lose you."

And I certainly don't want to die.

Hugging Papa, I take comfort in the embrace, and it's only then the full impact of the night hits – the embarrassing situation in the restroom and the photos. It means the person who wants to kill me could really have done so if he wanted.

My body shudders, and tears sting my eyes. I hold Papa tighter, needing more comfort.

Instinctively, my father senses my distress, and he starts to rub his hand up and down my back. "I'm sorry, *mon amour*. I wish things didn't have to be this way. You can be strong for me, right?"

I nod, and pulling back, I do my best to smile so I don't add to Papa's stress.

Too late, you already threw a fit because you couldn't kiss a stupid guy you have no feelings for.

Feeling defeated, I let out a sigh. "I'll try harder to be accommodating to Max."

"Thank you." Papa gives me a loving smile and brushes his hand over my hair like he used to do when I was a little girl. "I just want to keep you safe."

"I'm sorry I lost my temper."

My father shakes his head. "I understand this is all unexpected and hard for you to deal with. We'll get through this like we've gotten through everything else."

My smile grows wider. "I'll let you continue with your work."

Papa turns his gaze to Max. "Please keep her safe."

"I will."

The two words carry a world of danger, and it makes me wonder who

Max really is.

I hug Papa again before leaving the mansion with Max by my side.

With the threat looming over my head, I feel like holing up in my penthouse and not setting foot outside until this madness has been dealt with.

The drive back to my apartment building is filled with a heavy silence. When Max parks the Bugatti and I climb out, I feel the urge to apologize for what happened tonight.

The words burn on the tip of my tongue as we step into the elevator, and it makes the confined space feel even smaller.

Or maybe it feels smaller because Max seems so much bigger after everything my father said.

Who is this man? What makes him the best man to protect me?

An unsettling feeling tightens my stomach, and I glance at him.

He looks like a Russian God with intense eyes and a face carved from stone. I don't think the man has ever cracked a smile. He's domineering, broody, and honestly, scary as hell.

But he's here to protect me, and at the end of the day, it's all that matters.

The elevator doors slide open, and Max murmurs, "Wait here."

I watch as he searches the apartment, and only when he gives me the clear do I walk to the living room. "Can we talk?"

He nods as he comes down the stairs.

My eyes follow him while I kick off my high heels, and taking a seat on the couch, I fold my legs beneath me and lean against the armrest.

I'm exhausted, but I don't think I'll be able to sleep until we've cleared the air.

Max sits down on a armchair, leans forward, and rests his forearms on his thighs. He lifts his light green eyes to me, and for a moment, I'm caught off guard by how attractive he looks.

Nope. Mind out of the gutter. You need to have a serious talk.

“Is there any way we can come to an understanding?” I ask. “Just to make things easier for both of us.”

He takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly before answering, “I need to have eyes on you at all times when we’re out in public. What happened tonight can’t happen again.”

I clench my jaw and tighten my control on my temper. Getting angry won’t help.

“You could’ve knocked or, at the very least, opened the door like a normal person.”

“A second’s delay can mean the difference between life and death,” he mutters.

I stare at him momentarily before admitting, “I’m supposed to feel safe with you, but you scared me tonight. After bursting into the restroom, there were a couple of minutes where I really thought you might lose your shit and hurt me. That can’t happen again.”

I’m surprised when I see a flicker of guilt on his face, and for some unknown reason, it makes me feel better.

“It wasn’t my intention to scare you,” he says. His features soften enough to break the serious expression always carved into his face. “I’m here to keep you safe. I’d never do anything to hurt you.”

Giving him a pleading look, I ask, “Can you try to be less robotic? Please?”

I can see he struggles to find the words, then he explains, “I’m used to working alone and rarely spend time with people. Just go on with your life and pretend I’m not here.”

Disappointment fills my chest, but I’m not ready to give up. “It would be easier if we both made an effort to get along. You’re in my life for the

unforeseeable future. We might as well try to be friends.”

Max’s face turns to stone again. “I’m not here to be your friend.”

“Jesus,” I mutter. “Would it kill you to try?”

He stares at me with an expression that gives me the impression it might actually kill him to be friends with me.

The thought hits like a ten-pound hammer.

He doesn’t like me.

Why does it upset me?

Slowly I start to nod my head, and rising to my feet, I say, “Fine. I won’t push the subject.” I pick up my pair of high heels, and walking to the staircase, I use my professional tone as I add, “By the way, if you ever grab my hair again, I swear to all that’s holy I’ll smother you in your sleep.”

My threat does nothing to Max, and he just watches me head up the stairs.

Chapter 9

Max

What a fucking shit show.

Long after Camille retired to her bedroom, I sit in the living room thinking about the disaster the night was.

Did I need to burst into the restroom?

No.

Could I have handled the situation better?

Yes.

Would I do things differently if I had a chance?

No.

No, I wouldn't. Watching Camille dance seductively before going to a restroom with another man made me unreasonably angry. It had nothing to do with her safety and everything to do with the fact that another man was touching her.

And I didn't like it one bit.

I can't develop feelings for this woman. I'm an assassin, and she's a socialite. We're worlds apart and total opposites.

And I never mix business with pleasure.

Then there's also the problem that I shot her. If I get close with Camille and she learns the truth, it will be a disaster.

It's easier to hate an enemy than a friend.

Fuck.

It's hard doing a job that's the opposite of what I usually do.

I can't expect her to stop living, but I can't allow the slightest risk. One fuck up, and she's dead.

Over my rotting corpse will she die on my watch.

It's okay if she hates me as long as I keep her alive.

I let out a sigh and climb to my feet. Camille's bedroom door opens, and she comes out wearing her usual t-shirt and tight shorts. Barefoot, she takes the stairs down, and without glancing in my direction, she heads toward the kitchen.

A smile every once in a while wouldn't kill you. It will make her feel better.

I follow her to the kitchen and watch as she takes ingredients out of the fridge.

"Are you hungry?" she asks, her tone quiet and drained from the fighting spirit she displayed earlier.

"I can eat," I answer.

Even though her anger was directed at me, I found it attractive. Her eyes lit up with little sparks, and her cheeks flushed with a pink tinge.

Camille is sexy and beautiful, and she's kind. Christ, she's the perfect woman. If things were different, she's precisely the type I'd go for.

I'm so fucking glad I didn't kill her.

I watch as she prepares chicken and mayonnaise sandwiches.

Give the woman a break, Maxim. She's not from your world, and the threat to her life must be very upsetting.

Still, I can't risk having a friendship with her. How the fuck do I stop that from happening?

Camille glances up and catches me staring at her. Her eyebrows draw together, and she hesitates before saying, "I'm sorry about tonight."

It takes a few seconds before I let down my guard enough for a smile to

tug at the corners of my mouth.

Surprise flutters over her features, and it's quickly followed by a smile of her own. The frustration that's taken up permanent residence on her face eases away like mist before the sun.

Christ, does a smile mean so much to her?

"I really didn't think you had it in you to smile," she teases me.

I notice her body relaxes, and it makes me feel like an asshole for not smiling sooner.

My violent past has conditioned me not to show emotion, but now that I have to guard this beautiful woman, I'm starting to realize how lifeless my life has become.

Still, you can't let her in.

Camille plates the sandwiches before taking a seat at the island instead of going back to her bedroom. When she gives me a hopeful glance, I step closer and sit across from her.

She waits for me to take a bite before she picks up half of her sandwich. After chewing and swallowing, she asks, "Don't you get lonely keeping people at a distance?"

Without hesitating, I answer, "No."

Having people you care about gives your enemies something to target.

"I always considered myself an introvert until I met you," she mentions.

Our eyes lock, and almost a minute passes before she glances down at her plate.

"So, with you in my space, day and night, how are we going to handle things if I go on a date or decide to bring a man back to my place?"

Christ.

She lets out an awkward chuckle, "I'd lose my shit if you burst into my bedroom while I'm...busy."

There's a weird sensation in my chest, and it makes my temper flare.

I know what I'm asking is unreasonable, but I can't stop the request.
"Maybe you could take a break from dating while I'm around."

So I don't kill an innocent fucker because I didn't like you moaning his name.

"What if it takes months or a year before the threat is dealt with?"

Then I'm royally fucked.

It's one thing keeping my distance from Camille for a couple of weeks, but it's a different beast being around her for months.

I'll get used to having her around.

I'll start caring about her.

And eventually, I'll give in and lower my guard.

Avoiding the problem, I say, "Let's take things one week at a time."

She nods and takes the last bite of her sandwich. Instead of leaving the plate on the counter, she places it in the dishwasher.

"You don't have to keep the place spotless," I mention. When she gives me a skeptical look, I add, "I want you to be at home in your place."

Her features soften as she stares at me. "Thank you for trying, Max. I appreciate it."

I nod before loading my plate in the dishwasher.

"Would you like to watch TV with me?" she suddenly asks. "I have snacks if you need an incentive."

Automatically the corner of my mouth lifts. "I'd say yes if you had beer. I don't care much for snacks."

Lifting her hand to her chin, she taps her pointer finger against her bottom lip. "Hmm... I don't have beer, but I have whiskey."

"You have a deal," I chuckle.

Emotion washes over Camille's face, and it looks like she's a second

away from crying. She quickly turns around and rushes toward the liquor cabinet in the living room.

Christ, this is all she wanted.

You're an asshole, Maxim.

I walk to her pantry and grab a packet of chips and a chocolate bar before taking a soda from the fridge. With Camille's snacks in my hands, I meet her in the living room.

I set the snacks down on the couch where she will sit and take the tumbler of whiskey from her.

"Thanks."

"You're welcome," she whispers as she makes herself comfortable on the couch.

Just as I take a seat on the armchair, she asks, "Don't you want to change into something more comfortable than a suit?"

I shake my head, and when she folds her legs beneath her, I quickly look at the TV so I don't stare at her bare legs.

"Are you okay with a comedy?" she asks.

I nod and take a sip of the whiskey. The liquid burns down my throat, and it feels totally out of my character to sit in front of a TV.

I can't remember the last movie I watched.

I think it was while I attended school.

Camille picks something called *The Hitman's Bodyguard*, and I almost let out a chuckle.

If only she knew the irony of that title.

Four minutes into the movie, a burst of laughter escapes me when the bodyguard's charge is assassinated. It's not because of the killing but due to *Ryan Reynolds's* facial expression.

I might not watch much TV, but I know who's who in the entertainment

world. It's not like I live under a rock.

I feel Camille's eyes on me but keep my attention on the movie.

I find myself relaxing, and every couple of minutes, I chuckle.

"See, I could've been worse," Camille says, her tone light and playful.

Without thinking, I tease, "If you give me half the shit this poor guy has to endure, I might kill you myself."

She laughs as if I just told her the biggest joke, and my eyes flick to her. Seeing her comfortable on the couch with her snacks, something warm trickles into my chest.

This woman is so easy to please.

We watch the movie, and I have to admit, I enjoy the sarcastic humor more than I thought I would. Then again, it might be funnier for me because of my work.

When the credits start rolling, I'm actually disappointed.

As if Camille can read my mind, she says, "There's a sequel." When my gaze rests on her for too long, she adds, "Unless you'd rather go to bed."

I shake my head. "I'll watch the sequel on one condition."

A curious expression fills her eyes. "What?"

"Tomorrow, you make some time to go out and take photographs."

Surprise flickers over her face, then she nods. "Okaaaay? That's not what I expected to hear."

"What did you expect?"

She lets out a chuckle. "You telling me to never break one of your rules."

"That's a given."

Camille rises from the couch and picks up the empty tumbler. "Would you like another?"

When I nod, and she walks toward the liquor cabinet, my eyes lock onto her ass.

My control slips at the sexy sight, and I wonder what it would feel like to spank her into submission.

She carries the tumbler of whiskey to the living room, and after handing the drink to me, she admits, “I’m enjoying this. Thank you for making an effort.”

It’s the second time she’s thanked me just because I’m interacting with her. Contact with people must be important to her.

I set the tumbler down on the side table and ask, “If you like people so much, why do you hate being a socialite?”

Camille searches for the sequel and draws her bottom lip between her teeth as she thinks about her answer.

“I hate the fakeness surrounding socialites. Everyone’s always trying to one-up the other. It’s all about status and money.”

Understanding, I nod. “Why do you do it?”

“It’s what my father expects of me.”

Tilting my head, I ask, “But he loves you.”

Camille lets out a sigh and pops a chip into her mouth. “My father is a controlling man. He doesn’t want me to work and insists that I live the life of a socialite.” Her eyes meet mine. “He’s given me an amazing life, the least I can do is follow a couple of rules.”

“If you had a choice, what work would you prefer to do?”

She doesn’t have to think about her answer. “I’d become a professional photographer.” She scrunches her nose, a chuckle bubbling from her. “I doubt I’d make any money, but I’d enjoy it a lot.”

My eyes flick to the hallway, and I glance over her collection of photos. “You have a talent, Camille. I’m sure you’d make money from selling your work.”

When she doesn’t say anything, my eyes flick back to hers. Her lips are

parted and her eyebrows drawn together, emotion trembling in her eyes.

“That’s the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me.”

More warmth creeps into the icy chambers of my heart, and I start to worry that if I give this woman half a chance, she’ll make herself right at home in my chest.

That can’t happen.

“It’s time for bed,” I say as I rise to my feet.

“What about the movie?”

I shake my head and start to check every window. “It’s late. We can watch it another day.” When I’m done with my checks, I head to the stairs and mutter, “Good night, Camille.”

“Night,” she whispers, and I feel her eyes follow me all the way to my bedroom.

Christ, I’m going to walk a tightrope between trying to take it easy on Camille and not giving her too much attention.

Just make sure that fucking rope doesn’t become a noose around your neck.

While Camille is taking an afternoon nap, I pull my phone out and scroll through my contacts list until I reach Nikolai’s number. Pressing dial, I bring the device to my ear.

I haven’t spoken to him in a while and just want to touch base with him.

The call goes through, then my friend growls, “Yes?”

A frown forms on my forehead as I ask, “Everything okay?”

“No,” he mutters, clearly upset about something.

When Nikolai is in a mood, it just helps to listen. Most of the time, I’m able to calm him down.

“Want to talk about it?”

“I fucked one of the attendees.”

I shake my head, not understanding why that would upset him. “And?”

“She’s a fucking thorn in my side.”

I let out a chuckle. “And you decided fucking her would be the best course of action? Why?”

“Christ, it’s hard to explain,” he grumbles. “She’s full of sass and strives to drive me insane.”

Not half as much as Camille’s driving me insane.

I don’t mention anything because this conversation isn’t about me. Instead, I say, “Yeah, I still don’t understand why you decided to fuck her and why it’s a problem.”

There’s a moment’s silence before he admits, “I care about her.”

My eyebrows fly up because that’s a first. Nikolai is a bachelor by choice, and the longest relationship he’s had was when he married my sister because I asked him to.

“Oh,” I mutter. “How much do you care about her?”

“Too much. I fucking asked Viktor to cancel the hit he had out on her.”

“Hold on.” I almost choke on a droplet of spit and clear my throat. “Last time I checked, there were two active hits. Which one are we talking about?”

“Abigail Sartori.”

Surprised as fuck, I almost shout, “You fucked Sartori’s daughter?” A bark of laughter escapes from me. “Jesus, now this story is getting good.”

The Sartoris are enemies of the bratva and mafia. For Nikolai to fuck Abigail, the woman has to mean something to him.

“Fuck off,” Nikolai mutters.

I get my laughter under control, then ask, “Again, why is this a problem?”

Nikolai lets out a sigh. “Because I love my life the way it is, and I don’t

need a woman destroying my routine.”

“Did you ever stop to think that just maybe a woman will add to the quality of your life?”

“Yeah, so tell me, why aren’t you married yet?” he asks.

“Because I haven’t met the one.”

Camille’s face pops into my mind, but I quickly shake my head to banish her from my thoughts.

“Right.” Nikolai sighs again, then says, “Abigail is a fucking handful. We’ll end up killing each other.”

Trying to be the voice of reason, I say, “You don’t know that.”

“I do. No one has ever pissed me off as much as she does.”

Getting up from the couch, I walk to the kitchen and take a bottle of water from the fridge. “Why does she piss you off?”

“She fucking flirts like it’s a paying job and doesn’t take anything seriously.”

Another chuckle escapes me because it sounds like she’s the right woman for him. “Hey, opposites attract. With you being anal about your routine and where everything has to be, her ruffling things up might be a good change.”

Nikolai lets out a frustrated groan. “There’s an eighteen-year age gap between us. I’m old enough to be her father.”

“But you’re not her father,” I state the obvious. “Age doesn’t fucking matter as long as both parties consent to the relationship.”

“You’re not fucking helping,” he grumbles.

After taking a sip of water, I say, “I’m not going to tell you what you want to hear, Nikolai. I think if you care about the woman, then you should give a relationship a try. The worst that can happen is you fuck her for a while and realize she’s not the one for you.”

Fucking her a couple of times won’t be enough.

“She’s already under my skin. If I let her in, there will be no getting her out.”

I place the bottle of water on the counter and stare at the living room. “I don’t see why this is a problem.”

“Of course you don’t, because it’s not your perfectly constructed life that will fall to pieces.”

I sigh, then say, “Listen to me, Nikolai. You don’t want to wake up one day and realize you’ve let the only woman you could love get away.” I pause to let my words sink in. “Take time and think things through. If your feelings for the woman keep growing, just go for it. At least the odds are in your favor.”

“How do you figure that?”

“She let you fuck her. It’s an emotional act for women.” *And that’s why I have to keep Camille at a distance, and I can’t cross any lines with her.* “Stop worrying and let things happen naturally. You can’t control every-fucking-thing in this world.”

“I’m sure as fuck going to try,” he mutters.

“I pity the woman who has to deal with your OCD and control issues,” I taunt my friend.

“Yeah, like you’ve done for over thirty years.”

I press my hand to my chest, a grin on my face. “Damn, you’re right. I pity myself.”

“Fuck off,” he chuckles.

“Feeling better?” I ask.

“Yeah.”

Knowing it will take his mind off his problem, I decide to exaggerate things on my side a little as I say, “Good, now about Camille DuBois. The woman is fucking infuriating.”

Just as I'd hoped, Nikolai starts to laugh. It takes a while before he catches his breath. "You just lectured me about love and relationships. Did you miss the entire conversation?"

Frowning, I mutter, "I don't care about the woman."

"Yet," he chuckles. "Give it time. Soon she'll be under your skin, and before you know what's happening, you're fucking her brains out, and your best friend tells you just to let things happen naturally."

Shaking my head, I growl, "You're impossible to talk with today. I'll call tomorrow when you're in a better mood."

Nikolai's laughter comes over the line as I end the call.

Fuck I have to be careful with Camille, or I'll end up in the same position as Nikolai.

Chapter 10

Cami

Last night was like a breath of fresh air.

Not the incident at the nightclub, but after, when Max watched a movie with me.

He smiled and even laughed a few times.

His smile. Holy hotness.

It made his eyes a million times more intense. There was a spark, like it was trying to ignite a fire, and I got the feeling if that happened, he'd be irresistible.

His smile changes him from serial killer to devastatingly handsome.

I wonder if he even knows how much it changes his features.

Dressed in a pair of jeans, a sweatshirt with a hoodie, and sneakers, as per Max's request, I'm checking my camera bag when he comes down the stairs.

My head lifts, and the air wooshes from my lungs. "Jesus," I whisper when I see the gray sweatpants he's wearing. My eyes lock on the outline of his manhood beneath the fabric.

Holy. Shit.

"You're going to give every woman a heart attack."

Or an ovary explosion.

He pauses at the foot of the stairs. "Why?"

"You can't wear gray sweatpants in public."

A frown forms on Max's forehead. "What's wrong with sweatpants?"

I don't even have the mental capacity to process my words before they leave my mouth. "They look too hot, Max. It's like me walking in the streets

in lingerie.”

His eyebrow pops up. “I doubt that very much.”

“To women, gray sweatpants on a man are the equivalent of lingerie. How do you not know this?”

Not able to stop myself, my eyes sweep over the said sweatpants. Tingles spread through my abdomen, and I start to fuss with my camera bag.

“I’ll be back in a second,” Max grumbles.

My eyes dart up, and I blatantly ogle his ass as he walks back to his bedroom.

Letting out a sigh, I draw my bottom lip between my teeth.

Damn, I should’ve taken a photo of him in the sweatpants. It would sell for millions.

When he comes out of his room again, I let out a groan because the black cargo pants aren’t much better.

He still looks hot.

He comes toward me and asks, “Better?”

I shake my head and admit, “Honestly, you could wear old-man pajamas, and you’d probably still look hot. At least everyone will be too busy looking at you to notice me.”

The corner of his mouth lifts slightly. “Hot?”

I roll my eyes and walk to the elevator. “Don’t fish for compliments.”

Max swipes the keycard, and when the doors slide open, he says, “Cover your hair with the hoodie.”

I let out a sigh and scowl at him as he comes to stand next to me. “This is not going to work. The paparazzi will spot me a mile away, and they probably already know you’re my bodyguard, so you’ll be a dead giveaway.”

“It’s worth a try,” he mutters.

Max said I should dress comfortably, that way, I won’t attract attention. I

don't think it's going to work, but I'm willing to give it a try to keep the peace between us. I just hope me wearing jeans is not on the front page tomorrow.

Pulling the hoodie over my head, I smile at Max.

I'm still in shock that he's trying to be more human, and I wasn't lying when I said I appreciate it. I feel less tense around him.

The elevator opens in the parking area so we can sneak out the back, and I let Max check our surroundings before I join him.

"Where do you want to go?" he asks as we walk toward the exit.

"Anywhere. I usually drive around until I see something that draws my attention."

He stops walking and asks, "Do you want to take the car?"

I shake my head. "It will be nice just to walk around. I never get to do that."

Nodding, he places his hand on my lower back. Where it annoyed me the first time he did it without my permission, his touch now makes me feel protected, and I have to suppress the urge to move closer to him.

When we reach the sidewalk, Max doesn't remove his hand and steps closer to me. Our sides are touching, and every brush of our clothes sends tingles of awareness spreading through me.

Even though I think Max is very attractive, I'll never entertain the idea of starting something with him. Not because he's my bodyguard but because men like him don't look twice at women like me.

Maybe he would if I lost twenty to thirty pounds, which will never happen. I love food too much and refuse to starve myself for a man.

Max's side pushes against mine as he says, "Turn left."

I follow his lead and start to look around for something to photograph.

Nothing grabs my attention until we reach the *Arc de Triomphe*. A pigeon

is looking for food on the ground, and taking my camera, I choose a setting for black and white, then take a couple of photos.

Suddenly the bird takes flight, and I snap like crazy to get as many shots as possible. Once the pigeon is out of sight, I glance around for something else. I see an elderly woman waiting to cross the road while traffic zooms past her and take a photo from behind so her face isn't visible.

When I start walking again, Max is right by my side. Enjoying the fresh air as the sun sets, I grin up at him. "Thank you for doing this."

There's a super-fast flash of emotion on his face before he nods.

We walk for half an hour in the direction of the *Eiffel Tower*, and I get a couple of good shots as night falls over Paris.

Honestly, I don't think I've ever walked around for such a long period of time. I never considered it could be fun.

We stop by a café and order two coffees to go. While I sip on the beverage, I glance at Max, then ask, "Are you at least enjoying yourself?"

He nods. "I love being outside. I get cabin fever when I'm stuck indoors."

I'm surprised by the information. "Then it must be hell guarding me."

He shakes his head. "It's easier than I expected."

"What did you expect?"

We cross a street before he answers, "A spoiled socialite who wakes up every morning choosing tantrums and violence."

A burst of laughter escapes me. "No, that would be Juliette."

A camera grabs my attention, and when I recognize the guy, I dart behind Max and almost glue myself to his back. "Paparazzi! He's standing near the entrance to the Four Seasons hotel."

"Probably waiting for someone to come out," Max says. "He hasn't spotted you yet."

Max stops walking, and turning around, he tucks my blonde strands

beneath the hoodie. “Just keep your head down. You look like a random tourist.”

My heart starts to beat faster.

“Okay.”

“We’re going to walk right by him. He won’t expect a socialite to wear jeans and walk the streets.”

“Okay.”

Max wraps his arm around my shoulders, and I’m held tightly to his side. We must look like an intimate couple as we walk toward the vulture who’ll sell my photo to any and every magazine in France.

I duck my head low, and as we near the paparazzi, Max whispers intimately, “What do you want to have for dinner, *ma chérie*?”

I almost stumble from hearing him call me his darling, but knowing it’s an act, I answer, “Anything. I’m not fussy.”

We pass the man, and Max keeps his arm around me until we turn left up a street, and we disappear from the paparazzi’s line of sight.

I glance over my shoulder then let out a burst of laughter. “We actually pulled it off.”

“The hunter never expects his prey to be right in front of him,” Max says as he lowers his arm and places his hand on my lower back again.

I should be worried about how much I’m starting to like the man’s touch.

I take some random photos of cars lining the streets, lights shining from buildings, and even a trashcan with a discarded packet next to it.

When we get back to my penthouse, I wait for Max to do his usual search of the place before saying, “Thank you for tonight.”

“You’re welcome.”

There’s no expression on his face, and it has me requesting, “Give me one smile, and I’ll leave you alone for the rest of the night.”

He shakes his head, and it fills me with disappointment. “You can’t leave me alone if we’re watching a movie.”

My face lights up with a bright smile. “Okay, I’ll agree to no smile if you at least have some popcorn tonight.”

He narrows his eyes at me. “Don’t push your luck.”

Walking to the stairs, I chuckle, “One day, I’ll get you to eat snacks.” I head to the first floor, then call out, “I’m just going to take a shower. I’ll meet you in the living room in a half hour.”

I dart into the darkroom and place my camera bag on the desk before I go to my bedroom. Feeling relaxed and happy, I grin from ear to ear as I grab a pair of shorts, a T-shirt, and clean underwear.

If things stay like this, I don’t mind having Max around. When he lets his guard down a little, he’s actually a nice person.

Just don’t go falling for the man. You don’t need that kind of heartbreak in your life.

Chapter 11

Max

I'm entering dangerous waters.

Watching Camille take photos to her heart's content and holding her close when we passed the paparazzi guy did things to my heart.

Weird shit.

I'm not used to feeling anything, especially where women are concerned.

And having Camille smile at every little thing and thank me for everyday shit is not helping.

I can't develop feelings for the woman. Under no circumstance is that acceptable.

I'm just doing Nikolai a favor and paying her back for almost killing her. And even if that weren't the case, she won't be able to accept that I kill people for a living.

She takes photos of birds and old people where I hunt targets and kill. She enjoys snacks and comedies while I maintain a healthy diet and barely watch TV. Her camera is her favorite thing, where a gun is mine.

And she's worth more than a one-night stand.

No matter how sexy her fucking ass is, how beautiful her smile is, and how amazing her personality is, I can't allow myself to feel anything for her.

The guilt I've had to live with the past ten years is the only emotion she'll get from me.

Christ, I didn't expect Camille DuBois to be so fucking perfect.

Why the hell isn't there a line of men at her front door?

I'm so deep in thought I don't realize that I've changed into the gray sweatpants instead of just staying dressed in my cargo pants.

She thinks I look hot in sweatpants.

The corner of my mouth lifts, and I shake my head.

You're just going to watch the movie with her because the first one was good. There will be no bonding and shit.

I leave my gun on my bed and walk out of the bedroom. Hearing Camille in the kitchen, I head down the stairs and find her gathering enough snacks to feed a small army.

She glances in my direction then stops what she's doing to stare at me. "You have to let me take a photo of you in those pants. I'll make millions."

I chuckle and shake my head at her. "Not happening."

She scrunches her nose. "I tried." Pointing at the snacks, she asks, "Will you take those to the living room? I'm going to make ramen for dinner."

I gather all the chips, pretzels, and packets of candy and carry the load to the coffee table, where I dump it.

I head back to the kitchen and take a seat at the island. Camille's stirring the noodles in a pot, a soft smile playing around her lips.

Christ, please stop looking so damn beautiful.

She glances at me then her eyes widen. "Why do you look like you want to kill someone?"

Not kill. Fuck. I want to fuck someone. You in particular.

I wipe the emotion from my face. "Let's eat so we can watch the movie."

She gives me a cautious look before dishing the ramen into bowls. "Chopsticks or a fork?"

"Chopsticks."

Camille takes a seat across from me and chooses to use a fork to eat.

Her eyes are glued to my hand when I take my first bite, then she mutters,

“I’m jealous. I can’t use chopsticks.”

I point at the drawer. “Get some, and I’ll show you how.”

She quickly gets a pair and excitedly takes her seat again.

“Cradle the bottom chopstick between your thumb and the other with your index finger so you can move it up and down.”

She does as I instruct and grins when she gets it right.

“It will take some time until you get the hang of it. Don’t get frustrated,” I warn her.

Camille tries to pick up a single noodle, but it slips away.

“It’s harder focusing on one noodle than a bunch.”

She goes in for the kill and manages to pin a couple between the chopsticks. When she leans down to transfer the food to her mouth, it all slips free, causing the broth to splash in her face.

Instead of getting angry and giving up, she laughs, wipes off her face, and tries again.

As I watch her learn something new, I realize the more time I spend with her, the harder it will be to walk away.

There’s no keeping this woman out if every little thing she does is so damn perfect.

When we’re done with our dinner, we move to the living room. Camille pours me a tumbler of whiskey before taking her seat and grabbing the bag of pretzels.

While we’re watching the movie, a text comes through from Maurice, and I quickly check it.

Maurice: St. Monarch’s couldn’t trace the partial image. It’s a dead end.

Fuck.

The past three weeks have been pretty uneventful, and with Camille spending most of her time at home, the forced proximity has made it near impossible to keep my growing attraction for her under control.

Under control, my left nut. It's fucking spiraling into chaos.

The shitty part is I'm getting used to having her around. I find myself listening for her footsteps, waiting for her to wake up or get out of the shower. Any interaction with her excites me.

Camille has to attend a fashion event, and I have to admit, I miss being at home with her instead of between all these people who are willing to spend money on a piece of so-called clothing no one would be caught dead in.

She's wearing a breathtaking dress that shows every sexy curve of her body, but every time a model walks past us, Camille fidgets with her outfit.

I'm starting to get the feeling she's self-conscious, and I don't like it one bit.

She lets out a groan then whispers, "Just my luck."

"What?"

She doesn't answer me, and I follow her line of sight.

Christ.

Juliette's wearing the same dress as Camille. I'm going to go ahead and assume this is never a good thing for a socialite.

When Juliette reaches us, the cameras start flashing like crazy, which means the two women will be front page news tomorrow.

Unable to stop myself, I place my hand on Camille's lower back to give her some support.

"Darling, what a disaster," Juliette says, her mouth downturned. She glances over Camille's body, then asks, "Why would you wear this dress? It doesn't suit your curvy body."

My eyebrow rises, and anger pours into my chest.

Camille lifts her chin, and smiling at Juliette, she replies, “You look beautiful as always. I need to do my rounds, so you’ll have to excuse me.”

When we walk away, Camille mutters under her breath, “At least I have an ass, and I don’t look like a stick insect.”

“You should’ve said that to her face,” I mention as I glance around the area.

The fashion show’s being held outdoors, making my job harder than usual.

“I won’t stoop to her level,” she grumbles, then checks the time on her phone. “Fifteen minutes, and we’re out of here.”

“Got it.”

My eyes lock on a familiar face, and every muscle in my body tightens. Jedrik Rusnak. Gun for hire and the second-best assassin.

We’ve been playing a cat-and-mouse game for years, and the only reason I haven’t killed him is because I didn’t want to waste a bullet.

Up until today, it hasn’t bothered me, but with Camille by my side, it changes the entire game.

Jesus fucking Christ.

Instinctively, I take hold of Camille’s arm while slipping my free hand behind my back and gripping the handle of my gun.

“We have to leave right now,” I growl.

Camille glances around us as I pull her toward the exit. “What’s wrong?”

“Just walk,” I order, my eyes staying on Rusnak. “Faster.”

“Max,” she whimpers, fear tightening her voice. The sound digs into my heart.

Rusnak starts to walk, sticking with us, which means we’ll meet at the exit.

Fuck. This is not going to end well.

I give him a look of warning, slowly shaking my head.

The only thing stopping me from taking the shot is Camille, but I'll fucking kill him if he tries anything.

A smirk pulls at his mouth, his eyes locked on mine.

I slow my pace and pull Camille partially behind me. "Don't panic or cause a scene."

"What?" Confusion laces the word, and I can feel her trembling.

"Stay calm," I order right before we come face-to-face with Rusnak.

"Maxim Levin," he chuckles with a cocky air around him. "What a surprise."

"Now is not the time nor the place, Rusnak. Walk away while you can."

The smirk on his face grows, and for a split second, his eyes flick to Camille. "Working?"

Every muscle in my body is wound tight and ready for action. "Always."

We scan our surroundings simultaneously, then he mutters, "Me too."

Rusnak prefers to kill his targets up close, whereas I prefer they don't see it coming. The risk is lower that way.

My jaw clenches as I growl, "Who?"

He glances in the direction of the crowd. "A businessman."

Camille grips my arm, and I feel her press against my back. She's shaking like a fucking leaf.

I gesture with a nod of my head for Rusnak to go.

Again his eyes flick to Camille, and I shake my head. "Don't even think about it."

He lets out a dark chuckle. "I've been busier than usual the past few weeks and wondered where you were. I almost got my hopes up and thought you were killed. But here you are. And with a woman, no less. Interesting."

I take a deep breath, my fingers flexing around the handle of my gun. “Walk away before I put you in a body bag.”

Rusnak lets out another chuckle. “It was good seeing you again, Maxim.”
Just fuck off already.

He starts to walk toward the crowd, then pauses and looks directly at Camille. “Word of advice, beautiful. Associating with an assassin won’t do your public image any good.”

Jesus Christ.

He’s a dead man walking.

My eyes are locked with Rusnak’s as I promise, “I’ll see you soon.” I nudge Camille toward the exit, and fucking angry, I bark, “Walk.”

Camille startles, and looking rattled as fuck with fear tightening her features, she hurries to the Bugatti.

The fucking asshole. The second I’m done protecting Camille, I’m killing him.

Chapter 12

Cami

What the hell was that all about?

Max drags me to the Bugatti, and I'm practically bundled inside.

When he tensed up and started growling orders, I thought I was in danger. My freaking heart almost pounded out of my chest.

Then that man approached us, and Max transformed into...Jesus, I can't even describe it. He was calm but deadly? The danger emanating from him had me trembling like a leaf in a storm.

Max gets into the car and starts the engine, his face cut from stone. But his eyes... Jesus, his eyes are filled with so much violence it makes the tiny hairs on my body rise.

"Max?" I whisper, too scared to talk louder.

His gaze keeps checking all the mirrors as if he's expecting an attack at any moment, and his tone is so low a shiver creeps down my spine when he growls, "We'll talk once we're home."

What happened back there? The entire conversation was...off. It's the weirdest and scariest thing I've ever witnessed.

Frowning, I replay the conversation the two men had.

Killed. Body bag. Assassin.

Intense shock hits me square in the stomach, and I wrap my arms around myself. "Oh, God."

"Stay calm," Max orders.

Assassin.

"Jesus." My heart sets off at a crazy pace, and I feel the blood drain from

my face as I look at the man beside me. “You’re an assassin?” My mouth goes bone dry. “Oh. My. God.”

Is that even a thing people still do?

Of course, it is.

What the hell?

Looking terrifying as hell, Max orders, “We’ll talk when we get home.”

I sit frozen in my seat, suddenly too scared to move a muscle. The drive feels endlessly long, and by the time Max parks the car, my body is ice cold and a trembling mess.

When I don’t move, he murmurs, “Let’s go up, Camille.”

I push the door open and keep myself from looking at him as we walk to the elevator. When the doors shut us in the confined space, I wrap my arms around myself and watch the numbers as they climb to my floor.

Jesus. An assassin. A man who unalives people for a living. Jesus. Oh my God. An assassin. This is insane.

The doors open, and he orders, “Wait here.”

Like always, Max walks through the penthouse. My eyes lock on him, and now I see the predatory way he moves.

Now I understand the cold expression on his face. It’s ruthlessness.

He comes back toward me. “All clear.”

Slowly, my eyes settle on his face. “Who was that man?”

Max’s features are drawn tight, the danger still in his eyes. “You don’t need to know who he is.”

Still processing the shock, I shake my head again. “Are you...” I swallow hard, “an assassin?”

I expect him to deny it.

I expect him to reassure me.

What I don’t expect is for him to nod.

Shivers rush over my skin, and my skin feels clammy. My heart thunders in my chest as I stare wide-eyed at him. “Jesus, you unalive people for a living.”

He tilts his head, his light-green eyes locked on me as if he’s waiting for me to make a move.

My arms tighten around my middle. “Does my father know?”

Again he nods. “That’s why I was asked to protect you.”

Holy shit.

“But you don’t protect people,” I state the obvious with fear trembling in my voice.

His features soften a little, but it doesn’t make him look any less dangerous. “No, I don’t. You’re an exception.”

“Me?” A frown forms on my forehead. “Why?”

“Why what?”

I swallow hard. “Why am I an exception?”

“I owed someone a favor and had to repay a debt.”

I spent three weeks with an assassin and didn’t have the slightest clue.

Lifting my hand to my mouth, I let out a burst of incredulous laughter. “I can’t believe I’m having this conversation.” Worry forms a pit in my stomach. “How can you protect me if you’re an assassin?”

“I’m the best there is, Camille. If the person threatening you is from my world, they’ll back off solely because you’re seen with me.”

Shit.

I’m standing mere inches from the best assassin there is.

Shit.

I move backward and bump into the elevator doors.

Max shakes his head, and I watch as the dangerous expression fades from his eyes. His tone is as gentle as I’ve ever heard it. “I won’t hurt you.”

My tongue darts out to wet my dry lips. “But...I don’t understand why my father would hire someone like you.”

He pulls his phone out of his pocket and dials a number. A moment later, he says, “Camille found out I’m an assassin. She needs reassurance that she’s safe with me.”

He hands the device to me, and I press it to my ear. “Papa?”

My father lets out a sigh. “I hoped you wouldn’t find out. You’re safe with Mr. Levin, *mon amour*.”

Incredulous, I say, “But, he’s an...an assassin.”

“Which is why he’s guarding you, *mon amour*.”

My eyebrows knit together. “But if this information gets out, it will ruin you.”

“Leave the worry to me,” Papa replies. “Just know you’re safe with Mr. Levin.”

We talk for a minute longer before we end the call. I hand the phone back to Max and shake my head for what feels like the hundredth time.

It feels like I’ve been thrown into the twilight zone.

“Better?” Max asks.

“Not by a long shot, but it all makes sense now.” My eyes move over every inch of his handsome face. “You being so cold and distant. Not showing any emotions.” My gaze settles on his. “That’s why it was hard for you to interact with me.”

Max nods, then tilts his head. “You’re safe with me, and as soon as the threat has been dealt with, I’ll disappear, and you’ll never see me again.”

There’s a stabbing sensation in my chest.

“Now you understand why we can’t be friends.”

I nod, the stabbing sensation creating a hole in my heart.

My eyes lift, and I look at the killer standing in front of me. “I’m going to

need some time to process this.”

“That’s understandable.”

Slowly, I step around him, then say, “I’m going to bed.”

I don’t think I’ll shut an eye tonight. Not because I feel unsafe with Max but because I have to process the fact that I started to care about him.

He’s a trained killer, though, and I’m just an ordinary woman, so we can’t even be friends. We’re complete opposites.

Still, with all the time we’ve spent together, I already consider him a friend.

I already care.

How will I continue to live in the same space with him without feeling anything?

He’s a killer.

He’s killed before, and he will kill again.

Jesus, my bodyguard is an assassin.

I shake my head again as I walk into my bedroom and shut the door behind me.

It feels like my body is on autopilot as I strip out of my dress. I pull on a pair of comfy shorts and a T-shirt before going through my skincare routine.

When I’m ready for bed, I stand in the middle of my room and stare at the closed door.

If I had known he was an assassin when I met him, I would’ve freaked out, but after getting to know him a little, I trust he won’t hurt me.

I trust that he’ll do everything he can to keep me alive.

I trust an assassin.

Slowly, I walk to the door, and not making a sound, I open it. My bare feet are silent on the floor as I sneak down the hallway. Reaching Max’s room, I pause when I see the door is slightly ajar.

My breathing slows as I peek into the bedroom, and seeing him checking his weapon before he sets it down on the bed has my heart skipping a beat.

Suddenly he murmurs, “You can come in.”

Jesus.

I place a hand against the doorjamb as I take a step into the room. “How did you know I was here?”

“I felt you.” His eyes flick to me as he pulls the tie free from around his neck.

My abdomen flushes with heat, and I have to wonder if there’s something wrong with me. Sure, the man was hot before I learned the truth about him, but now that I know how dangerous he really is, it’s as if the attraction I feel for him has been multiplied by a thousand.

I do like a bad boy as much as the next woman.

But he’s not a bad boy, Camille. He’s a violent man. There’s a huge difference.

His closed-off personality had me curious, but now I’m just downright ravenous for more information about him.

But I’m also cautious because the last thing I want to do is to piss him off. My eyebrows pinch together as I ask, “Can I ask questions?”

He shrugs off his jacket, and when he starts to roll up his dress shirt’s sleeves, my eyes drink in the sight of the veins snaking beneath his skin.

“What do you want to know?”

My gaze darts back to his face, and when he walks toward me, I backpedal until I’m pressed against the glass banister. I gesture to the living room. “Can we talk down there?”

He nods and waits for me to walk before following me. Every nerve in my back tingles, and I can’t resist the urge to glance over my shoulder every few seconds.

Max waits for me to take a seat on the couch before he sits down on the armchair. Leaning forward, he rests his forearms on his thighs and links his fingers together.

Nervously I tuck some hair behind my ear. My eyes dart around the open living space before settling on him, then I let out a nervous chuckle. “I actually don’t know what I want to ask.”

The corner of his mouth lifts ever so slightly. “There are the usual questions. Why am I an assassin? How did I get into it? How many people have I killed?”

Another nervous chuckle bursts from me, and I quickly shake my head. “Who was that man?”

“Rusnak. He’s also an assassin, but there’s nothing for you to worry about.”

“If you say so,” I whisper. Sucking in a deep breath, I pull my legs up and wrap my arms around my shins. Giving him a sheepish smile, I ask, “How did you become one?”

Max glances down at his linked hands as he answers, “When I met my best friend, he introduced me to a different side of the world.” Shaking his head, he lifts his eyes to me again. “It’s something I’m really good at, and it felt natural.”

My eyes widen. “Killing people feels natural to you?”

Max lets out a deep breath. “I don’t consider my targets people.”

“But they are,” I argue.

He thinks for a moment before he replies, “Let me rephrase that. They're not innocent.” Gesturing at me, he continues, “I don’t go around killing people like you. My targets are mostly criminals.”

My eyebrow darts up. “Mostly?”

“There’s the rare occasion when I take out a businessman.”

His words make a tremor ripple through my body. “Like my father?”

Max keeps quiet for a moment before he answers, “I don’t kill politicians. It’s too messy.” He seems to think about something, then he admits, “Only once did I shoot an innocent person, but it was an accident, and it’s something I regret deeply. Luckily, the person survived.”

It comforts me to hear that he can feel remorse for the mistake he made. I draw my bottom lip between my teeth, my eyes jumping over Max. “Do we go on as normal?”

“If that’s what you want.”

“And you?” I ask while freeing my legs. “What do you want?”

Max stares at me for a long moment until I start to feel like a caged bird.

“What I want doesn’t matter. As long as you trust I’ll do everything in my power to keep you safe, we’re good.”

It feels like there’s a magnetic force coming from him, and it makes me lean forward.

I want to get closer.

“Is it weird that I trust you?”

The corner of his mouth lifts, and there’s a flicker of relief in his eyes. “No. It’s not weird.”

My tone is soft and almost intimate as I ask, “Do you trust me?”

Again Max stares at me until every nerve ending in my body tingles.

“Yes.” Just as I feel the relief the word brings, he adds, “You’re a clever woman. You won’t do anything stupid to endanger your life.”

“Is that a threat?”

Max shakes his head. “It’s common sense.”

Chapter 13

Max

The conversation went much smoother than I expected.

Camille didn't freak out and kept a cool head, which makes me respect her even more. Once again, I'm so fucking thankful I didn't accidentally kill her all those years ago.

When she asked what I wanted, emotions I've never felt before waged war in my chest.

I want her. Even if it's just for one night.

I want the chance to feel what it's like to be with such an incredible woman.

But I can't have her, and I'm sure now that she knows I'm an assassin, anything romantic between us will never be an option.

Contrary to popular belief, being an assassin doesn't get you laid. Most women distance themselves from danger and don't get into bed with it.

My eyes drift over her face, still searching for any sign she's going to freak out.

She fidgets, and unable to sit still, she gets up and walks to the kitchen. "Are you hungry? What do you feel like eating?"

I rise to my feet and follow her. She's clearly nervous, and I hate it. I want her comfortable around me.

"I can make something healthy. Do you eat fish?" she keeps rambling.

I come up behind her, and when she turns around and sees how close I am, she bounces back. "Jesus." Her hand flies to her chest, covering her

heart.

The urge to touch and comfort her almost overwhelms me, but I fist my hands at my sides.

My jaw clenches, and the words come out sounding harsher than I meant. “Don’t be nervous around me.”

Camille nods while taking a step back. She glances around the kitchen, then darts to the fridge. “So, what do you feel like eating?”

You can’t touch her.

“Anything,” I answer, my body burning to move closer to her.

“A tuna salad?” Her head pops into the fridge. “I have salmon.” She takes it out and inspects the packet. “Nope, it expired.”

“Camille,” I say to get her attention because she’s clearly panicking and rambling about food.

“Shoot, I don’t know what to cook. Maybe we can order in?”

“Camille,” I try again, so she’ll look at me.

Shutting the fridge’s door, she heads to the pantry and disappears inside.

Christ.

I follow after her, and when I fill the space between the doorjamb, effectively cornering her, her teeth start to worry her bottom lip. Her eyes dart to my face, giving me a pleading look.

Finally, she admits, “I’m trying not to be nervous. It’s just...” she waves a hand over me, “you’re intimidating. It’s one thing thinking you’re just a broody person, but it’s another knowing you’re actually a killing machine.”

Again the urge to comfort her surges through my body, and I take a step forward. “What can I do to make you feel better?”

She shakes her head and quickly nudges some hair behind her ear. “I really trust you’ll keep me safe. I think I just need to get used to the idea that you’re not an... ordinary man.”

I take another step closer, placing my body inches from hers, then I repeat my question, “What can I do to make you feel better?”

She has to tilt her head back to lock eyes with me.

An electric current with enough force to power a nuclear weapon surges to life between us.

Her lips part, and she whispers, “I don’t know.”

The air tenses around us, and unable to fight the need I have to comfort her, I slowly lift my hand to the side of her neck. When she doesn’t flinch or pull away, I take another step, closing the last of the distance between us.

This is so fucking out of character for me, and it makes my heartbeat speed up as I move cautiously to wrap my arms around her.

My fingers slip into her silky hair as I cup the back of her head while my other arm locks her to me.

For a moment, we both stand frozen on the spot, then Camille pushes closer to me and rests her cheek on my chest. I feel her hands on my sides before her arms circle my lower back.

I lean my head down until her hair tickles my jaw. “You’re safe with me, Cami. I’ll never do anything to hurt you or put you in harm’s way. Understand?”

She nods, then I feel her body relax. She hugs me tighter. “Thank you for taking a break from killing people to keep me safe.”

A burst of laughter escapes me, and pulling back, I let go of her. “You’re welcome.”

Her eyes meet mine, and she almost looks shy as she admits, “I like Cami. No one calls me that.”

“Then I’ll call you that from now on.”

Her mouth curves up, and I’m blessed with a gorgeous smile.

We step out of the pantry, and as she shuts the door, I say, “Let’s order in

and watch a movie. I think you can do with some relaxation after today.”

“Sounds good.”

Camille heads to the living room, where she left her purse, and digs her phone out.

I’m a couple of steps behind her when the windows shatter. Without hesitating, I dart forward and tackle Camille off her feet. She hits the tiles with a cry, and my body slams hard against hers.

“Keep your head down,” I order with a growl.

More windows shatter as someone blindly shoots into the penthouse.

Thank fuck I kept the curtains closed.

The shooter probably saw her silhouette and took the shot.

“Max,” she whimpers, her body jerking with every shot fired into the apartment.

“I’ve got you.” Moving next to her, I capture her terrified gaze. “Stay down. I’ll be back in a minute.”

“No!” Her eyes widen as more fear darkens her irises. “Don’t leave me.”

Not thinking, I grip the back of her head and press a kiss to her forehead. “You’re going to be fine. Just stay right here. Don’t move an inch.”

Her chin trembles, and for the first time since I’ve guarded her, tears escape her eyes. Shakily she nods to show she hears me.

Her gaze remains glued to me as I move into a crouching position. Another spray of bullets hit, then I dart up and run toward the kitchen.

Three.

Two.

One.

Dropping, I slide the last couple of feet behind the island in the kitchen, and opening a drawer, I pull out the Magnum I’ve placed there. It has an average range of a hundred yards, and with my experience as an assassin, the

shot will be child's play.

Bullets hit the counters, the fridge, and the entire wall leading to the living room.

"Max!" Camille screams.

"Stay down, Cami!" I shout.

As soon as the shooting stops, I'm up and running to the light switches. I flip one after the other, throwing the penthouse into darkness.

Moving to the shot-up curtains, I carefully peek outside. I spot the shooter on the rooftop of the building across the road and quickly scan the area.

"Max?" Cami whispers. "Where are you?"

"I'm here. Just keep still while I deal with the problem." I walk to the kitchen and open the door. It only takes a second before a shot is fired in my direction, but I keep low as I creep out onto the terrace. Cami has a small jungle out here which I use for cover.

In a crouched position, I hold my weapon ready. I close my eyes and mentally focus on where I saw the shooter on the rooftop.

I let out a breath, and leaping to my feet, I aim and fire three rounds.

My eyes lock on the shooter slumping down onto the rooftop. I rush back into the penthouse, and when I reach Cami, I grab hold of her shoulders and haul her to her feet.

"W-what happened?" she stammers while I grab her purse and cell phone, shoving the items into her hands. I pull her to the elevator and press her back to the doors. "Stay right here and switch off your cell phone."

She nods, her cheeks wet with tears and her eyes wide from shock while she does as I order.

I place my hand against her cheek and wipe a tear away with my thumb. "You're going to be okay. I eliminated the threat, but he might not be alone. Stay right here."

She nods again. "I won't move."

"Good girl," I praise her before I can censor myself.

I rush to the stairs and sprint up them. Darting into the guest bedroom, I pull my duffle bag from where it was hidden beneath the bed and hurry out of the room again.

Reaching Cami in a couple of seconds, I grab the keycard from the stand and quickly swipe it to open the elevator doors.

I push her inside, and as we descend, I set the duffle bag down and pull out my Heckler & Koch submachine gun.

"Jesus," Cami whispers, her eyes round as saucers on the weapon.

I pull the strap over my head, then dig my KA-BAR knife out, which I shove between the waistband of my pants and my belt to keep it in place at my side so I can grab it quickly if needed.

Zippering up the bag, I glance at her. "You'll have to carry the bag so my hands are free."

She nods wildly. "Okay."

I lock eyes with her and take a second to praise her. "You're doing good."

Her tongue darts out to wet her lips. "Uh-huh."

I gesture with a nod of my head, then order, "Stand in the corner by the panel and wait until I give the clear."

"Okay." Her gaze is wide on me as she presses her body into the corner of the elevator. She holds my duffle bag like a shield in front of her.

My eyes lock on the numbers as they tick down.

Three.

Two.

One.

Chapter 14

Cami

Holyyyyyy shit.

Dressed in my shorts and T-shirt, I'm barefoot and rattled to hell and back.

This is insane.

My eyes are glued to Max, who looks calm and deadly compared to me, who's a second away from becoming hysterical.

He's badass.

The gun is freaking massive.

Dear God.

Max's eyes meet mine, and as we descend the last floor to the parking area, I watch as all emotion drains from his face until there's only a potent ruthlessness coming off him in waves.

Where he terrified the shit out of me the first time he got that look, it now gives me a sense of safety.

He turns to face the doors, raising the gun to eye level. The veins snaking beneath the skin of his forearm are more prominent. I can see his biceps straining against the fabric of his dress shirt.

Jesus. Never has he looked hotter.

My heart hammers in my chest, and I grip the duffle bag tighter to my body.

Time slows, and my mouth goes completely dry right before the doors slide open.

Max moves forward and out of my sight. Suddenly there's a loud pop of

gunfire. I let out a shriek, and scared that something has happened to Max, I cautiously lean forward and peek out of the elevator.

There's a body lying near a Mercedes, and Max is searching between the other parked cars. When he reaches the guard house, I notice the usual guard isn't inside.

God, I hope nothing bad happened to him.

Suddenly a man leans around the corner of the exit, but Max reacts instantly, taking a shot that ends the man's life.

Max turns around and runs back to me, shouting, "Come."

I dart forward and run to the Bugatti, but he shouts again, "No, we're taking my SUV."

I backtrack to the SUV, and when the doors unlock, I yank the passenger side open and quickly climb inside.

Max slides behind the steering wheel and shoves the massive gun onto my lap. He pulls his smaller firearm from behind his back and places it between his thighs.

Starting the engine, the tires squeal as he reverses. My body jerks as he switches to drive, and a second later, we're barreling toward the security boom.

The red pole is smashed in half by the nose of the SUV, the tires screech again, then we're speeding down the road.

I sit frozen, clinging to the massive gun and the duffle bag.

"Are you okay?" Max asks, his tone cool and calm, as if he didn't just kill people.

In all fairness, they were going to kill me.

I blink a couple of times. "Uh-huh."

Max takes a sharp right, then asks, "Are you hurt anywhere?"

Finally, life starts to return to my body, and I shove the bag and weapon

into the space by my feet. I glance over my body, then shake my head. “No. I’m fine.” My eyes dart to Max. “Are you okay?”

“Yes.” His jaw is clenched, and he still has a ruthless expression.

I slump back in my seat and focus on my breathing and rapid heart rate while processing the fact that I could’ve died tonight.

The threat is real. Very real.

My dry lips part, and I whisper, “Jesus, someone just tried to kill me.”

“No one’s killing you on my watch,” he mutters, his tone low and deadly.

I nod, my eyes trained on the road ahead. “In that case, can I keep you forever?”

He lets out a chuckle and continues driving until we leave Paris.

Max keeps checking the rearview mirror, and it has me glancing out the back window while asking, “Are we being followed?”

“No.”

Minutes later, he pulls over at a gas station and brings the SUV to a stop. We both stare out of the windshield for a few seconds before we look at each other. His eyes search over my body, then he lifts a hand, and taking hold of the back of my neck, he pulls me closer to him.

When my face is only a couple of inches from his, my heartbeat picks up again.

With Max’s eyes locked on mine, he says, “As long as I’m alive, I’ll keep you safe.”

The crazy emotions from the nightmare back at my penthouse overwhelm me, and I feel tears sting my eyes.

I lift my hand and grip hold of his forearm. “Not that it matters what I think, but I’m grateful you’re a badass assassin.”

The corner of his mouth lifts into a hot smirk. “It has its perks.”

My chin starts to tremble, and I close my eyes to fight back the tears.

When I feel calmer, I look at him again.

This man saved my life.

Closing the distance between us, I press a kiss to his cheek, then whisper, “Thank you, Max.”

For the second time tonight, he pulls me into an embrace, and I soak up the comfort his strong body gives me.

When we pull apart, he says, “We’re going to put in gas, then head for Troyes.”

“What’s in Troyes?”

Max opens the SUV’s door, and as he gets out, he replies, “One of my safe houses.”

While filling the tank with gas, he pulls his cell phone out and makes a call.

“The penthouse was hit. Camille is safe, and I’m on the road with her. I killed four men,” I hear him say. “She’s just rattled but handling things well...Yeah, hold.”

He leans into the SUV and holds the device out to me. “Your father.”

Taking the cell phone, I press it to my ear. “Papa?”

“Are you okay, *mon amour*? Did you get hurt?”

“I’m fine.” My voice is hoarse, and the tears threaten to fall. “It was terrifying, and I’m scared.”

“Max will keep you safe until I get to the bottom of this.” Hearing the concern in my father’s voice makes a tear trickle down my cheek.

“I don’t understand why this is happening. Why do you have to leave politics?”

Papa clears his throat. “It’s because I’m encouraging the country to go green. Many energy companies will suffer losses if it happens.”

“Seriously?” Frowning, I shake my head. “That’s not worth killing people

over.”

“When money is involved, many people are willing to do the worst.”

Letting out a sigh, I ask, “What do I do now?”

“Just stay with Max and do as he says. I’ll deal with the mess and the media on this side. Think of it as a vacation.”

“Okay,” I whisper. “Please be careful.”

“Don’t worry about me. I have a whole team guarding me.”

Yeah, but none of them are Max.

“*Je t’aime*, Papa.”

“*Je t’aime aussi.*” My father lets out a tired sigh. “Let me talk to Max.”

Leaning across the driver’s seat, I hold the device out. “Max.”

He takes the cell phone, and I shamelessly listen to his side of the conversation.

“I’ll keep her safe...only use the encrypted phone to call so it can’t be traced...we’ll move around a lot...yeah, I’ll take good care of her.”

His reassuring words make warmth spread through my chest, chasing some of the chills from the attack away.

I watch as Max tucks the cell phone into his pocket, then he leans down. “I’m just going to run into the store. Don’t leave the SUV.”

I nod, and my eyes follow him into the small convenience store. Not even a minute later, he comes out, and as he walks toward the vehicle, he glances around.

The man is attractive, but after seeing him handle a gun and kill to keep me safe, I know it will be impossible not to fall for him.

There’s nothing hotter than a man willing to kill to protect me and no stopping my heart from caring about him.

He climbs into the SUV and places a bag with snacks and sodas on my lap.

A smile trembles around my lips as I look at him. He starts the engine, then pauses to place a hand on the side of my neck.

For a moment, he stares deep into my eyes. “You okay?”

I nod, my smile widening. “Thank you for the comfort food.”

“You’re welcome, Cami.”

I love when he calls me Cami.

He lets go of me and puts the vehicle in drive.

During the two-hour trip, I eat one packet of chips after the other, and by the time we pull into the small town, I’m finding it hard to keep my eyes open and drift off to sleep

I stir awake when Max turns off the engine, and prying my eyes open, I only see darkness around us.

“Where are we?” I ask, my voice hoarse with sleep.

“A cabin in Forêt d’Orient nature reserve.”

He gets out of the SUV and comes around the front of the vehicle to open my door. I pull the duffle bag from the floor and hand it to him before cautiously picking up the machine gun. I hand the weapon over to him, then quickly gather all the empty chip packets and wrappers.

I move my feet to climb out, but Max says, “Wait, you’re barefoot. Give me a second.”

I watch him walk into the darkness, and a minute later, lights go in the cabin, breaking the darkness around us. The structure is small, with large trees at the back of it. I can’t make out much more of our surroundings.

Max comes back to the SUV, and before I know what’s happening, he slips an arm behind my back and another beneath my knees. I’m lifted bridal style out of the car and quickly wrap my arms around his neck.

He kicks the vehicle’s door shut, and every powerful step he takes vibrates through my body.

Never before has a man carried me like this.

Yeah, I'm not going to lie. I'm liking this a little too much.

Once we enter the cabin, he carefully places me on my feet, and I glance around. The space is small but cozy. A single couch is positioned against a wall. There's no TV.

"It's not much, but it will have to do," he murmurs as he watches my reaction to his safe house.

There's a tiny kitchen, and from where I'm standing, I can see the bedroom and bathroom.

"As long as it has running water, I'm good to go." I smile at Max. "Thank you for bringing me here."

His eyes rest on me for a while, then he asks, "How are you holding up?"

I shrug and walk toward the bedroom, where a double bed and worn desk occupy most of the space. "I'm just tired." I glance at the couch again. "Do you have an extra blanket?"

He shakes his head. "This place only has the bare necessities. I'll go into town tomorrow to get supplies." He walks closer to me. "You take the bedroom. I'll sleep on the couch."

There's no way his body is going to fit on the couch.

Feeling awkward as hell, I say, "Or we can both get a good night's rest on the bed. It's big enough."

Max doesn't say anything for a few seconds, and I shift on my feet.

"Will you be okay with that?" he asks.

I nod, then force a smile to my face. "We're just going to sleep."

His eyes drift over me. "Right."

He turns around and shuts the front door before locking it. I walk into the small bedroom and throw the covers back.

"Sleep next to the wall," he orders.

I crawl across the mattress and lie down. Then my eyes land on Max, who's unbuttoning his shirt.

Holy shit.

I force myself to stare at the ceiling, but a second later, I turn onto my side, and my gaze drinks in the sight of him as he shrugs the fabric off.

The muscles of his chest are defined, and the man has abs for days.

Jesus. Of course, he'd have a body to go with his intense eyes and perfect face.

There's a name tattooed on his side. *Anja.*

When he turns to place the folded shirt on a worn desk, I get a view of his muscled back and broad shoulders.

"The strong win. The weak die," I read the words inked above a tattoo of a tree with leaves blowing up toward his shoulder and roots creeping across his lower back to his hips. "What does the tree symbolize?"

Max starts to unbuckle his belt, and my eyebrow flies up. The corner of his mouth lifts, then he says, "I'm not sleeping in suit pants."

Reluctantly, I turn onto my other side and face the wall so he'll have some privacy. It takes every ounce of strength I have not to take a peek.

Chapter 15

Max

This is not a good idea.

The thought means shit as I switch off the light and lie down beside Cami.

Tonight, shit got real. Rage simmers in my chest because those fuckers actually tried to kill her.

Over my dead body, will I allow anyone to touch her.

Seeing Cami's terror and having her in such a dangerous situation makes my rage grow.

I let out a sigh then answer the question about the tattoo. "A tree symbolizes strength, and the roots are to remind me where I come from. The leaves blowing into the sky show there are no limits to what can be achieved." I keep quiet for a few seconds, then add, "Anja is my sister's name."

"The tattoo suits you."

Silence falls between us again, and minutes pass before she asks, "Remember when you told my father to send the photo to St. Monarch's?"

"Yeah?"

"What's St. Monarch's?"

I think of how to describe the place. "It's an old castle that belongs to the retired head of the bratva." I pause my explanation to ask, "Do you know what the bratva is?"

Cami turns around, so she's facing me. "No. But I'm guessing it's some

kind of organization.”

“It’s the Russian form of the mafia,” I explain. Then I continue, “St. Monarch’s is neutral ground for anyone in the criminal world. It’s the one place where no killing is allowed. You can go for training to specialize in the field of your choice. The castle also has a resort, and weddings between rival families are sometimes held there to ensure no one dies.”

Her tone is soft as she asks, “Is that where you learned how to be an assassin?”

“Yes. They teach everything from weapons and fighting to hunting and eliminating a target.”

I’m surprised when she chuckles. “It sounds like Hogwarts for criminals.”

The corner of my mouth lifts. “Far from. They also handle every illegal contract and are more equipped than the FBI. St. Monarch’s is the heart of the criminal world.”

“There’s this whole other side of the world I never knew existed. It’s crazy,” she murmurs.

I turn my head, and we lock eyes. “Why doesn’t any of this freak you out?”

A smile tugs at her mouth. “Will it help if I freak out?” Before I can answer, she adds, “I think it’s because I got to know you a little before the bomb was dropped. I know I can trust you, making it a little less daunting.”

I glance up at the ceiling as her words fill my chest with more warmth.

“Good night, Max,” she whispers.

“Night.”

We lie in silence for a while, but she doesn’t fall asleep. She might not have freaked out, but the events of the night must’ve rattled the hell out of her.

“Come here,” I order, my tone softer than usual.

Cami sits up and pauses before hesitantly inching closer to me. I hold my arm open for her, and when her head rests on my shoulder, I pull her closer.

I listen to her breaths as her body relaxes against my side, then her frozen foot touches my ankle.

“Christ, you’re cold.”

“Cold feet, warm heart,” she mutters. “You’re warm, which explains your cold heart.”

I let out a chuckle. “That’s the biggest load of shit I’ve ever heard.”

Cami relaxes even more and lets her arm rest across my abs. My muscles tense from the innocent touch.

“Is this okay?” she asks.

No. Not by a long shot.

“Yeah,” I reply. “Sleep, Cami.”

She lets out a content sigh and fucking snuggles into my side.

You’re just offering her some comfort.

Sleep.

I listen as her breaths even out, and knowing she’s finally asleep, I lower my head and press my mouth to her hair.

It takes a while before I drift off into a dreamless sleep, and when I wake up, the sun is just breaking over the horizon.

I stare at the ceiling, my left arm dead from Cami lying on it, but I don’t dare move a muscle because I don’t want to wake her.

Christ, I’m willing to sacrifice the blood flow to my arm just to feel her body pressed to mine.

The room grows lighter as time passes, and when Cami wakes up with a groan, stretching her body against my side, her arm tightens around my waist as if I’m her personal teddy bear.

A possessive emotion floods my chest, and she chips away at another

piece of ice around my heart.

She's just a job.

I shake my head at the thought.

She stopped being a job when I hugged her in the pantry.

“Oh God,” she groans as she lifts her head. “I’m all over you.” She rolls onto her back and stretches again. “Sorry.”

My eyes lock on her hard nipples pressing against the fabric of her T-shirt, and I shoot up and off the bed in a single move.

Leaving the room, I head straight to the bathroom and shut the door behind me before I look down at my cock tenting in my boxers.

Christ, Maurice better find out who’s threatening him before I fuck his daughter.

You can't fuck her.

I turn on the faucets in the shower, and stripping out of my boxers, I step beneath the cold spray. I let the water cool me down before I get out and dry off with a shitty towel.

I need to get supplies. Some time away from Cami will do me good.

Pulling on my boxers, I leave the bathroom, and when I walk back into the bedroom, I keep my eyes trained on the desk where I left my clothes.

While I pull on my pants, I say, “I’m going to head into town. I think it will be safer if you stay here. We can’t risk someone recognizing you.”

I fasten my belt and reach for my shirt.

“Okay.” I hear Cami move, then she asks, “How did you sleep?”

With a hard as fuck cock, no thanks to your curvy body pressed to mine.

“Fine,” I mutter. “You?”

“Like the dead.”

I button my shirt and adjust the rolled-up sleeves before turning to face the woman who’s sneaking through my defenses and worming her way into

my heart.

She's sitting on the side of the bed, her eyes locked on me with a curious expression.

I stare at her momentarily before I put on my shoes and stalk out of the room. "I'll be back in an hour," I call out as I leave the cabin and head for the SUV.

I get into the vehicle, and as I start the engine, my eyes scan over the cabin. Cami's standing in the doorway, and she gives me a wave.

I spare her a chin lift before reversing around the front of the cabin so I can steer the nose of the car toward the dirt road.

My fingers tighten around the steering wheel as I put some distance between the cabin and me.

I try to clear my mind but fail as thoughts of Cami overwhelm me.

The way she held herself together last night is nothing short of impressive. Sure, I know women who are just as dangerous as me, but Cami's not from my world.

I'd bet my left nut all her socialite friends would've shat themselves if they were in the same position as her.

And somehow, while all this shit is going down around her, she still smiles.

She's one of the most reasonable people I've ever met. Instead of jumping to conclusions or overreacting, she's rational.

And by God, she's fucking sexy and beautiful.

How the fuck am I going to stop myself from falling for this woman?

Too late, fucker. In case you haven't noticed, you're already in deep with her.

"Christ," I mutter, slamming my palm against the steering wheel.

Nothing can happen between us, no matter how she makes me feel or

how badly I want her.

As soon as the threat has been dealt with, Cami will return to her life as a socialite, and I'll return to my world.

But her life doesn't make her happy. She hates being a socialite.

She won't fit into your world. Don't even think about it.

Plus, Maurice will lose his shit.

You can't have Camille DuBois. Keep your head in the game, protect her until it's all over, and walk away from her.

Chapter 16

Cami

While Max is out getting supplies, I explore every inch of the cabin. I find an old rag and a bottle of all-purpose cleaner.

“This will have to do,” I whisper as I fill the basin with water and wet the cloth.

I wipe every surface in the cabin and open the windows to air the place out. Unfortunately, it doesn’t keep me busy for long.

I don’t want to risk exploring the area around the cabin with Max not here. Also, I don’t have shoes.

Standing in the kitchen, my teeth tug at my bottom lip. My eyes land on my purse, and walking closer, I pick it up and glance inside.

I have lipgloss, a tiny mirror, my cell phone, a couple of tissues, and a bite-size chocolate bar.

“Hey, at least I have breakfast,” I chuckle as I take the chocolate out and unwrap it.

Popping it into my mouth, I pull out my cell phone and stare at the dark screen. I haven’t turned it on since Max told me to switch it off.

Not wanting to risk being traced by my phone, I leave it off and set the device down on the counter.

I glance around the small space again, and seeing Max’s duffle bag, my eyebrow lifts. I walk closer, and crouching, I unzip it. My eyes widen on the weapons, everything from all sizes of knives to guns.

“Jesus,” I whisper. “The man has enough weapons to wage a small war.”

I hear a car’s engine outside and quickly zip up the bag. Rushing to the

window, I see Max pulling up in the SUV and let out a sigh of relief.

Walking to the front door, I step outside and move closer so I can help carry the bags.

Max climbs out of the vehicle and scowls at my bare feet. “You’ll hurt yourself. Go back inside.”

I look down at the patches of grass and ground. “I’m fine. Pass me a bag.”

I’m given another glare as he hands me the lightest bag while he carries six heavy ones.

“My assassin, the gentleman,” I tease him before I can stop myself.

Max pauses mid-step and stares at me, an emotion I can’t place, tightening his features.

Thinking I overstepped the boundaries between us, I give him a rueful grin. “Sorry.” I turn around and head back into the cabin, then keep myself busy unpacking everything.

There’s a fridge that’s seen better days where I pack the perishables.

Remembering my cell phone, I ask, “Do you think they can track me with my phone?”

Max freezes for a second, then mutters, “Where is it?”

I point to the counter, and when he sees it’s still off, his eyes settle on me with relief. “You didn’t turn it on?”

I shake my head. “I didn’t want to risk it.”

He lets out a chuckle as he shakes his head before continuing to unpack the goods.

“What? Why are you chuckling?”

His eyes flick to mine. “You make my job easy.”

A smile spreads over my face. “You’re welcome.”

He heads outside again and comes back with more bags. Noticing they

contain clothes, I move closer. He removes sneakers in my size, a pair of jeans, two T-shirts, and two pairs of shorts.

“This will have to do until I make another run for supplies,” he murmurs.

No underwear or bra.

I shrug and collect the clothes and sneakers. “Thank you.”

Walking to the bedroom, I fold everything neatly and set the pile down on the side of the table. Taking clean clothes for the day, I return to the kitchen to grab the body wash and a brand-new towel.

“Is it okay if I shower?”

Max nods as he takes off the price tags from the clothes he bought for himself. “Sure.”

Heading into the bathroom, I shut the door and open the faucets so the water can run warm.

“Crap,” I mutter when I don’t see any toothpaste. I open the door again and ask, “Did you get a toothbrush and toothpaste?”

He walks to the counter in the kitchen and brings me the bag containing all the toiletries.

“Thanks,” I grin as I take the bag from him.

I shut the door again and quickly brush my teeth before stripping out of my dirty clothes and stepping into the shower.

I don’t care that the body wash is a cheap brand, I’m just grateful I get to clean myself.

As I’m rinsing off the suds, something on the wall catches my eye. It’s big, brown, and has way too many legs.

I blink at the spider who’s eyeing me like I’m its next meal, then I let out a scream that can probably be heard in Paris.

I dart out of the shower and grab my hairbrush so I can whack the monstrosity.

The door slams open, and Max bursts into the tiny bathroom, his gun held ready at eye level.

I point at the wall and shriek, “Kill it.”

His eyes dart between the massive spider and me, then he lowers his gun and states the obvious, “You’re naked.”

I get the heebie-jeebies, doing a little dance as I keep pointing at the spider. “Kill it. Kill it. Kill it.”

Max switches off the faucets, grabs hold of the spider with his bare freaking hand, and stalks to the window, where he tosses it outside.

With the threat to my life dealt with, a shiver rushes down my spine, and the intense fear fades.

Max turns around, and when his eyes sweep over my body, the realization hits that I’m butt-freaking-naked.

An overwhelming sense of self-consciousness fills me with embarrassment, and I wish the floor would open up and swallow me whole.

He stares at me with the grimmest expression I’ve ever seen, making me feel even more self-conscious about my body. Honestly, I’m a little scared of him right now.

Suddenly he stalks forward, and as I stumble backward, his hand grips my hip, and I’m shoved hard against the wall between the basin and the toilet.

A startled breath explodes from me, then Max leans down until our breaths warm the small space between our faces.

Dear God and all that’s holy. Is that desire in his eyes?

His jaw is clenched, his gaze burning into mine, and the moment is so freaking charged that I can feel it rippling over my skin.

My heart hammers against my ribs, and I begin to tremble, unable to tear my eyes away from his as my desire for this man builds into an inferno in my

abdomen.

The anticipation is next level, and I'm about to beg him to fuck me.

His fingers dig into my hip, and just as I think he's going to kiss me, he pulls away and stalks out of the bathroom, the door slamming shut behind him.

Jesus.

I slump against the wall, gasping for air while disappointment fills my chest.

It takes me a solid minute to catch my bearings, then I hurry to get dressed in the clean T-shirt and shorts. A tremor racks through my body, and I wrap my arms around my middle, unsure what to do now.

Do I go out there and pretend nothing happened?

Do I confront him?

Was that really desire I saw in his eyes?

Jesus, Camille. The man had you pressed up against a wall. He wouldn't do that if he didn't feel some kind of attraction.

Okay. I'm going to play it cool. We're both adults.

He saw me naked. Like all of me. Naked!

Calm down.

I take a deep breath, then unpack all the toiletries to buy myself some time.

You survived people trying to kill you, you can survive Max seeing you naked.

I let out a hopeless sigh, then open the door while bracing myself for the most awkward moment of my life.

Chapter 17

Max

Jesus fucking Christ.

My entire body is shaking from the restraint it's taking not to go back into that bathroom and fuck Cami raw.

When I heard her scream, I just reacted. I expected an axe murderer, not a spider.

A fucking tiny-ass spider is going to be responsible for me losing control.

Nothing on this planet could prepare me for Cami's naked body.

Fucking hell, I'm fucked.

Standing behind the cabin, I suck in deep breaths of air, trying my best to ignore my hard-as-fuck cock.

Her breasts are the perfect size, and she has a body that can handle a hard fuck. Everything about her is soft and so fucking sexy it's impossible to resist her.

Needing something to help take off the edge, I walk to where the SUV is parked, and opening the passenger door, I grab the packet of cigarettes and lighter from the compartment.

I can't remember the last time I smoked, as it's not something I do often. But after seeing Cami naked, I need a cigarette.

Lighting one, I drop the packet and lighter on the seat and take a deep drag. As I blow out the smoke, I glance at the cabin.

Seeing Cami in the doorway, looking awkward as hell, I let out a soft curse, "Shit."

I shut the passenger door and take another drag before I drop the cigarette and kill it.

My eyes lock on her again, and seeing the self-conscious expression on her face takes a swing at my heart.

She's a fucking goddess and has nothing to feel self-conscious about.

My hands fist at my sides, and my body strains from the effort it takes not to give in and take what I want.

She tucks a couple of damp strands behind her ear, then lets out an uncomfortable-sounding chuckle. "So that just happened." She glances into the cabin. "I'm going to fix something to eat."

I watch as she disappears inside.

My body is still shaking with desire. If I go in there, I won't be able to control myself.

It will make things awkward.

"Things are already fucking awkward," I growl. "Fuck this." Stalking around the SUV, I head for the front door.

When I enter the cabin, Cami glances at me from where she's pouring water into a pot. Like a man on a mission, I stalk toward her, and she quickly drops the pot in the basin and turns to face me.

Her breathing speeds up, and when my body slams into hers, her hands fly to the sides of my neck and she lifts herself onto her tiptoes.

Our mouths fuse together, and my arms lock around her like a steel cage.

A desperate sound escapes Cami as she parts her lips for me, and when my tongue thrusts into her mouth, a satisfied groan rumbles from me.

Christ Almighty.

I squash her body to mine as I tilt my head and sweep my tongue through her mouth.

She tastes like an addiction begging to happen.

I tilt my head and devour every inch of her mouth before my teeth nip at her bottom lip.

When I lift my head, Cami threatens, “I swear if you stop now, I’m going to shoot you with one of your guns.”

A chuckle rumbles from my chest as I grab hold of her curvy ass and lift her against my body before I set her down on the counter.

I’m so fucking glad I bought more than one outfit for her as I grab hold of the neck of her shirt and rip it open down the middle.

“Oh God,” she exclaims, followed by a moan as I lean down and suck her nipple hard into my mouth.

I fucking feast on her like a starved man while her fingers weave into my hair and her back arches.

Letting her nipple go with a wet pop, I lift my head and lock eyes with Cami. “I’m going to fuck you.”

I’m passed the point of asking permission. Fuck the consequences, I’m taking what I want.

She nods quickly, her breaths racing over her lips. She leans closer, and her mouth brushes over my jaw then she whispers, “Please.”

My hands travel up and down her sides before my palms cover her breasts.

“Just the right fucking fit,” I grumble, then my teeth tug at her bottom lip. “You’re so fucking sexy it’s been driving me insane.”

Surprise widens her eyes, and I pull back. Frowning, I shake my head. “You have no idea how beautiful you are, do you?”

Pure awe washes over her features.

I frame her face with my hands and lock eyes with her. “No woman has ever driven me as wild as you, Cami. I’m going to fuck you until you understand just how fucking sexy you are and what kind of power you hold.”

She launches herself against me and kisses me with so much passion she steals my breath.

Lowering my hands to her gorgeous body, I massage and squeeze every inch of skin in an attempt to imprint the feel of her in my mind.

The anticipation between us becomes unbearable, and lifting her, I order, “Legs around my waist.”

She obeys my command, and while I walk us to the bedroom, she licks and sucks at my neck.

“Christ, woman,” I growl, and dropping her on the bed, I shake my head as I pull her shorts down her legs. “I’ve been in dangerous situations before, but you’re on another level.” My hand brushes up the inside of her leg until I reach her pussy. “If I don’t get inside you soon, there’s a possibility I might die.”

With a gorgeous smile on her face, she chuckles, “We can’t let that happen. I’ll just have to save you.”

My woman spreads her legs, and losing the last of my control, I start to go down on her like a man possessed.

“Jesus,” she gasps, her ass lifting off the bed.

I grip her hips to keep her in place, my lips and teeth working the sensitive bundle of nerves between her legs.

She tastes like erotic nights.

Christ, how have I lived so long before tasting something so exquisite?

“Max,” Cami gasps, her hips starting to swivel.

I tighten my hold on her and force her into the mattress so I have complete control of when she orgasms. Lifting my head, I blow air over her hot pussy. “Don’t come without my permission.”

“What’s the use of saving my life if you plan on killing me like this?” she complains.

Letting out a dark chuckle, I devour my woman's pussy until she whimpers and begs, "Max, please. I can't hold out."

Crawling up her body so I can see her face, I push a finger inside her wet heat and command, "Come for me, baby."

She grabs hold of my biceps, and as her inner muscles clench around my finger, her features tighten, and she lets out a cry.

Her back arches off the bed, her lips part, and I watch in absolute reverence as she comes apart with pleasure.

I press my palm to her clit to prolong her ecstasy, and lowering my head, I bite her bottom lip before sucking on it. My tongue thrusts into her mouth so she can taste her arousal.

When she comes down from her high, I pull my hand from between her legs and break the kiss.

Looking down at the woman who's had me walking around with a hard-on the past few weeks, I say, "I love the way you come."

She moves her hands to my chest and starts to unbutton my shirt, but I don't have the patience to wait. Buttons pop as I rip it off, and moving to the side of the bed, I quickly undo my belt and get rid of my pants and boxers.

I need to be inside her now, and I plan on fucking her until I have no strength left.

Chapter 18

Cami

This is really happening.

My eyes rake over Max's body, and seeing his rock-hard cock, my abdomen clenches with need. The man is so well endowed I'm bracing for some discomfort.

When his body covers mine, and he stares down into my eyes, a wave of emotion hits.

Max can have any woman, yet he wants me.

To have such a strong and attractive man show the slightest interest in me gives me one hell of a confidence boost.

He thinks I'm beautiful.

Max pushes a hand beneath my butt, and his fingers dig into my skin. Letting out a satisfied groan, he admits, "You have no idea how much I love your ass."

Intense satisfaction fills my chest from his compliment. I lift my hands to his neck and press my mouth to his. Kissing him is otherworldly, and having his naked body on top of mine makes it a million times hotter.

I enjoy every second my tongue brushes over his, and our lips massage and nip each others until mine tingle from all the friction.

His free hand moves up and down my side before he positions his cock at my entrance.

Anticipation explodes in my chest, and I stop breathing as I wait for him to fill me.

Max's eyes lock with mine, and as he pushes an inch inside me, pure

ecstasy tightens his features. I've never seen him show so much emotion, and it makes this moment between us incredibly intense.

"Christ, Cami," he groans. I feel a tremor rock through his body. "I'm sorry."

He slams into me so hard that I jerk a couple of inches up the bed. The air wooshes from my lungs, and my muscles tense from the sharp pain.

I'm no stranger to sex, but the men I've been with are all average in size.

"God, you're too big," I gasp, and as I struggle to take all of him, he pulls out and slams into me again.

"You'll take every inch of me," he grumbles, the deep timbre of his voice a turn-on.

I expect him to take me fast, but instead, he keeps the slow pace of forceful thrusts. With each one, my body jerks.

I place my hands on his shoulders and hold on for dear life.

His eyes keep mine imprisoned as he fucks me slow and hard. It feels like he's savoring being inside me while fighting the need to find his release.

"Jesus," I moan. My hands move to the sides of his neck, and with our lips inches apart, I admit, "You're so intense it's going to drive me wild."

The corner of his mouth lifts with a satisfied smirk as he fills to the hilt, the sound of our skin slapping echoing around us.

"Good girl," he praises me for taking every inch of his cock.

My abdomen clenches, and I wrap my legs around his ass, giving him complete access to me.

Max presses his head to mine, and I feel him shudder right before his fingers dig into my skin and he starts to fuck me as if his life depends on it.

Moans and whimpers spill from me as my body is jolted wildly with each thrust until I'm practically bouncing beneath him.

I move my hands down his back, my nails clawing at him as a volcano of

tension builds in my abdomen.

“Max,” I cry, the friction becoming too much.

He moves even faster, and I don’t recognize the sounds spilling from me.

“Come,” he demands, his tone so freaking dark and deadly, my body practically spontaneously combusts.

My vision goes dark, and the scream tearing from my chest sounds like a freaking war cry as the orgasm rips through me.

I’ve never experienced anything so intense.

I hear Max groan as if he’s in pain then his cock swells inside me. His body jerks against mine, and when my vision returns, it’s just in time to see ecstasy wash over his face.

In our moment of pleasure, I see a side to Max that leaves me breathless. There’s no badass assassin. There’s no bodyguard.

There’s just him at his most vulnerable.

There’s just us.

The way we connect in this moment should terrify me, but something tells me I’ll never be safer than I am right now.

His mouth claims mine in a deep and passionate kiss that makes me fall fast and hard for him.

By the time his body stills against mine and he lifts his head, I know I’ll never be able to forget this moment.

I don’t know what I’m going to do when the threat is dealt with, and he has to leave.

Max brings his hand to my cheeks and brushes some hair from my face. His eyes are soft and tender as he stares at me.

“You’re in trouble,” he whispers.

My eyes widen. “Why?”

“Once isn’t enough for me,” he admits.

My mouth curves into a smile. “It doesn’t have to be once.”

“Good.” He glances down as he pulls out of me. “Are you on birth control?”

“You don’t think it’s a little late to ask me that?” I tease him.

His eyes flick to mine, the tenderness from a moment ago gone. “It was hard to *think* in the heat of the moment.”

Letting out a chuckle, I nod. “I have an implant. We’re good.”

Max moves fast, and I’m flipped onto my stomach. My chuckle turns to a shriek when his hand connects with my ass.

“That’s for teasing me,” he mutters, his tone almost playful.

The next moment he bites my left ass cheek. “That’s for being so goddamn sexy.”

With another slap to my butt, he says, “Let’s eat so you can regain your strength. You’re going to need it.”

I turn onto my back and watch as he pulls his boxers and pants on. He decides against the shirt, seeing as half the buttons are scattered around the room.

Suddenly it hits me like a ten-pound hammer – I just had toe-curling, hot sex with Max.

I can’t keep the wide smile off my face as I scoot to the edge of the bed. I stand up and walk to the bathroom, and as soon as I shut the door behind me, I do a little happy dance.

Jesus, that was amazing. I seriously hope I need my strength because he plans on fucking me again.

Hiding from people who are trying to kill me doesn’t seem as bad if we’re going to spend our time having hot sex.

Jesus, his body is ripped and perfect in every way.

I quickly clean myself, and the thought that Max came inside me makes

desire burn through me again.

God, the man has me thinking and feeling things I never thought I would.

Is there something wrong with me? I mean, instead of freaking out that he's an assassin, I find it badass.

Frowning, I look deeper inside myself. I lift my hand to my chest and press my fingers to my heart.

I do some serious soul-searching, and the only answer I can find is that Max isn't a threat to me. I know I'm safe with him.

In the midst of all the chaos and danger, I'm happy, and it's because he's here.

For the first time, I feel alive. More than I ever have.

Chapter 19

Max

While Cami's in the bathroom, I go out to the SUV and grab another cigarette. Lighting it, I take a deep drag and slowly blow out the smoke.

I walk back to the cabin and sit down on the steps by the front door, needing a moment to process what just happened.

Fucking Cami was much more emotional than I expected.

Christ, being inside her felt like I was having an out-of-body experience.

Her moans, whimpers, and cries are the sweetest sounds I've ever heard. Her breasts are generous, and her ass...Christ, her ass.

I take a long pull of the cigarette and watch as the smoke forms a cloud when I exhale.

I don't regret fucking her, and I plan on being inside her again as soon as she's eaten something.

But.

I saw the moment she connected with me. The emotion was all over her face. Once the bodyguarding job is over and I leave, it will hurt her.

My heart clenches at the thought.

It will hurt me too.

There's no fucking a woman like Cami and just walking away from her. Unlike the other women I've fucked, I'll never forget her name.

Christ.

As I take another drag, I hear her footsteps behind me. I glance over my shoulder and see she's wearing shorts and my dress shirt. She tied the fabric by her stomach and left it unbuttoned.

Fuck, I've never seen anything sexier than her.

Cami sits down beside me and stares at the trees around the cabin. "It's so quiet here."

I take a last drag and kill the cigarette. "I like the quiet."

"It fits you."

Silence falls between us. I take hold of her hand and bring it to my mouth, pressing her fingers to my lips. Closing my eyes, I take a deep breath.

"Are you okay?" she whispers as she leans against my shoulder.

Opening my eyes, I turn my head and look at her. "I should ask you that question?"

"I'm fine." She weaves her fingers through mine. "I'm just worried you regret it."

I shake my head. "I have zero regrets."

Her mouth curves up. "Is it okay if we have sandwiches for lunch?"

I nod, and rising to my feet, I pull her up and follow her into the cabin.

I lean against a counter and watch as she makes grilled-cheese sandwiches, thinking I'm getting used to this – us living together.

The last time I lived with someone was with my mother, fourteen years ago.

While the sandwiches are in the oven, Cami lifts herself to sit on the counter across from me. Her eyes drift over my face before lowering to my bare chest. A frown line appears between her eyes as she spots the scar above my left hip.

"Did you get shot?"

My heart stutters in my chest, and I pray to all that's holy this conversation doesn't lead to the time she got shot. I don't think I'll be able to lie to her.

I give her a silent answer by nodding.

The corner of her mouth lifts. "I'm glad you survived."

I'm glad you survived too.

She hops from the counter and checks on the sandwiches. Happy with them, she switches off the oven and takes them out.

"Lunch is ready."

Not bothering with plates, we stand in the kitchen and eat.

Between bites, Cami asks, "Are you always this quiet after sex?"

I grab a bottle of water and take a sip before I answer, "I'm quiet in general."

She nods. "Right." She takes her last bite, then admits, "I'm not good with the after-sex thing. Usually, the guy leaves right after."

My eyebrow lifts. "How many have you slept with?"

I know everyone has a past, but picturing Cami with another man makes me feel murderous.

Her eyes widen. "Shit, that sounded bad. There haven't been many." She holds up four fingers.

Four.

"Does that number include me?"

She nods, a pink tinge flushing her cheeks. "And you? What's your number?"

I have to think hard. Honestly, as soon as I'm done with a woman, I walk away and never think about her again.

"Jesus, that many?" Cami gasps, then her hand flies up, and she touches my arm. "Not that I'm judging."

"I think I've been with thirteen," I answer. "I'm not sure."

A frown forms on her forehead. "You can't remember how many women you've slept with?"

I shrug and take another sip of the water. "They weren't that memorable.

Ask me the number of kills, and I'll be able to give you the exact figure."

The moment I say the words, I regret them, but it's too late because Cami asks, "How many kills?"

I shake my head. "You don't want to know."

She steps closer, and tilting her head back, she locks eyes with me. "I want to know."

I shake my head again, not sure how she'll handle it.

Her palm brushes up and down my arm as if she's trying to encourage me.

My tone is emotionless as I admit, "One hundred and sixteen."

Her lips part, but she doesn't break eye contact. I watch as she processes the high number.

"They were all criminals?" she asks.

I nod.

Luckily the one innocent I shot survived and became an amazing woman.

A confused expression settles on her face. "Does it make me a bad person for not caring?"

"No." I lift my hand to cup her cheek. "You're the furthest thing from bad." I move my hand to the back of her neck and take a step closer to her. "I'm a criminal, Cami."

She scrunches her nose, and it looks like she's struggling to associate the word with me.

"Villian suits you better."

Shaking my head, I say, "Don't sugarcoat it."

"I'm not." Cami pulls away from me. "If you had told me you killed innocent people for a living, this conversation would not be happening."

Tilting my head, I stare at her as I realize she's seriously okay with me being an assassin as long as I stick to killing the scum of this world.

Christ, was this woman made for me?

“Careful,” I warn her, my tone dark.

Cami’s eyes fly to my face, and confusion tightens her features. “Careful with what?”

“If you keep being this perfect, I might never let you go.”

The confusion drains from her face and is quickly replaced with hope.

Fuck.

She moves closer to me and trails her fingertip down my chest. “It’s a turn-on when you’re all threatening and scary.”

My eyebrow lifts as I stare down at her. “Yeah?”

She nods as her teeth tug at her bottom lip. “Seeing you in action last night almost made my ovaries explode. It was hot, and I wanted to rip your clothes off.” Her fingers dip beneath the waistband of my pants, and she seductively caresses the sensitive skin before pulling down my zipper. “Knowing you’re dangerous but that you won’t hurt me is intoxicating.”

Cami’s fingers wrap around my cock, and she slowly starts to stroke me.

I lift a hand to her face, and gripping her jaw, I let the mask I have to wear when I’m out in public fall.

I show her all the brutality that lives inside me.

I let her see who I really am.

Chapter 20

Cami

Holy mother of God.

The expression on Max's face becomes cold and ruthless. For a moment, fear ghosts through my body, but knowing he feels something for me, the uneasy emotion disappears.

His lethal gaze is focused on me with laser precision while I stroke his rock-hard cock.

I want this bad man to do bad things to me. Jesus. I love this.

His eyes narrow on me, and his movements are downright predatory as he steps closer. His grip on my jaw tightens.

I'm his prey.

A thrilling sensation makes my heartbeat speed up. My breaths come faster, and goosebumps spread over my skin.

Lowering his head, he stops an inch from my face and just stares at me. Our breaths mingle, and the air fills with an intense electric current.

His tone is deadly as he orders, "On. Your. Knees."

With his other hand, he grabs a fistful of my hair.

I keep my eyes locked with his as I sink down to my knees.

With his hand still gripping my jaw, his thumb pulls at my bottom lip. "Open."

My lips part on his command.

I tighten my fist around the base of his cock, and as his hips move forward, I take him into my mouth.

I suck hard before trailing my tongue up and down an angry vein. I tease

the swollen head, then suck him to the back of my throat before repeating the process.

Max takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly, his eyes burning on me. His thumb brushes over my lips as he savors the feel of his cock in my mouth.

“Take a deep breath.”

I inhale through my nose and relax my jaw. His grip on my hair tightens right before he starts to fuck my mouth.

My eyes water, but I keep them locked with his. When he hits the back of my throat, and I moan, he has to grab hold of the counter behind me to keep himself standing.

I hollow my cheeks out and moan long and hard, which has him thrusting his cock down my throat. My gag reflex kicks in, and the sound has Max burying all of him inside my mouth and throat.

His body shudders as he comes, his teeth bared and his eyes as light as I’ve ever seen them.

I swallow every last drop, and when he pulls out, I’m grabbed by my arms and yanked to my feet. His mouth takes mine with force as I’m shoved back against the counter.

The kiss is wild, and it feels like he’s branding me as his.

As if he’s falling for me.

As if he's going to carry out his threat and never let me go.

He makes me feel like I’m one of a kind and the only woman who can make him lose control.

He breaks the kiss, and framing my face with his hands, he stares deep into my eyes. “I can’t change who I am for you.”

I lift my hand to his chest. “I’m not expecting you to.”

Frustration flashes over his face. “But I want you to know if there were

anyone I'd try to leave my world for, it would be you." His eyes drift over my face. "You're not just a fling whose name I'll forget as soon as we're done."

I push myself up on my toes and press a kiss to his mouth, then I tease, "I'm glad you'll remember my name." My expression grows serious before I admit, "I don't want you to change for me. I'm attracted to this version of you, Max."

You wouldn't be the same man I'm falling in love with, and it will change everything. I don't want to tame you.

The violence fades from his eyes until only awe remains. He shakes his head incredulously. "Christ, Cami." His hands move into my hair, and he crowds my body with his.

Every unspoken word fills the air, and a powerful emotion builds between us.

I press a tender kiss to his mouth before I wrap my arms around him and rest my cheek against his chest.

Max allows me to hold him for close to a minute before he says, "As much as I want to fuck you all day long, I need to get some work done and see if there's any information I can find about the attack on the penthouse."

I pull away. "Okay."

As I begin to clean the kitchen, I watch him leave the cabin. A few seconds later, I see him through the small window in the kitchen. I hear metal grind, and forgetting about the chores, I walk out of the cabin and around the back.

My eyebrows lift when I see a trap door, and getting closer, it looks like it leads to a shelter of some kind.

Cautiously I take the steps down and call out, "Max?"

"Yeah?"

“Is it okay if I come down?”

“Sure.”

I walk down a short, dimly lit passage before I reach a room. One wall has all kinds of weapons on display, and across from it is a large desk filled with monitors.

The man has a bat cave.

With wide eyes, I move closer to the desk where Max is sitting. As he types on a keyboard, letters and numbers flash over the main monitor.

Another screen comes alive with multiple camera views, each showing a different side of the cabin and surrounding woods.

A third monitor displays the words ‘**Welcome to St. Monarch’s.**’ The words fade away, and a menu appears.

Contracts. Tracking. Available for hire. Training. Bookings. Auction.

“Come here,” Max murmurs. I step closer, and he pulls me onto his lap. “Welcome to my world.”

I wrap an arm around his neck and lean against his chest. “It’s impressive.”

He enters the tracking option on the menu and types a couple of things, then my eyes widen, and I pull away from him to lean closer to the monitor.

There’s a photo of him looking lethal as hell.

Maxim Nikita Levin

Age: 38

Nationality: Russian

Family: Deceased

Affiliation: Bratva

Years active: 14

Kills: 116

Training: All forms of physical combat. Explosives. Tracking. Catch

and release. Hacking.

Level: A

Price: Starting at €500 000-00

Availability: Unavailable until further notice

“Holy shit,” I whisper before reading the information again. “Does level A mean you’re good?”

“Only one assassin gets level A,” he murmurs. “The rest are B and below.”

Turning my head, I look at Max. “So you’re the best?”

He nods, not looking smug about it.

“In the world?”

He nods again.

I wrap my arms around his neck, and the corner of my mouth lifts. “How quickly would you be able to kill me.”

He brings his hand to my throat, and his fingers squeeze lightly. “Less than ten seconds.” His head leans closer, and his breath fans over my jaw before he whispers, “But I rarely take a kill up close. It’s too personal.” His mouth brushes over the sensitive skin beneath my ear. “Normally, my target doesn’t even see the bullet coming. It’s quick. I also don’t take hits on women.”

I turn my head until our lips touch. “Would you make an exception for me?”

“If you betrayed me,” his eyes lock with mine, “I would.”

The air tenses around us. Max lifts me from his lap and places me on my feet.

“How would you do it?” I murmur, my tone intimate and needy, while he pulls my shorts down my legs.

I sit on the desk and open my legs wide.

Max steps between my thighs, and as his fingers brush over my clit, he says, “I’d strangle you with my bare hands.”

He pushes a finger inside me, drawing a moan from me. My head falls back, exposing my throat to him.

Bringing his other hand back to my neck, he caresses my skin. I feel his cock at my entrance, and as he surges inside me, his fingers wrap around my throat, and he cuts off my air supply.

I gasp but can’t manage to take a breath. My eyes remain locked with his as he thrusts ruthlessly into me, and it doesn’t even take thirty seconds before my orgasm threatens to overwhelm me.

A choked whimper escapes me, and only then does Max relax his grip and allow me to breathe.

His features are dark and deadly as he orders, “Come for me, baby.”

I gasp for air as the pleasure hits in electrifying waves.

Max’s arms wrap around me, and I’m yanked flush with his body as he continues to fuck me hard and fast. His light-green eyes keep mine imprisoned, our breaths rushing from us.

As my pleasure starts to fade, I feel his fingers brush over the scar on my back. There’s a flash of pain on his face right before he empties himself inside me.

He must’ve seen the scar earlier, and I hope he doesn’t ask how I got it. I’m not sure I’m ready to tell anyone about the darkest time in my life.

Besides my father, no one knows I was shot when I was seventeen.

But maybe one day I’ll be ready to share it with someone, and maybe that someone will be Max.

Chapter 21

Max

It's been a week since we escaped to the cabin. With Cami asleep on my lap while I'm sitting at the desk in the underground room, I only have one hand free to work.

I've sent a request to St. Monarch's for any information about the attack on the penthouse, but I haven't heard anything back yet.

I'm currently browsing the underground chatter for clues of my own. There's information for sale on everything from sex slavery to drug and weapons smuggling, but nothing about the attack on Cami or who's behind it.

Which means it's not someone from my world. This is why I don't touch politicians. Everything is wrapped up behind hundreds of firewalls.

I open a program designed by the bratva for hacking and get past the first wall to enter the DSGE, France's version of the CIA, through a backdoor. All my focus is on the monitor as I type code after code until I break into Maurice DuBois' classified file.

The information spills over the screen, and I search for anything that will give me a lead.

It takes a higher clearing to access the blacked-out information before my eyes lock on a single sentence.

Has known associates in the bratva.

Maurice only dealt with the bratva to move forward with his green policy for France. The person threatening him would have to be high up in the government to know this information.

I check Maurice's financials and everything about his solar panels business. He's currently expanding to include wind turbines.

That's not worth killing for, though.

Frustrated, I exit all the classified files. After I switch off the system, I hold Cami bridal style and rise to my feet. Carrying her out of the underground room, I walk back into the cabin and head to the bedroom to lay her down so she can continue to sleep peacefully.

I strip out of my pants and boxers, then go to the bathroom for a quick shower. As I'm rinsing off the suds, Cami comes in, and I watch as she takes her clothes off.

When she steps into the shower, I grab the body wash and squirt some into my palm. Moving closer to her, I take my time washing every inch of her skin.

I knew this would happen the moment I fucked her – she's broken through most of my defenses and walked right into my heart, where she's made herself at home.

My eyes settle on hers, and I see my emotions reflected in her irises as if I'm looking into a mirror.

She feels the same.

I lift my hands to her wet hair, and gripping fistfuls, I press my forehead to hers. With the water raining down on us, I look at the first woman I care about since I lost my sister and mother.

The only woman alive who's managed to evoke an emotion in me. She's thawed the ice around my heart, and now the fucking organ's beating for her.

"What am I going to do with you?" I ask, my tone soft and as close to tender as it will ever be.

A smile curves her lips, and she teases me, "I can think of a couple of things." She gives me a seductive look. "You could teach me how to shoot a

gun?”

Hearing her request, my eyebrow lifts. “That’s a good idea.”

I switch off the faucets, and grabbing towels, I hand one to Cami. We quickly dry off before walking to the bedroom to get dressed.

When I pull on a pair of gray sweatpants, her eyes light up with desire while she puts on her shorts, T-shirt, and sneakers.

I grab two guns and a box of ammo before we head to the space behind the cabin.

“You should wear shoes,” she says as we stop a couple of yards from the treeline.

“I’m fine,” I reply while checking the Glock before handing it to her.

Cami flexes her fingers around the handle. “It looks heavier than it feels.”

Moving closer, I point out sections of the weapon. “This is the safety. You have to flip it this way before you can fire the gun. Always keep the safety on unless you intend to shoot someone.” Cami nods, eagerly taking in the information. “You press this to release the clip.”

I demonstrate how to release and load the clip, then say, “Now you do it.”

She carries out the order and checks with me to see if she did it right. I give her a nod, which makes her smile.

I take a shooting stance and lift my Heckler & Koch to eye level. “Dead leaf hanging from the left branch.” Firing the shot, the leaf disappears along with the bullet.

“I need a bigger target,” she mutters while glancing around.

I almost chuckle as I point to a branch. “Aim and shoot.”

Cami lines up the barrel with her sight, and when she pulls the trigger, the weapon clicks.

“Safety,” I remind her. “Never forget the safety.”

“Sorry.” She flips the lever, then aims again.

This time the shot echoes through the air, and Cami stumbles backward.

I move in behind her and place my hand on her hip. “That’s called a recoil. With the next shot, don’t move.”

“Where did the bullet go?” she asks.

“Fuck if I know.”

A chuckle escapes her, but she lines up the next shot. I feel her body tense, and when she fires the weapon, only her arms jerk.

“Good, now keep your arms still,” I order.

“Yes, sir,” she murmurs seductively.

With the third shot, Cami manages to keep still, only her hands making the slightest movement.

“Very good,” I praise her. “Now, actually try to hit the branch.”

Unable to resist the urge to distract her, I brush the barrel of my Heckler & Koch down her abdomen.

She fires another shot that disappears to God-only-knows where.

“Again,” I order as I push the barrel of the gun between her legs, slowly rubbing her clit.

“You’re not making this easy,” she complains.

“By the time I’m done with you, I promise, you’ll hit the target,” I say as I keep rubbing her clit. “Pull the trigger.”

Watching Cami handling a gun is sexy as fuck. I press my cock against her ass as I continue to rub the Heckler & Koch’s barrel between her legs.

“Max,” she moans.

“Keep shooting,” I order. “If you want to come, you better hit that branch.”

“You’re killing me,” she whimpers, but she keeps taking shots.

Her body trembles, and I watch as her lips part. She sucks in a breath, then finally hits the fucking target. I drop my gun and shove my hand down

the front of her pants. Massaging her clit, I say, “You can come, baby.”

She grabs my forearm with her free hand and rests the back of her head against my chest as she finds her release.

Her cries follow the bullets she fired earlier into the trees, and I press my mouth to her fluttering pulse, sucking hard to leave my mark on her skin.

Christ, one week of having Cami all to myself, and I know with dead certainty I’ll never be able to let her go.

I’ll do everything in my power to make sure that never happens because she’s becoming my reason for breathing.

Her breaths slow as she comes down from her high, and she turns around to face me.

The second our eyes lock, I say, “I going to keep you.”

“Was it such a turn-on watching me shoot a gun?” she chuckles before she presses a kiss to my mouth.

I pull back, and looking at her with the vow written all over my face, I say, “You’re mine, Cami. There’s a lot I’m capable of doing, but letting you go is not one of them.”

The smile fades from her face, but instead of fear, happiness shines from her eyes. “Are you asking me to be your girlfriend?”

I lower my head and let my mouth brush over hers. “I don’t care what you call it, as long as you know you’re mine.”

Taking her in a kiss filled with dark promises and obsession, I ignore the warnings that this can blow up in our faces.

As long as she doesn’t find out about my secret, I’ll be able to deal with every obstacle we’ll have to face as a couple.

A couple.

Jesus Christ.

For the first time in my life, I find myself in a relationship with a woman,

and I'm luring her to the dark side of life.

Chapter 22

Cami

After two weeks at the cabin, we packed our clothes, which wasn't much, and locked up the place.

Sitting in the passenger seat of the SUV, I look at the changing landscape as Max drives us to a hotel where we'll collect my passport.

Papa sent the document there at Max's request, as he wants to take me to Switzerland until after the elections.

It looks like Mr. De Rothschild is set to become our next President, which means Papa will definitely be his Prime Minister.

I don't know how that will solve any problems.

Turning my gaze to Max, I ask, "Do you think the threats will stop after my father becomes the Prime Minister?"

Keeping his eyes on the road, he shakes his head. "He'll still be in politics."

I let out a sigh. "So basically, unless my father retires from politics, I'll never be safe."

"You're with me, Cami," he mutters. "Which means you're safe."

"You can't be my bodyguard forever," I state the obvious.

His eyes flick to me. "No, but you're my girl—" He pauses and frowns. "I hate that word." His jaw clenches as he focuses on the road again before grumbling, "You're mine. End of story."

It's only been a week since we made things 'official,' but we never really discussed anything. Max just said he's keeping me and nothing else.

Are we just dating?

Will the relationship end when the threat has been dealt with?

He'll return to his work as an assassin. I'll return to my socialite duties.

How will things work between us?

The questions are endless, but I don't ask them out loud. Things are good between us, and I don't want to rock the boat.

Just enjoy the time you have with Max, and once the elections are over in a month, you can deal with reality.

The past two weeks fill my thoughts, and a smile forms around my mouth. Max taught me how to shoot a gun and handle a knife. The sessions were hot and always ended in an orgasm.

I've never had so much sex in my life, and I've learned Max is controlling in every aspect of his life. Not that I mind. The way he barks out orders is a turn-on for me.

Jesus, everything he does is a turn-on.

It's also safe to say my attraction to him has become a much stronger emotion. I'm not ready to admit to myself just how strong, so I try not to think about it.

"You're quiet," Max murmurs as he takes the turn-off to Mulhouse, which is right on the border of France and Switzerland.

"Just thinking," I murmur.

His eyes flick to me before returning to the road. "About?"

I shake my head and smile at him. "Our time at the cabin and how much things have changed."

"Hmm." The sound rumbles from his chest. "Did you enjoy our time there?"

I reach across the console and place my hand on his thigh. Max immediately places his on top of mine.

"It was amazing."

The corner of his mouth lifts in a hot smirk that I don't get to see often.
"What did you like most?"

I move my hand up his thigh until I brush against the impressive bulge behind the fabric of his cargo pants.

"My favorite part was when you gave in and kissed the hell out of me for the first time."

"And?"

"When I finally got to feel you inside me."

His smirk turns into a smile. "That's my favorite as well."

Max steers the SUV into a parking lot, then says, "Stay by my side at all times."

"Okay."

He pulls his gun from where it was wedged between his seat and the door and tucks the weapon into the waistband of his pants.

When he climbs out of the vehicle, he pulls his shirt over the gun to conceal it while glancing around before coming to my side of the SUV to open my door.

"Come, baby,"

"I love hearing those words," I tease him, but he's too focused on our surroundings to smile.

He takes my right hand and pulls me close to his side before we walk toward the hotel's entrance. It's a three-star establishment, and that's being generous.

Luckily, we won't be staying here.

Reaching the reception, Max barely glances at the man behind the counter.

"Afternoon, how can I help you?" the man asks with a polite smile.

"Three, seven, six, nine, one," is all Max says.

The smile drops from the man's face, and he nods. Reaching beneath the counter, he pulls out a manilla envelope and hands it over.

Max takes the envelope, and without another word, we turn around and leave the hotel.

A smile spreads over my face as we walk to the SUV. "That was so cool. I feel like a spy."

Max shakes his head, but I notice the corner of his mouth twitching.

Once we're safely in our vehicle and driving down the road, he says, "Check inside the envelope."

I tear the side open and take out my passport and a smaller envelope. My name is written on it in Papa's handwriting.

"Got my passport," I say while I open the second envelope. I pull out a single piece of paper.

Camille,

I'm so sorry this is happening. I miss you, *mon amour*. Please know I'll do everything in my power to make France safe for you again.

I've opened an account in your name at St. Monarch's. Should anything happen to me, Max can help you access the money I've placed there for safekeeping.

Please, *mon amour*, try not to worry.

Keep the following numbers safe: 58962

There's nothing I love more than you.

Papa.

I don't realize I'm crying until a tear splats onto the letter. I quickly wipe my cheeks dry and read the words again.

Suddenly Max pulls the SUV over to the side of the road before wrapping his arm around my shoulders. "What's wrong?"

A smile trembles around my lips. "It's a letter from my father. I just miss

him.”

He presses a kiss to my forehead, then says, “You’ll see him soon.”

God, I hope so. As much as I’m enjoying this impromptu vacation with Max, I miss my father terribly.

I have to remember to memorize the number before I burn the letter.

I fold the letter again and tuck it back into the envelope. “Papa said he opened an account at St. Monarch’s for me.”

Max pulls away from me, and steering the SUV back onto the road, he murmurs, “That’s a good precaution.”

Precaution or not, it fills me with worry.

Leaning forward, I pick up my purse from where it’s lying by my feet and tuck my passport and the letter inside it. My eyes land on my cell phone, which I haven’t switched on since we left my penthouse.

Jesus, I haven’t even thought about my penthouse.

I wonder if Papa had all the damages fixed. How did he explain the attack to the media?

God, I’ve been closed off from the world.

“How long before we reach the border?” I ask as I glance around us.

“Thirty minutes. Have you been to Switzerland?”

Nodding, I reply, “Yes. Papa and I used to spend our winter vacations skiing in the Alps.” Clearing my throat, I ask, “Do you know what happened after the attack? Was there a press release?”

Max nods. “Yes, everyone thinks it’s a burglary gone wrong. They were told the police responded, and a gunfight ensued. You’re on a much-needed vacation in Bali to recover from the trauma.”

My lips part with shock. “And they believed it?”

“Money can cover up anything and buy anyone’s silence, Cami.”

“Right,” I relax back in my seat and place my hand on his thigh again.

“It’s good news, though, and I have a story for when I return from this *vacation*.”

There’s a moment’s silence, then Max asks, “Do you want to return?”

My eyebrows lift. “To France? Of course.”

“No, I mean to your life,” he explains. “Being a socialite.”

“Honestly?” I think for a moment. “No.” My tongue darts out to wet my lips. “I’m thinking of talking to my father so I can step away from the spotlight.”

“What will you do then?” he asks, “Sell your photos?”

“Yes.” I let out a sigh. “Among other things.” I turn my head and look at Max. “I just want to do something that’s more satisfying.”

“You can always become my lookout while I’m on a job,” he jokes.

I let out a chuckle. “I didn’t think you had it in you to make a joke.”

Max’s eyes lock with mine for a second, and the smile drops from my face. “Are you serious?”

He shrugs and places his hand on top of mine. “I can promise you it will be a hell of a lot more exciting than being a socialite.”

A doubtful chuckle escapes me. “My father will have a heart attack.”

“You’re twenty-seven, Cami. Make your own decisions in life.”

I shake my head. “You’re insane.”

Silence falls between us again, and the rest of the way to the border, my thoughts are filled with wild fantasies of Max and me becoming a couple like Bonnie and Clyde.

But that’s all it will ever be – a wild fantasy.

Chapter 23

Max

When I finally stop the SUV at my safe house in Bern, I'm fucking tired of driving. Cami offered, but I know she doesn't have defensive driving skills, so I refused. Also, I'm a control freak.

I climb out and stretch my muscles while my eyes sweep over the area.

"It's beautiful here," Cami comments as she comes around the front of the vehicle. "Are all your safe houses cabins?"

"Most of them," I reply as I walk to the front door. "I always try to stay as far away as possible from other people."

The cabin is on a lake and is pretty secluded, which is why I like it. I have a couple of apartments in cities across the world, but I mainly use them when I'm busy with a job.

I unlock the door, and pushing it open, dust motes dance in the air.

"I haven't been here in a while," I say as I open windows so fresh air can come in.

"It's bigger than the other one," Cami mentions while glancing around.

I head to the bedroom and place the duffle bag by the bed. When I hear Cami behind me, I say, "I'll do another supply run before it gets dark."

"Can you please get me underwear and a bra?"

The corner of my mouth lifts as I shake my head. I turn around to face her. "I like knowing there's nothing underneath your clothes." I step closer to her and slip my hand beneath her T-shirt. Cupping her breast, my smile grows. "Easy access."

Cami tilts her head to the side and narrows her eyes at me. “My vagina is closed for business until you bring me some underwear and bras.”

Just as she playfully pulls away from me, my phone starts to ring. Pulling out the device, I see Nikolai’s name flashing on the screen.

“None of what I’m about to say is the truth,” I tell Cami before I answer, “Hey, I’m starting to think you hate me.”

Nikolai lets out a chuckle, “Why?”

I wink at my woman, then answer, “Cami is a fucking headache.”

She places her hand on her hip and lifts an eyebrow at me. I step closer and press a kiss to her forehead.

“Cami?” He asks. “You already have a nickname for Camilla?”

I’m pretty sure we’ve had this conversation before. Just goes to show how fucking rattled he was when we last spoke.

“Shut up,” I grumble, then my tone softens because I’m worried about my friend, “How are you?”

I pull away from Cami and glance out the bedroom window.

“I’m getting married,” Nikolai drops a bomb on me.

“What?” I bark, stunned out of my mind. It takes me a moment to comprehend what he said, then I ask, “To Abigail?”

“Yes. She’s the one.”

Finally, Nikolai’s found someone who makes him happy. My eyes flick to Cami as I let out a chuckle. “Damn, brother. That’s great. When’s the wedding?”

“This Sunday. Please tell me you can get the day off. I’ll send the private jet for you.”

Fuck. There’s no way I’m leaving Cami alone. My mind races, but not wanting to have this conversation over the phone with Nikolai, I lie, “Let me speak to Mr. DuBois. I’m sure one of the other guards can babysit Cami for

the day.”

My friend clears his throat, “I’m asking my father to be my best man. You understand, right?”

“Of course,” I reply. It’s a given that Mr. Vetrov will be his son’s best man. “I’m just fucking happy you met the love of your life. You deserve it, Nikolai.”

He sounds emotional when he says, “It means a lot coming from you.”

My heart squeezes as my sister, Anja, flits through my mind. A wave of emotion hits. “Listen, I have to go, but I’ll be in touch regarding Sunday. What time is the wedding?”

“Ten in the morning,” he answers.

“Okay. I’ll talk to you soon.”

I end the call and toss the cell phone on the bed.

“Are you okay?” Cami asks, her gaze searching my face.

I close my eyes as I nod, letting the wave of sadness pass through me. “My best friend’s getting married this Saturday.”

“Are you upset about it?”

I shake my head. “No, it just feels like he called to ask my permission because he was married to Anja.”

“Oh.” She comes closer and wraps her arms around my waist.

I engulf her against my chest and press my face to her hair. Taking a breath, I admit, “It’s been fifteen years since Anja passed, but sometimes it feels like it just happened. We were really close.”

Cami presses a kiss to my chest but doesn’t offer me empty words of comfort.

“I’m happy for Nikolai, though. He deserves this more than anyone I know.”

She pulls back and gives me a stern look. “I’m a headache?” There’s no

bite to her tone, so I know she's joking. "And you're getting me a babysitter?"

"I didn't want to get into it over the phone. I want to tell Nikolai in person, so I told a white lie."

"Why in person? He just told you he's getting married via a call."

I pull her back to my chest before I answer, "He's been worried about me because I live a reclusive life, and I want to see his expression when I tell him about you."

She gives me a beautiful smile. "So you're going to a wedding this Sunday?"

"We're going to a wedding," I correct her. "I need you there as living proof that I'm not bullshitting him."

"Then I'm coming with on the supply run. There's no way I'm letting you buy me a dress I haven't approved."

"Okay," I agree. "But you follow my orders to a T."

She nods and lifts herself on her tiptoes to give me a quick kiss. "And before we go shopping for a dress, I have to get a normal outfit because I'm tired of wearing shorts every day."

I lower my hands to her ass and grip her tightly. "I like your ass in shorts."

I lean down until our faces are an inch apart, but before I can claim her mouth, she says, "Will you let me have control just this once?"

"For?"

"Sex."

My eyebrow lifts, but then I nod.

She wiggles out of my arms and rushes out of the bedroom, only to return seconds later, carrying a chair from the kitchen.

She places the chair at the foot of the bed, then orders, "Sit."

I've never given anyone control over anything concerning me, but for Cami, I'll make an exception.

I take a seat on the chair, then lift an eyebrow. "What now?"

"Do you have rope lying around somewhere?"

"Rope?" I shake my head. "Why?"

She gives me a seductive look. "I want to restrain you."

I don't know how I feel about being restrained.

I stare at her for a long moment before I say, "There are zip-ties in the duffle bag."

"Great!"

Cami looks way too fucking happy about the idea of tying me up. My eyes narrow on her as she grabs the zip-ties and comes closer.

"Arms behind the chair, please," she asks sweetly.

Reluctantly, I follow her order.

She fastens a zip-tie around my wrists before connecting them with an extra one.

When she comes to kneel in front of me and reaches for my ankle, I shake my head. "No."

She looks at me for a few seconds, then nods. "Okay, not the legs, but you're not allowed to move until I say so."

"Okay," I agree, still giving her a skeptical look.

"Stop looking like you're worried I'm going to kill you."

"Oh, trust me, I'm not worried about that."

"I plan on torturing you."

My eyes narrow on her. "This better be what I think it is."

A nervous expression flutters over her face. "It might be stupid, but it's something I've always wanted to try. If I make an ass of myself, just pretend I'm the sexiest thing you've ever seen."

“Cami,” I murmur, “you are the sexiest thing I’ve ever seen. I don’t have to pretend.”

“Okay.” She darts closer, presses a kiss to my mouth, then moves back again.

I watch as she slowly strips out of her T-shirt and shorts. Even though I’ve seen her naked every day over the past two weeks, the sight doesn’t get old.

My cock hardens when she crawls onto the bed. She fluffs the pillows and stacks them on top of each other before she lies on her back, spreading her legs wide and giving me a full view of her pussy and breasts.

“I definitely approve of this,” I say to encourage her.

With her eyes on me, Cami brushes her fingers over her right breast before she tweaks her nipple.

Christ, that’s fucking hot.

Her other hand slips down her abdomen and between her legs, and I watch as my woman starts to play with herself.

Unable to watch quietly, I order, “Pinch your nipple.”

She obeys without argument and gives me what I want. She’s about to push a finger inside her, but I say, “Stop. Only my cock gets to be inside you. Flick your clit.”

Seeing her hands on her body is next-level erotic, and I start to strain against the zip-ties.

Then she fucking moans.

Her movements become hurried as she keeps massaging her breasts and working her clit. Her lips part, and her lashes lower.

Fuck.

Chapter 24

Cami

Seeing that Max is getting turned-on, I moan harder and flick my clit until my orgasm threatens to hit.

“I’m going to come,” I say, breathless from the intensity building in the room.

The next second I hear the zip-ties snap, and Max freaking launches himself at me. He unzips his pants, rips out his cock, and slams into me with so much force I swear I can feel him in my stomach.

So. Damn. Hot.

“Jesus,” I gasp, and then I have to grab hold of the covers and hang on for my life.

“Don’t you dare come,” he growls between ruthless thrusts.

The sound of our skin slapping echoes around us, and all I can do is stare into his eyes. Max’s hand grips my hip, and he fucks me harder.

Whimpering sounds spill from me, and I beg, “Please.”

He shakes his head. “Don’t you fucking dare.”

My body starts to tremble uncontrollably, and sobs burst from me.

This is the most intense sex I’ve ever had. Holy shit.

“Come,” Max roars as he fills me again and again. His body tenses, and as my orgasm rips violently through me, he comes just as hard.

Our eyes remain locked as we find our pleasure at the same time, and it makes the moment hotter than the surface of the sun.

Max lets out a rough grunt as he drives his cock deep inside me, then he slumps down on top of me, his body weight pushing me into the mattress.

“Jesus fucking Christ, woman,” he mutters between breaths. “That was fucking erotic.”

His praise fills me with confidence and makes me feel beautiful.

“Yeah?”

Lifting his head, he nods. Our eyes lock, and I can see he means it when he says, “You have to stop thinking there’s something wrong with your body or that I won’t find you attractive. I’m fucking obsessed with you, Cami.”

His words hit deep in my heart and emotions well in my chest. Tears start to form behind my eyes, and I try to blink them away. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me, baby.” He presses a quick kiss to my mouth. “I’m just telling you the truth.”

He pushes his arms beneath me and holds me tightly, and never before have I been happier.

God, he makes me so happy. I wish our time together never has to end.

After a while, the emotional moment passes, and I say, “You have to show me how you broke free from the zip-ties.”

“Tomorrow,” he mumbles against my hair before he pulls away with a sigh. “Right now, you have to get dressed so we can go shopping.”

I dart up and off the bed, and it has Max chuckling. Rushing to the bathroom, I quickly clean myself and wash my hands. I check my hair in the mirror, then hurry back to the bedroom.

Putting on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt, I glance down at my nipples showing through the fabric. “This isn’t going to work, and now I understand why you like me in these clothes.”

Max pulls his dress shirt from the bag and hands it to me. “Put this on over the T-shirt. No one gets to see what’s mine.”

“So possessive,” I mumble as I shrug the fabric on and tie it at my middle.

“Yeah, and you better remember that. Unless you want me killing a random man because he was staring at your breasts, you’ll keep your body covered.”

I shake my head at my crazy man, then follow him out of the bedroom. “I also need more toiletries. And some makeup. And a hairdryer would be awesome.”

“Anything you want, baby,” he murmurs, not really listening to me as he locks the door behind us.

“In that case, I also want a TV in the cabin.”

“Okay.”

I pause to ask, “Are you listening to me?”

His eyes flick to me as he opens the SUV’s door. “Yes. You want toiletries, makeup, a hairdryer, and a TV.”

“Oh. Okay.” I blow him a kiss before I climb into the vehicle.

Luckily, the trip to the nearest town isn’t long because I’m tired of the SUV after all the driving we did earlier.

“Whenever you need a break from driving, I can take over,” I offer again
Max just shakes his head.

“Is there a reason for your control issues?”

His eyes flick to be before returning to the road ahead. “No, it’s just the way I am.”

I nod and glance at the beautiful nature on the side of the road. “By the way, you didn’t wait for my permission before you broke free from the zip-ties.”

He lets out a chuckle. “There was no way I was waiting for your permission.”

Just two weeks of being in a relationship with him, and he’s built up my self-esteem so much that I wonder why I ever thought I wasn’t good enough

for him.

Entering the town, Max finds a parking spot, then orders, “Stay by my side at all times.”

“You don’t have to keep telling me. I know the drill.”

We climb out of the SUV, and I hold my hand out for him to take. We link our fingers, and like a normal couple, we head down the sidewalk in search of a store where I can get something decent to wear.

The first store we come across has mostly casual clothes, and I manage to find two pairs of jeans and four blouses.

I also grab a pair of high heels, but when I want to pay, Max says, “Put your credit card away.”

Not wanting to discuss it in front of the store assistant, I allow him to settle the bill, but the moment we leave the store, I ask, “Why did you pay?”

His tone is serious as he explains, “Because they can track you via your bank accounts.” His features soften a little, and he wraps his arm around my shoulders. “And because I want to.”

With a happy smile on my face, I press closer to his side. “You’re too perfect. It’s actually a little scary.”

“Why’s it scary?”

I glance up at his face. “Because no one’s perfect. I’m waiting for the bomb to drop.”

“Me being an assassin wasn’t a big enough bomb?”

“Crap, I forgot about that,” I chuckle. “Now I feel better.”

He shakes his head as if he can’t believe half the shit that comes out of my mouth.

We stop at a men's store for Max to get a suit for the wedding, and I make him try on a couple just so I can have a show. The man could easily be a model.

Once Max decides on a charcoal-colored suit that brings out the light green of his eyes, we head back to the SUV to put the bags inside the trunk before we continue with the shopping trip.

“I don’t see any stores with formal dresses,” I voice my worry.

Max pulls me into a convenience store while pressing a kiss to my temple. “Let me take care of the dress.”

I roll my eyes at him. “I need to make a good impression on Nikolai, seeing as he’s your only friend.”

“Just trust me. I’ll get you the most beautiful dress there is.” He gestures at the toiletries aisle. “Get what you need.”

I grab bottles of shampoo and conditioner and say, “I don’t even have perfume. Maybe I should stay at the cabin. No one knows I’m there. I’ll be fine alone.”

Max shakes his head and gives me a look of warning. “You’re coming with me. I’m not letting you out of my sight.”

I get everything I need, and as we walk to the snacks aisle, I ask, “What does Nikolai do for a living?”

“That’s a story for a less public place.”

My eyebrow lifts as I help myself to my favorite pretzels and chips. “Is it the same as you?”

Max just shakes his head, and as a man walks down the aisle, he moves in front of me as if he’s trying to hide me from the man’s view.

God, I like this possessive side of him.

I let out a sigh because I’m screwed if things don’t work out between Max and me. No man will ever hold a candle to him.

Chapter 25

Max

“Are you sure the dress will be there?” Cami asks for the tenth time.

“Relax, baby,” I murmur as I check for any messages on my phone. “Your dress is already there.”

Suddenly her eyes widen. “I forgot all about it. You haven’t told me what Nikolai does for a living.”

I didn’t forget. I was trying to put it off for as long as possible.

Cami hasn’t freaked out about anything thus far. Let’s hope my lucky streak continues.

“Nikolai’s last name is Vetrov,” I say while I reach for her hand. “His family are blood diamond smugglers.”

“Diamonds?”

Trust my woman to only hear that word.

I let out a chuckle. “They sell diamonds on the black market.

“Okay. That’s not as bad as I thought it would be.”

“There’s more.”

Her eyes widen with curiosity.

“Nikolai’s cousin is the head of the *bratva*, Viktor Vetrov. His godfather is the director of St. Monarch’s, and his uncle is the best assassin there’s ever been, although he is retired. I’ve never been able to break his record.”

“Jesus. Suddenly I’m glad you don’t have a massive family of criminals.”

“They are my family. I work for the *bratva* as well, Cami.”

“You’re taking me into a den of vipers,” she sighs. “Let’s hope I make a

good first impression.”

“They won’t hurt you. The Vetrovs don’t approve of hurting women. It’s the one thing they don’t allow.”

Relief washes over her beautiful face. “Thank God. Still, will I be the only person there who hasn’t committed a crime?”

You have. You stole my heart.

Slowly, I nod. “But you’ll be safe there. Besides St. Monarch’s, the Vetrovs’ island is the safest place for you.”

The pilot announces that we’re starting our descent, and it has Cami looking out the window. Her hand grips mine, and she holds on tightly.

Earlier, I learned she’s not a fan of flying.

I turn my hand over and link our fingers. “By the way, I got you a purple dress.”

“What?” she gasps. “You’re kidding, right?”

“I think the fabric is chiffon,” I add.

“Oh my God, Max. No one with fashion sense wears chiffon.”

The private jet I hired from St. Monarch’s touches down on the island. “Just kidding. I wanted to distract you while we landed.”

Relief washes over her features, and she smacks my chest. “Ugh, don’t ever joke about clothes, especially not dresses.”

When the plane comes to a stop, we unbuckle our safety belts and stand up. Cami stretches before she walks to the door. Taking hold of her hand, we exit the aircraft.

Nikolai is waiting with a huge smile on his face, and I have to let go of Cami’s hand so I can give him a brotherly hug.

“*Blyad'*, it’s good to see you,” he chuckles. “It’s been too long.”

I pull back and wrap my arm around Cami’s lower back before I say, “Cami, meet Nikolai. He’s one of the reasons I’m guarding you.”

Her eyes widen as she holds out her hand to him. When they shake hands, she says, “It’s a pleasure to meet you. Max has told me a lot about you.”

“He has?” Nikolai’s sharp gaze flicks between Cami and me. “You didn’t mention Miss DuBois would be joining us.”

“Yeah, about that. We need to talk.”

Nikolai gestures toward a lining of trees.

“How was your flight?” Nikolai asks.

“Good. How’re your nerves holding up?”

He lets out a chuckle. “You should rather ask how my patience is holding up. I just want to put my ring on Abigail’s finger and get the celebration over with.”

I take a good look at my friend, and seeing how happy he is, I pat him on the back. “I’m glad you’ve found someone you can share your life with.”

There’s a path we follow to reach his house. The two-story log cabin is nestled in the woods covering half of the island.

My dream of retiring on an island of my own is inspired by the Vetrovs’ island. I fell in love with the place the first time I visited.

“Come in,” Nikolai invites. “Abigail’s at the main house with my mother. You’ll meet her after the ceremony.”

We take a seat in the living room, and while Cami glances at the modern décor, Nikolai’s eyes narrow on us.

Shock flutters over his face, then he says, “Christ, is this what I think it is?”

I let out a breath, and taking Cami’s hand in mine, I nod at my friend. “Yes.”

Another wave of shock washes over him. “Holy fuck, Maxim. Are you serious?”

Seeing the worry creeping into his eyes, I put him at ease, “She knows

I'm an assassin. She knows everything."

Nikolai's gaze snaps to Cami. "And you're okay with it?"

She clears her throat. "It's not like it will change anything if I weren't okay with it. Right?"

A frown forms on my friend's forehead, and I quickly explain, "She didn't freak out, and she's not going to." It's actually hard to explain Cami's personality to Nikolai. "She doesn't do drama."

That doesn't sound right, either.

"What Max is trying to say is that I'm fine with everything as long as you all don't go around killing innocent people. I'm not saying what you're doing is acceptable, but I'm not going to judge. Consider me a judge-free zone. I'm Switzerland."

Nikolai tilts his head and looks at Cami like she's lost her mind.

"She takes some getting used to. You can relax. What you see is what you get with Cami."

"Does Maurice know?" he asks.

"Not yet," Cami answers. "My father has a lot to deal with right now, and I haven't had a chance to talk with him."

Nikolai pins me with a scowl. "So when you said she's a headache, that was bullshit?"

Nodding, I let out a chuckle. "I didn't want to tell you over the phone."

"And you're both serious about this relationship?"

Christ, it feels like I'm being grilled by a parent.

"It's serious." I'll go into more detail when I get a moment alone with Nikolai.

"Where's the restroom?" Cami asks.

"Down the hallway, first door to your left," I say. I watch her walk away, and when I hear the door shut, I lock eyes with Nikolai. "She's the one for

me. I'm just waiting for the right time before I discuss it with her."

"You love her?" Nikolai's gaze narrows as he searches my face for the answer.

I take a few seconds before I nod, not quite ready to say the words out loud.

A smile spreads over my friend's face, and he stands up. I'm yanked into a hug. "You have no idea how happy I am to hear that."

We pull apart, and I give him a reassuring look. "She gets me, Nikolai. We're complete opposites, but somehow, we fit perfectly."

"I understand. It's the same with Abigail and me." He pats my shoulder.

While I have this moment, I say, "If you're looking for my blessing, you have it. I hope your future with Abigail is blessed."

Emotion tightens his features for a moment. "Thanks, brother."

We hear the restroom's door open, and seconds later, Cami comes back into the living room. She sits down beside me, giving me a nervous smile.

"You can relax," I chuckle. "Nikolai's done with his interrogation."

"Interrogation, my ass," he grumbles.

Chapter 26

Cami

Since we arrived on the island, Max isn't as guarded as I'm used to seeing. He seems to relax when he's around Nikolai, which tells me how much they trust each other.

After meeting Nikolai's family and his bride-to-be, Max takes me to the guest room we'll be using for the day so I can change into my dress.

Honestly, I don't have much trust in Max's fashion sense, so I'm a little anxious to see the dress he bought for me.

As soon as we enter the bedroom, my eyes lock on the garment bag, and I make a beeline for it. I pull the zipper down, then my eyebrows fly up, and I gasp.

Removing the light green silk gown, I'm struck speechless.

I can feel Max's eyes burning on me as he asks, "I thought it would match your eyes. Do you approve?"

I nod my head, and smiling at the man who keeps surprising me, I say, "It's gorgeous."

Not having any time to waste, I quickly strip out of my clothes and let the silk fabric of the dress flow over my head. Max comes closer and pulls up the zipper at my side before pressing a kiss to my bare shoulder.

The fabric falls in waves beneath my neckline. There's no cleavage, and my hard nipples aren't visible.

Max must read my mind because he lifts a hand and brushes his fingers over my left breast. "I made sure there can be no wardrobe malfunctions."

A chuckle escapes me. "I'm not surprised."

My possessive assassin.

I smooth my palms over the silk to straighten out some creases before grabbing my makeup from our overnight bag.

While I'm touching up my makeup, Max changes into his suit. I keep stealing glances in the mirror when the realization that we're a couple hits again.

Sometimes it feels like it's all happening too fast, and I don't have any control over anything. Then there are times when it feels like I've known Max my whole life.

It's getting harder to keep myself from completely falling in love with him. The only thing standing in the way of me giving him my whole heart is the fact that once the threat has been dealt with, Max will leave.

I'll return to being a socialite, but hopefully, Papa will agree that I can retire from the spotlight and pursue my photography hobby.

And Max will resume killing people.

Then there's the other problem. Papa will have a heart attack when he finds out I got romantically involved with Max.

Ugh, even if he accepts our relationship, Max will still go back to his world.

Sure, there were a couple of times he's said something implying that we're in this relationship for the long haul, and I know he never says anything he doesn't mean. But I also know he doesn't do relationships.

He keeps saying I'm his, but that doesn't mean forever.

Jesus, he can't even remember who he's been with and what their names were. He's a lone wolf by nature.

The elections are in a week. After that, Papa wants me to come home. Max will no longer be required because we'll receive protection from the SGPM – the Security Group for the Prime Minister.

There's a flare of panic in my chest when I think of Max leaving me.

"Everything okay?" he suddenly asks, pulling me out of my thoughts.

I smile to set him at ease as I nod. "I tend to get emotional at weddings."

I squash my worries deep down so I can enjoy the day with Max.

When I get up from the stool by the dressing table, he comes to stand behind me.

He starts to pull the fabric up my legs, and frowning, I say, "I don't think there's time for this."

Taking hold of my panties, he pulls them off before shoving them into his pocket. "I don't like you wearing anything beneath the dress."

Oh.

Heat rushes through my abdomen to pool between my thighs as I turn around to face him.

He lifts a hand to my jaw and brushes a kiss over my lips. "And it will give me easy access."

I like the sound of that.

I'm given another kiss before he takes my hand and links our fingers. As I leave the guest room with Max, I glance up at him, taking in his handsome features.

I want forever with this man.

We head down a staircase and out of the main mansion. Luckily, there's a cobblestone path we can follow because I'm wearing high heels and would probably land on my ass if I had to walk on sand and grass.

The ceremony's being held in a clearing that's surrounded by trees. White Tiffany chairs are on either side of the aisle that's been covered in white rose petals.

"It's so beautiful," I whisper while Max leads me to the second row. I glance at the other guests and wonder if they're all involved in the criminal

world.

Probably.

Max keeps hold of my hand and rests it on his thigh. He smiles at Nikolai, who doesn't look nervous at all.

Nikolai's grandfather and father are standing up front with him, and when piano notes fill the air, we all turn in our seats to watch Abigail walk up the aisle.

"She's exquisite," I murmur to Max.

Cillian, Nikolai's grandfather, is officiating the marriage, and once the groom and bride are standing in front of him, he says, "I was told to make this short and sweet."

My lips curve up while the other guests chuckle.

Cillian pauses and gestures at Abigail. "Wow, can we all just take a moment to look at this beautiful bride my grandson managed to snag?"

With laughter bubbling from Abigail, she turns in a circle so we can all admire her wedding gown.

Suddenly Max calls out, "She's too gorgeous for you, Nikolai."

My eyes glue themselves to the man by my side, and I drink in the sight of him being relaxed and comfortable because he's among his kind.

He notices I'm staring at him and wraps his arm around my shoulders. Pulling me closer so I'll lean against his side, he whispers, "Thank you for coming with me today."

The ceremony continues, and when Nikolai and Abigail are pronounced husband and wife, I send a wish into the universe that, just maybe, there's a chance things can work out between Max and me.

Like most women, I've dreamed of getting married but never has there been a man I considered to be the one – not until Max.

When everybody gets up, he pulls me to my feet and wraps an arm

around my lower back. Leaning closer, he asks, “You okay?”

I nod quickly, and smiling at him, I say, “It was a beautiful ceremony.”

He tilts his head and stares at me for a few seconds, his eyes searching mine. “It feels like you’re hiding something from me.”

Patting my hand against his chest, I widen my smile. “I’m fine, Max. There’s nothing wrong. Let’s follow everyone to the reception.”

Once again, I squash my worries deep down and focus on the celebration.

Once we leave the island, I’ll take some time to sift through my emotions and decide how to handle things going forward.

Chapter 27

Max

Attending Nikolai's wedding was a breath of fresh air. It was good catching up with my friend again.

But it also burst the bubble Cami and I have been living in.

Before the wedding, we closed ourselves off from reality and got lost in each other. But now reality is knocking on the door, and things will change soon.

Next week Maurice will become Prime Minister of France, and I'll either have to take Cami back to France or kidnap her.

I'm leaning toward kidnapping her but ripping her away from her father won't do me any favors.

Christ, Maurice will never give his blessing. No sane father who loves his daughter would agree to her dating an assassin.

"Max, it's starting," Cami calls from inside the cabin.

The SUV needed an oil change, which kept me busy for a while.

Heading into the cabin, I say, "Let me just wash my hands."

While I'm scrubbing the grime from my fingers, I hear the TV's volume increase.

Olivier De Rothschild is having a presidential debate against the opposing party, and Maurice is there to support him.

I dry my hands, and walking back to the living room, I take a seat next to Cami.

I have zero interest in politics, but Cami wants to watch the debate in the

hopes of getting a glimpse of her father.

She snuggles into my side, and pulling a bag of pretzels closer, she nibbles on one.

The announcer talks about the candidates' history and what he thinks will be discussed today. He mentions De Rothschild will probably use Maurice's push for a greener country to gain more votes.

It's not even been ten minutes, and I'm bored.

Taking my phone from my pocket, I check my emails and bank accounts before signing in to St. Monarch's database.

Suddenly Cami grabs my thigh and excitedly says, "There he is." She frowns as she stares at the TV. "I've told him not to wear that suit. The light gray makes him look old."

I don't even bother looking as I check if any information has been found about the threat to Cami.

The request shows there's nothing new, but before I exit my dashboard, a message uploads.

Information requested found.

My phone starts to ring, and seeing the number from St. Monarch's, I get up from the couch and answer, "Levin speaking."

"Mr. Levin," Director Koslov says. "I'm giving you this information via a personal call because it's time-sensitive, and you're my godson's best friend."

"What have you found out?"

"The target is no longer Camille DuBois but Maurice DuBois. Today."

Jesus Christ.

"Who has the hit been assigned to?" I ask. Knowing who the assassin is will tell me when and how it will happen. We all have our own personal brand.

“I can’t give you that information. I suggest you hurry.”

“Thank you.”

I end the call, and walking back to the living room, my eyes lock on the TV as I dial Maurice’s number. The call connects, but it keeps ringing until it goes to voicemail. “It’s Max. Get out of there.”

I don’t say anything else, and instead, I redial the number.

On the TV screen, I see Maurice and De Rothschild walk up the steps toward the stage, waving at all their supporters. I watch as Maurice stops on the side while Rothschild takes his position behind the podium.

Fuck.

“Answer your phone,” I growl as I listen to the incessant ringtone.

Maurice reaches into his pocket, and the line goes dead. When I try again, the call goes directly to voicemail.

“Who are you trying to call?” Cami asks, her eyes darting between the TV and me. “What’s wrong?”

Christ. There’s no time.

My heartbeat speeds up, and trying to get Cami away from the TV in case the fucking assassination happens while the cameras are on Maurice, I say, “Get me a glass of water, please.”

She frowns at me, and as she stands up, her eyes flick to the TV screen.

I hear the distinct sound of a gunshot and dart forward. The cameras swing to the side of the stage as I grab hold of Cami.

A commotion breaks out in the crowd, and the announcer shouts, “A shot’s been fired!”

I press Cami’s face to my chest and feel how the shock trembles through her body.

“Senator Maurice DuBois has been shot,” the announcer cries. “Oh, my God! Someone just fired a shot out of the crowd. It’s absolute

pandemonium.”

Maurice, you dumb fuck. You should've answered your phone!

Keeping hold of Cami, who's frozen against my chest, I reach for the remote and switch off the TV.

“No,” she whispers.

I force her to sit down and crouch in front of her. Framing her face with my hands, I see horror warring with disbelief. She pulls away from me, and starts to shake her head.

“What happened?” she gasps. Her eyes connect with mine, and her features tighten with anguish as the horror darkens her irises. “No. Don't look at me like that.” She starts to shake her head. “No, this isn't happening. It's a mistake.”

I move to sit next to her, and wrapping my arm around her shoulders, I pull her to my chest.

Her body shudders, then she asks, “What just happened?”

“Your father was shot,” I tell Cami, not sugar-coating it.

“No,” she gasps again, and it looks like she's still struggling to accept the fact.

“I'm so fucking sorry.” I press a kiss to her hair. “Let me make a call and see what I can find out.”

Maybe he was lucky, and the shot didn't kill him.

A breath shudders through her, then she whimpers, “Please. Maybe he's okay.”

I quickly dial St. Monarch's number, and when Director Koslov answers, I ask, “Is it a confirmed kill?”

“Yes.”

“Christ,” I mutter just as another call beeps in my ear. “Thank you.”

I end the call with Director Koslov and answer the one from Nikolai,

“Yes?”

“I just got the news Maurice DuBois was assassinated.”

“I have to call you later. Cami needs me.”

“Okay.”

I end the call and drop my phone on the coffee table. Cami’s eyes are frozen in horror and glued to me as if I have the power to make this situation better.

I shake my head. “I’m sorry, baby. It’s a confirmed kill.”

Her features tighten with anguish as she tries to breathe through the blow.

I engulf her in my arms and press kisses to her hair and temple. “I’m so fucking sorry. I tried to call him, but he switched off his phone.”

“No,” she whimpers, bringing her hands up to cover her mouth. She keeps shaking her head, the shock clearly too much for her to process.

Suddenly a heartbreaking sound tears from her, and she slumps against me. My fucking heart breaks for her as she weeps uncontrollably.

“I’ve got you, baby. I wish I could take this pain from you,” I say, trying to comfort her the only way I know how.

It takes close to thirty minutes before she manages to calm down and process the initial shock.

When she pulls her face away from my chest, a weird calmness settles over her features.

“I don’t know what to do,” she murmurs, her tone emotionless. “I guess I should call someone... who?”

“No.” I frame her face, and using my thumbs, I try to wipe some of her tears away. “I’ll handle everything.”

Slowly she shakes her head again, looking lost and dazed. “But, what do I do?”

“Nothing, baby. You leave everything to me and just...deal with what

happened.”

“How?” The word is squeezed from her throat before a fresh wave of tears overwhelms her.

I hold her again, and brushing my hand up and down her back, I say, “Just cry, baby. Let it all out.”

“Max,” she groans, the raw grief making her voice hoarse. “I can’t lose my father. He’s all I have.”

No. You have me, as well.

“I’m here,” I say with the promise that I’ll never leave, darkening my tone. “You’re not alone. You have me. I’ll help you through this.”

My words don’t seem to get through to her as she weeps hysterically, “He can’t be gone. Why? Why did they kill him? No, he’s not gone.”

All I can do right now is hold her as she breaks down.

“I’ve got you, Cami,” I keep repeating.

And I’ll never let go.

Chapter 28

Cami

I can't believe Papa's dead.

My eyes feel swollen, and my lips are dry from all the crying.

Max is making calls to find out what's going on. When he puts his phone down on the coffee table, he places his hand on my back and leans forward to see my face.

"I spoke with Director Koslov again, and he's assured me there's no longer any threat to your life."

"That doesn't matter," I snap, suddenly overcome with a wave of anger. "What did you find out about my father?"

He moves closer to me while pulling me back to his chest. "He was pronounced dead at the scene. It was a clean shot to the head. He didn't suffer."

My face crumbles. "He didn't suffer," I repeat the words, though they don't offer any comfort. "Papa," I gasp as devastating heartache shudders through me.

Memories of Papa spill into my mind, and each one crushes my heart until there's nothing left but unbearable pain.

His smile.

His laughter.

The way he looked at me with all the love in the world.

Sorrow overwhelms me, and every muscle in my body tightens. Uncontrollable sobs burst from me, and I soak Max's shirt with my tears.

How am I supposed to go on without you, Papa?

“Baby,” Max groans, my pain echoing in his voice. “I’m so fucking sorry. Tell me what to do. How can I make this easier for you?”

It’s the first time I hear panic in his voice.

“It hurts so much,” I sob. “My heart. It feels like someone is trying to rip it from my chest.”

Max’s arms tighten around me until it borders on painful. He continuously presses kisses to my face and hair.

It feels like forever passes before the pain becomes a dull throb again. I feel numb otherwise. It’s as if all my will to live has left this realm with my father.

When I pull back, Max looks at me with worry etched deep into his face. “I know it feels like hell right now, but just hold out, baby. This coming week will be the hardest, but I’ll be with you every step of the way. You’re not alone in this.”

I can see he’s speaking from experience and know he’s referring to his own family he’s lost.

“I can’t believe he’s gone,” I admit. “What changed? Why did they go after him instead of me?”

“Because I’m with you, Cami. They knew they couldn’t get to you. They only had one option left.”

The realization sinks like burning coals into my stomach. Because I had Max, Papa became a target.

“Your father loved you more than anything, baby,” Max murmurs.

“I know,” I whimper, the heartbreaking tears overwhelming me once again.

While an assassin protected me, another took my father’s life.

Max made all the arrangements for us to return to France because I haven't been able to think of anything but Papa.

Taking a private jet home, it feels like I'm stuck in perpetual heartache. No amount of crying is easing my pain.

How do I process my father's death?

How do I carry on without him?

How do I say goodbye?

I can't remember our last conversation. What did we say? Did I tell him I love him?

"Cami," Max says as he takes my hand.

My eyes lift to his face, and it feels like I'm in a trance as I mumble, "Yes."

"We've landed." He takes hold of my chin and turns my face toward him. "I think we should stop at the hospital so you can get something for the shock."

I hate hospitals, but knowing I can't do this on my own, I nod.

"Come, baby."

Since Papa was assassinated earlier today, Max's tone has been gentle, and it keeps making me cry.

"Don't talk to me like that," I say. "Your tone is always commanding. The gentleness is making it worse for me." I lift my eyes to his. "I have no strength, Max. I need you."

A domineering expression takes hold of his features, then he says, "Take all the strength you need from me."

His hand grips mine like a vice as we step off the plane. A blacked-out SUV waits for us, and there's a motorcade with a group of guards.

"They're from St. Monarch's," Max informs me.

We approach a man who looks like he's in charge of the motorcade. He

nods at me, then says, “I’m sorry for your loss, Miss DuBois.” His eyes flick to Max. “My name is Danil. What are our orders, Mr. Levin?”

He’s Russian.

“We’re heading to the hospital before going to Mr. Dubois’ house.”

There’s so much I have to do. Funeral arrangements. My father’s last will.

Philippe! Does our chef even know my father’s been killed?

I’m sure he does.

Max opens the backdoor and nudges me forward. When I climb inside, he takes the seat next to me while Danil slides in behind the steering wheel.

As we’re driven to the hospital, I lean against Max. I try to focus on the comfort I find from having him with me rather than the devastating loss I suffered today.

God, I don’t know what I’d do if he weren’t here.

A random thought knocks the air from my lungs – if the threat against my life is gone, Max can leave me at any time.

NoNoNoNoNo.

Max must feel my panic because he takes hold of my jaw and lifts my face to his.

Because I’m beaten and weak, I beg, “Don’t leave me.”

A frown forms on his forehead, but he says what I need to hear, “I’m not going anywhere, baby.”

Stay with me forever.

This time I can’t say the words, and instead, I bury my face against his chest. I breathe in his masculine scent and focus on the feel of his arms around me.

I’m not sure I’ll recover from losing my father. I can’t lose Max as well.

He’s all I have now.

The most vulnerable emotion I've ever felt grips my chest in a chokehold.

The SUV comes to a stop, and Max helps me out of the back seat. With his arm around me, he leads me into the hospital, and I don't pay any attention to what's being said.

Exhausted and heartbroken, I allow Max to steer me everywhere. He speaks on my behalf and fills out forms.

At some point, I'm given an injection, and not long after, a dreamless sleep engulfs me.

Chapter 29

Max

Jesus. Fucking. Christ.

Cami's not handling the loss of her father well at all, which is to be expected. She's been strong through everything that's happened until she lost Maurice. It's fucking breaking her right in front of my eyes, and there's nothing I can do to stop it.

Luckily, the hospital gave her an injection to calm her. We also got pills she can put under her tongue to dissolve, which will take the edge off.

I lay her down in the bedroom Philippe, the chef, pointed out to me and take off her shoes. Covering her with a blanket, I press a kiss on her forehead before staring down at her.

Jesus, baby. I wish there was more I could do.

I sit down on the side of the bed and brush my fingers over her cheek and jaw.

I'll get you through this, somehow.

Earlier, she asked me not to leave her. I didn't want to have an intense conversation with her while she's in this state, but it worries me that she even had to ask the question.

Obviously, I haven't been clear enough about my feelings for her. It will have to wait, though.

I'm definitely not telling her I love her while she's going through hell.

Still, as I look at my woman, I whisper, "I love you, baby. You're stuck with me for life." I lean forward and kiss her forehead again. "It's you and

me from here on out.”

I sit with her for a while longer before I get up and leave the room. I find Philippe in the kitchen, sitting at the island.

His eyes flick to me, and he stands up. “Is there anything I can do, sir?”

“I’d appreciate it if you prepared something to eat for the guards.” I glance around the room, then ask, “Can I have a bottle of water?”

I got the extra guards from St. Monarch’s to help me protect Cami until after the funeral.

Philippe hands me the water, then asks, “How’s Cami doing?”

“She’s resting.” I leave the kitchen and go to Maurice’s office so I can make a couple of calls.

Taking a seat at the oak desk, I pull my phone out and make the first call.

“How are things there?” Nikolai asks.

“Shit,” I spit out. “Fucking shit.”

“And Cami? How’s she holding up?”

“She’s not.” I lean back in the chair and rub my fingers over my forehead. “She’s heartbroken. Maurice and Cami were close.”

“I got the assassin’s name from my uncle,” he informs me.

It’s one of the benefits of having a Vetrov for a friend. They have access to information the rest of us aren’t privy to.

“Who was it?”

“Jedrik Rusnak.”

I take a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I saw him right before the attack at Cami’s penthouse,” I admit. “He said he was in town for a businessman.” I shake my head because that was a month ago. “He doesn’t take that long to complete a hit. Are you sure you have the right name?”

“The contract was taken out today. It all went down in a matter of an hour. Rusnak took the hit as soon as it went live.”

An icy sensation skitters down my spine. “Which means whoever’s behind this knows about us. They had to know they’d only have a small window of time from when the hit was ordered because your uncle is the director of St. Monarch’s. They knew I’d find out.” I shake my head, then ask, “Can Director Koslov tell us who took out the hit?”

“I can try to find out.”

I let out a sigh, then mutter, “Fuck, I’m sorry this happened while you’re on honeymoon.”

“The timing sucks, but it is what it is. I have to go. Abigail sends her sympathy.”

“Thanks.” The corner of my mouth lifts for a second. “Talk to you later.”

We end the call, and I take a moment to think about everything.

It’s seldom that an urgent hit comes through. Usually, we’re granted two weeks to a month to take out the target.

It tells me whoever went after Maurice is a part of my world. They know who I am. It also explains why Maurice was killed and not Cami.

But that doesn’t explain why the penthouse was attacked.

Christ, I’m missing a vital piece of information.

Hopefully, Nikolai will find out who ordered the contract on Maurice.

I let out a sigh, then dial a number on my phone.

“De Rothschild.”

“My name is Maxim Levin. I’m Camille DuBois’ fiancé.”

There’s no fucking way I’m calling myself her boyfriend. I’m sure she’ll forgive me for lying, but it’s the only way the people around her will take orders from me.

“Will a state funeral be held for her father?” I ask.

“Of course. I tried calling her, but it keeps going to voicemail. Is she there? Can I speak with her?”

I shake my head. “She’s currently resting. I’m in control of everything regarding Camille. I’d appreciate it if you could advise the press that she’s unavailable for interviews. She’ll only attend the funeral and nothing else.”

“Last I heard, you were her bodyguard,” he mentions.

“And now I’m her fiancé,” I mutter. “Camille will retire from her socialite duties, and once everything has been taken care of, she’s coming with me.”

“It’s all a little sudden,” he says, doubt lacing his words.

I can’t blame the man for being suspicious of me.

“Just do what I said. Once Camille feels a little better, I’ll get her to call you.”

“I’d appreciate it. I’ll make the announcement that she won’t be speaking with the press. How is she doing?”

“Not well,” I answer honestly. “She loved her father very much.”

“I’ve known them since she was a child. They were always very close. Please give her my condolences and have her call me as soon as possible.”

“I’ll do that.”

I end the call and let out an aggravated huff. This is why I love my world. If you give a fucking order, people take it seriously because they know they’ll die if they don’t.

Fucking red tape pisses me off.

Getting up, I stalk out of the office and almost bump into Philippe. He bounces back, takes one look at my face, then whispers, “*Mon Dieu.*”

There’s fear in his eyes as he says, “Camille’s awake...sir...I thought I should inform you.”

Giving the man a nod, I step around him and head to her bedroom. When I enter the room, she’s sitting on the bed with her back against the headboard and her arms wrapped around her shins. She’s staring off into space until I sit

down. Her eyes drift to me, then her chin starts to tremble.

I open my arms wide. “Come here, baby.”

Cami moves sluggishly as she crawls onto my lap, and I cradle her against my body.

“I had a nightmare, then I woke up and realized it was real,” she whispers.

My arms tighten around her. “I’m sorry, *moya lyubov’*.” It’s the first time I’ve spoken in Russian to her. I don’t think she’s ready to hear that I love her, and I don’t want to put pressure on her while she’s in this state.

But after she’s had some time to mourn her father, we will talk about us. I’ll tell her how much I love her, and we’ll build a life together.

Chapter 30

Cami

God, my heart can't take much more.

Standing up front in the Church of Saint-Sulpice, that's filled with people, I swallow hard on my grief as I unfold the eulogy I've written for Papa.

For a moment, my eyes land on Max, and I draw strength from him.

Don't speak to everyone. Just focus on Max.

"My father was a kind and generous man. He wanted a better future for France." A wave of heartache hits and I take a moment and try to breathe through it, but it grips my chest so tight it feels like I'm going to pass out. "I miss him." My chin starts to tremble, and I have to force the words out, "So much."

The silence is loud in the church until someone coughs.

The silence has been loud since my father died.

I'm unable to get out another word and give Max a pleading look. He stands up, and coming to me, he wraps his arm around me. He takes the paper that my eulogy is written on and continues to read on my behalf.

As soon as he's finished, he leads me to the back of the church. The moment we step outside, the guards from St. Monarch's surround us.

I hear questions being shouted by members of the press but ignore them. Max removes his jacket and holds it over my head to shield me from the cameras.

I can't cry anymore, and only manage a dry sob.

When we make it to the safety of the SUV, I'm bundled into the backseat.

"Montparnasse cemetery," Max gives the order to Danil.

Not once does he let go of me. I know I depend on him too much, but I just don't have the will to make decisions for myself.

Danil parks quite a distance from where my father will be laid to rest.

"Are we walking all the way?" I ask Max.

"No. We're just waiting for the other guards to check the grounds again. I need to make sure it's safe for you."

"Can we wait until after the ceremony is held and all the people have left? I don't think I can face anyone right now."

I want to be alone when I say goodbye to Papa.

"We'll do whatever you want, baby."

It takes thirty minutes before the hearse arrives. Fifteen before the ceremony starts and another thirty before the people leave.

He's my father, yet the country buried him. Although I understand he was loved by many, I wish I could've done this alone.

"Ready?" Max asks. I nod, and he gives the order, "Drive closer, Danil."

When we stop near the gravesite, we have to wait for all the guards to come to our SUV. Only then am I allowed to climb out of the vehicle.

I understand it's for my safety, but it means I won't be alone with Papa.

Max's body is tense as we walk to the fresh grave, and he keeps scanning the area for any possible threats.

We come to a stop, and I'm barely able to look at the coffin.

Papa.

My throat strains, and my eyes burn, but only a single tear rolls down my cheek.

God, I'm going to miss you so much.

I cover my mouth with my hand, and when Max pulls me to his chest, a sob escapes me.

Thank you for the amazing life you've given me. I've been so blessed to

have you as my father. The hole you've left in my heart will never mend.

I grab hold of Max's side to keep myself standing as my body trembles uncontrollably. My sorrow becomes unbearable, and I close my eyes.

Bye, Papa.

The three days after the funeral were the hardest.

That's when Mr. Lafayette came to read Papa's will. There was so much paperwork to sign, I thought I would lose my mind. Max read every single page, though. He wouldn't let me sign a document he didn't check.

He's been my rock throughout the entire ordeal.

I'm sitting in Papa's armchair in the informal living room and staring at the book he was reading. He always loved reading.

The sorrow is starting to change into something darker. I would describe it as anger. It's more violent than any emotion I've ever felt.

Getting up, my body feels listless as I leave the room.

I walk to the kitchen, where Philippe is busy preparing dinner. Even though the food smells delicious, I don't have much of an appetite.

I take a seat at the island and watch as Philippe kneads dough.

We remain quiet for a while, then he asks, "What are you going to do?"

I let out a sigh. "I don't know." I glance around the kitchen, then think to say, "I won't sell the house. It's your home, and you can stay here as long as you want."

"It's too big for me," he mutters. My chin starts to tremble, and he quickly adds, "But I'll stay here and look after the house for you."

"Thank you," I squeeze the words out while lowering my head.

Philippe walks to me and wraps me in a fatherly hug. That's all it takes for me to break down.

I'm so tired of crying.

"You still have me," he grumbles, his voice thick from his own sorrow.

I nod. "Thank you, Philippe."

He pulls away and resumes kneading the dough.

"Cami," I hear Max call.

"Coming," I answer as I slip off the stool. I spare Philippe a smile before I leave the kitchen.

When I walk into the foyer, I see Max descending the stairs. He was taking a shower when I woke up from my nap.

"There you are," he sighs, giving me the impression he was worried.

The man has one hell of an obsessive streak. He has to know where I am every second of the day.

Where it might be a red flag for other women, it makes me feel loved. He hasn't said the words to me, but he's shown me in many ways over the past week and a half that he cares.

Max is obsessive, dangerous, and probably one of the scariest people on the planet, but to me, he's everything. He's my sanity, my protector...and the love of my life.

When he reaches me, a frown line appears between his eyes. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Like what?" I ask.

"I'm not sure. I've never seen that expression before."

Has no one ever looked at him with absolute love?

Not ready to say the words to him, I reply, "I was just thinking how lucky I am that you're here." I take hold of his hand and step closer to him. "Thank you for everything, Max. Without you, I wouldn't have survived the past week and a half."

The corner of his mouth lifts. "You would've survived, baby. You're

stronger than you know.”

I shake my head. “You’re the one who gave me strength.”

He pulls me closer and leans down, pressing a tender kiss to my mouth, then asks, “Are you sure you don’t want to go to the penthouse before the moving company packs everything?”

I nod quickly. “Being shot at once was enough for me.”

“We have the guards, and I’ll be there. It will be safe,” he assures me.

I shrug as I snuggle against his chest. “I’d rather not go. As long as the moving company brings everything here, I’m good.”

He pulls back to see my face. “You don’t want to say goodbye to your home?”

I shake my head again. “I don’t have it in me to say goodbye to another thing I love.”

His features soften, and he wraps me up in a tight hug. “I just don’t want you to regret it.”

I take a deep breath of his scent, that I associate with safety and comfort. “I won’t.”

I’m slowly starting to let go of my old life, and I have no idea what the future holds for me.

I just hope that whatever happens next, Max will stay by my side. Time is running out, though. We’ll have to talk about things soon, and it’s a conversation I’m not looking forward to.

What if he leaves?

Chapter 31

Max

I'm watching Cami like a fucking hawk as she eats her first full plate of food since her father passed away.

I'm not going to lie, I was worried she'd lose her curves. Cami's health is one of my biggest concerns at the moment.

"Why do you keep staring at me?" she asks between bites.

"I'm just enjoying the sight of you eating. You had me worried there for a while."

She pauses to say, "I'm glad my appetite is back. I missed food."

I gesture at her plate. "Finish it all, or there's no dessert."

Her eyebrow lifts, and as if the fucking sun decides to finally shine after twenty days of darkness, she smiles.

My woman smiles.

Christ, I've missed it.

"What's for dessert?"

"Finish your food, and you'll find out."

I keep watching her until she takes the last bite, then I give her a smile of approval. "Good girl."

We're sitting in the kitchen, where it's cozier than the dining room. Philippe has already retired to his room for the night, and half the guards are resting while the other half patrols the grounds outside.

"I'm going to release the guards so they can return to St. Monarch's," I inform her.

“I honestly don’t know why they were here for three weeks.”

“We had a lot to do. Now that most of the estate has been wrapped up and the paperwork signed, I can focus all my attention on keeping you safe.” I lift my tumbler of whiskey and take a sip. “By the way, I hate paperwork.”

She gives me another smile, and I drink in the sight like a man dying of thirst.

“Thank you for helping me take care of everything. I really appreciate it.”

“You’re welcome.”

Cami gets up and takes her empty plate to the sink. When she puts it down, she says, “There’s one more thing I have to take care of.”

“What?”

I lift the tumbler to my mouth but pause when she replies, “I have to pay you, but I don’t know how much. What amount did you and my father agree on?”

I set my drink down on the marble top and shake my head. “Things have changed, Cami. I don’t expect to be paid.”

She lets out a chuckle, but it sounds sad instead of happy. “Was I *that* good in bed?”

A frown forms on my forehead, and I point at the stool she just vacated. “Sit.” I wait for her to obey, then say, “I wanted to put off this conversation until you were better, but now’s as good a time as any.”

She swallows hard, and a nervous expression settles in her eyes. “Just rip the bandaid off.”

My eyes narrow on her. “What fucking bandaid? What’s going on? We’ve never talked about payment for my services. I’ve told you I’m not going anywhere.”

She tilts her head and locks eyes with me. “Yes, but you have to return to work at some point. I don’t expect you to guard me forever, Max. The

assholes got what they wanted. My father's dead, so there's no threat anymore."

The pain in her voice is so raw it fucking guts me.

I get up and walk around the island to her. Taking hold of her hips, I turn her to face me and lean down until we're eye-to-eye. "I'm not going anywhere."

"But..."

"Cami, listen to me," I snap.

Her eyes go wide, and I finally have her full attention.

I lift my hands and frame her face. "Yes, I will return to work. No, I'm not going to change. I'm an assassin. I'll always be one."

Heartache darkens her eyes.

"But I'm not letting you go. I meant it when I said you're mine. We'll find a way to make things work between us."

Confusion flutters over her face. "How? Are you going to leave me for weeks or months at a time, and I'll see you between hits?"

Christ, there's no way I'll be able to do that.

I pull back and let out a sigh. "Honestly?"

She nods.

"I was seriously contemplating kidnapping you so I can keep you by my side at all times."

A burst of laughter escapes her, and it makes the corner of my mouth lift.

"It's not kidnapping if I go willingly."

I stare at her for a moment, then ask, "Will you be able to do that?" I wave a hand at nothing in general. "Will you leave all of this behind for me?"

Her gaze searches mine, and when she hesitates, I say the words for the first time in fourteen years, "I love you."

My mother was the last person who heard those words from me.

Cami's lips part with shock, and she blinks at me as if I spoke a foreign language.

Taking her hand, I pull her off the stool so she's standing in front of me. I lift my other hand to the side of her neck and look deep into her eyes. "I love you, Cami. I haven't said those words to anyone but my sister and mother." I lean down and press my forehead to hers. "I fucking love you so much. There's no way I'll ever let you go. I don't care if I have to take you kicking and screaming, but I will if it's the only way I can have you."

"This is kind of romantic," she teases, but then her features tighten with emotion, and she slams into my chest. "I needed to hear it so much."

My woman clings to me as she admits, "I wasn't sure how you felt about me. I've been dying a slow death thinking you were going to leave. I know you said you wouldn't, but you've never told me how you felt, so I wasn't completely convinced what we had was special enough to make you stay with me."

I wrap her up in my arms and lower my head until my mouth brushes against her ear, then I whisper, "I love you, baby."

She lets out a sob, then finally says, "I love you, too. So very much."

Her words fall over me like rain on a summer's day. I swear it washes some of my soul clean from all the blood it's collected over the years.

"Enough to come over to the dark side?" I ask playfully so she'll laugh instead of cry.

Because of Cami, I think I'm actually starting to grow a sense of humor.

"I'll go anywhere with you."

I pull a little back to see her face. "Yeah?"

She scrunches her nose. "Just not a cabin any time soon."

My eyes lock with hers. "I need to hear it again."

"I love you, Max."

I take a deep breath, inhaling the words, and closing my eyes, I savor them.

Cami presses her mouth to mine, and I immediately take control of the kiss. My body pushes against hers, and as she bumps into the island, I claim her the only way I know how – with a fierce obsession that will never die.

When I finally lift my head, we're both breathless. Her lips are swollen from my assault.

To ease the last of my worries, I ask, "Are you really okay coming with me?"

She gives me a mischievous look. "I don't know. It all depends on where your home is."

"I move around a lot. At most, I spend a month in one place. Will you be able to handle that?"

"So we'll travel the world? Constantly?"

When I nod, a beautiful smile splits over her face. "I've always wanted the opportunity to travel around the world and take photos."

"Is that a yes?"

She nods, happiness filling her eyes for the first time since her father died.

"When I retire, we can find ourselves an island and build a home of your choice."

Her eyebrows fly up. "Do you get to retire?"

"Eventually."

"How long do I have before you want to leave France?" she asks as she wraps her arms around my lower back.

"A week or two."

"Okay."

I give her another kiss, then say, "We'll come back to France every now

and then so you can check on things.”

“I’d like that.”

Tilting my head, I cup her jaw. “I can’t promise you sunshine and roses, Cami. But I will protect you with my life and love you with all my heart. I’ll provide whatever you need and take good care of you.”

Her eyes widen. “Is that a proposal?”

I shake my head. “No.”

There’s still one more thing we have to discuss before I can ask her to marry me, but there’s no way I’m doing it now.

Christ, I might never propose, because how the hell do I tell the woman I love I shot her when she was seventeen?

Realizing my answer was blunt, I say, “I want to enjoy this stage of our relationship. We have our entire future ahead of us. There’s no rush.”

Her playfulness returns as she teases, “Do you want to date me?”

I pull her in for another kiss, then grumble, “I want to do more than just date you.”

Grabbing hold of her leggings, I pull them down her legs. I fucking miss the shorts she usually wears, but with all the men around, I’m glad she’s not wearing them.

Happy to see she doesn’t have underwear on, I growl, “I want to fuck you.”

I kiss my way up her thigh and remove her T-shirt. “I want to make you come.”

I lift her onto the island and spread her legs wide so I can step between them. It’s late, and I know no one will come into the kitchen.

Cami leans back and places her hands on the marble top. “Show me how much you want me.”

“You better hold on to something,” I warn her before I lean down to have

my way with her pussy.

Chapter 32

Cami

After the moving company cleared out my penthouse, I put it on the market to sell. I've scattered my belongings throughout the mansion, which I intend to keep.

I don't think I'll ever be able to let go of the home I shared with Papa. Philippe will remain here to take care of the place for me.

I'm glad he didn't decide to leave. It will be nice seeing a familiar face whenever I come to check on things.

I've opted to be a silent partner in Papa's company. The board will make most of the business decisions because I have no experience in solar panels or running a massive company.

I'm sitting in Papa's favorite armchair, remembering the beautiful memories we made in this house, but after a while, the anger creeps in.

The police haven't found out anything new regarding Papa's assassination.

They can't get away with killing my father.

Max comes into the room and sits down in the same seat he sat in when I met him. "I've arranged a private jet for us. We leave tomorrow."

I nod.

His gaze scans my face, then he asks, "You okay?"

I take a deep breath. "You're good at finding people, right?"

"Yes."

"I want to hire you."

I think it's the only way I'll find some relief from my sorrow. I have to

know who's behind the hell I've been put through.

A frown forms on his forehead. "For?"

"I want to know who's behind it all. I want them brought to justice."

He stares at me long and hard before he says, "If it's justice you want, then you have to let the police do their work. If you're looking for revenge, then I can help."

Justice or revenge?

These people tore my life apart.

I keep eye contact with Max as I think about my options.

There's a chance the police won't solve this case, and I can't let that happen.

Am I willing to cross the line? There will be no turning back.

Max gets up from the chair and comes to crouch in front of me. Taking my hand, he says, "You don't have to make the decision. I'll make it for you."

I slip off the chair and wrap my arms around his neck. With my mouth by his ear, I whisper, "I want revenge. I want them to suffer like I've suffered. I want them to bleed like my father bled. I want them all to pay for what they've done to us."

Max pulls back to look at my face. His eyes fill with violence and rage. "Whatever you want, baby. I'll hunt and kill every single last person responsible for your father's death."

Lifting my hand, I press my palm to his jaw, the stubble of his week-old beard rough against my skin. "I want to be there for every second of pain you make them feel."

Max takes a deep breath before letting it out slowly as he considers my request, then he shakes his head. "Leave the killing to me, baby." His eyes caress my face. "Watching the life drain from someone will change you. It's

not something I'm willing to risk."

Sighing, I nod. "Fine, but I want proof of death."

There's a cruel gleam in his eyes as he says, "That I can do, but I don't want to be paid. It will be my pleasure to take revenge for you."

As he rises to his feet, he lifts me against his body. I quickly wrap my legs around him, and while he carries me out of the living room to our bedroom, I kiss and suck on his neck.

I'm dropped on the bed, then Max starts to kiss me as if he's trying to devour my very soul. His movements are rushed as he rips my clothes off, then he orders, "On your hands and knees."

While I turn over and get into position, Max removes his shirt and cargo pants. I feel the bed move as he climbs on, then his palm connects with my right ass cheek.

Tilting my head back, I push my ass out so it's on full display for him. "Harder."

My fingers dig into the covers right before his palm burns against my skin. I let out a throaty moan, my teeth gripping my bottom lip from the sting.

Max's hands rub roughly over my hips and thighs, then he growls, "I'll never get enough of this view. Christ, your ass has me hard twenty-four-seven."

I feel him part my cheeks, and when his finger ghosts down the middle, my eyebrows fly up. My heartbeat speeds up to a wild thudding, and unexpected heat floods my core.

Before I can say anything, he keeps going until he circles my clit.

"Don't worry, baby. I'm not taking your ass today."

My body relaxes, and I let out a chuckle, "I'll need some time to prepare for that if it's something you want to do."

"I know." His finger teases the puckered flesh of my ass before he returns

to my clit.

Why do I find that so freaking hot?

Another hard slap to my asscheek has my muscles tightening again. Max pulls me into a kneeling position so my back is pressed against his chest.

“Open your legs wider,” he orders.

I move my knees farther apart, and without much warning, his cock slams into my pussy with a hard thrust. His palms find my breasts as a moan escapes me.

This position allows me to feel the strength in his body as he starts to fuck me hard. His hands squeeze the fuck out of my breasts, and he begins to kiss and suck at the sensitive flesh beneath my ear.

With every hard thrust, my body jerks in his powerful hold.

I lift my arms over my head and manage to grab hold of him.

Max seems to love this position because his touch is filled with desperation and need as his hands stroke up and down my breasts and abdomen. He continues to fill me with rough thrusts.

“So good,” I moan, loving how forceful he is with me. Caught in the heat of the moment, I admit, “I want you to restrain me and do bad things to me.”

Suddenly Max pulls out of me, I’m forced onto my back, and my hands are pinned to the bed. He only has to use one hand to keep my wrists locked above my head.

Using his knee, he forces my legs open, then he slaps my clit so hard, I let out a shriek.

Jesus.

“Yes,” I gasp from the intense wave of pleasure tightening my abdomen. “Again.”

“You don’t give the orders,” he growls, his eyes filled with darkness and violence.

Holy shit. YesYesYes.

Instead of another slap, Max circles my clit with his finger, not giving me any of the friction I need.

I let out a frustrated groan and try to swivel my hips, but he threatens, “If you move, I stop.”

Dear God, I love this way too much. It’s making my abdomen flutter with anticipation. I feel my arousal trickling down my ass.

“So fucking wet,” Max grumbles. “Do you like it rough, baby?”

It takes some courage to admit, “Yes.”

“Me too.” His palm connects against the sensitive flesh between my thighs, and I open my legs as wide as possible. “That’s it, baby. Let me see every inch of your beautiful pussy.”

His praise has more arousal rushing to my core. “Please,” I beg. “Take me rougher.”

I’m given another slap, and the sharp sting almost has me coming. His fingers tighten around my wrists, cutting off the blood flow to my hands. He leans over me and captures my eyes with a dominating look.

Everything in me tenses, then suddenly, he starts to slap my clit repeatedly with the palm of his hand.

A hard tremor rocks through my body, and my back arches off the mattress. I strain against his hold on my wrists. I gasp desperately for air and can only manage a whimper.

“Come, baby,” he orders.

A scream is ripped from me, and my body starts to convulse as the most powerful orgasm I’ve ever experienced forces the air from my body.

My vision goes black, and all I can feel is Max and the intense pleasure he’s giving me.

I swear I lose consciousness for a moment, and when I come to, Max’s

body is covering mine. His muscled chest and abs force me into the mattress as his cock fills me with a brutal thrust.

I manage to gasp for air, and my vision returns.

His hand still pins my wrists down while his other squeezes my left breast.

“Did you pass out?” he asks, his breaths rough and his features tight with desire.

“I think so.”

It’s one hell of a turn-on for Max because he starts to fuck me like a man possessed. Or obsessed.

Moans and cries spill from me as he takes my body with a ruthlessness I’ve never experienced.

I lose touch with all my senses except for the pleasure he’s giving me. “Please,” I barely manage to gasp. “Please.”

“Come, Camille,” he orders, his voice hoarse.

As another orgasm rips through me with the force of a natural disaster, Max comes so hard that a savage growl escapes him.

The sound prolongs my pleasure, and I struggle to catch my breath.

Max lets go of my wrists and it has the blood rushing to my hands. I feel completely satisfied and drained of all my strength as I lie beneath Max.

Jesus, that was out of this world. I don’t think I’ll be able to walk straight for a while.

Chapter 33

Max

We took the private jet to Geneva, where I have a house near St. Monarch's.

While I'm driving us to the place I consider my base of operations, Cami stares out of the window. From her sad expression, I can see she's thinking of her father.

Her grief is still palpable at times, and I know it will take months, if not years, for her to move on from the loss she's suffered.

When we pull up to my property, that's surrounded by high walls and protected with a state-of-the-art security system, the sadness drains from her face, and curiosity fills her eyes.

"I did not expect a mansion," she admits.

"I don't just have cabins," I say as I bring the armored SUV to a stop by the front steps. "This will be home when we're not traveling for work."

"How often will we be here?" she asks.

"Usually over the holidays. I'm not too fond of killing people during the festive season," I admit as I climb out of the vehicle.

When I unlock the front door, Cami asks, "Do you like Christmas?"

I nod. "As much as the next person."

My reply makes her smile before she glances around the foyer.

"I'm a minimalist," I explain the lack of décor.

"Seeing as this will be my home, too," she turns to face me with a hopeful gaze, "can I add a few things?"

Her penthouse was tastefully decorated, so I don't mind. "Of course."

Placing my hand on her lower back, I show her the rest of the house before taking her to my 'office.' The room is more of an armory where I keep all my weapons and my main computer system, where I do most of the tracking.

"Jesus," Cami whispers as her eyes flit over all the guns, rifles, knives, and grenades. "You have enough for an army."

"I like to be prepared," I state the obvious.

"For what?" she gasps, her eyes landing on me. "A war?"

"Among other things," I chuckle, finding her reaction amusing.

She turns to face all the monitors. "Holy shit, Max. Why do you have so many?"

I walk to the desk that fills the entire wall space and switch on my mainframe. The monitors come to life, showing a variety of information.

Some are streaming live locations from around the world, and others are doing automatic facial recognition of other assassins. I like to keep track of the competition.

"Dear God," Cami whispers. "I have to admit this is all a little intimidating. I can barely get my laptop to work."

I take hold of her hand and lead her out of the room so we can bring our luggage in.

Cami left some of her clothes in France but brought most with her, so I have to do a couple of trips to carry all the bags to the main bedroom.

She looks at the kingsize bed and black bedding, then says, "I'll have to add some color to the room."

"Nothing too bright, please."

"I was thinking pink and purple," she teases me as she opens one of her bags.

"I'll tan your ass red," I threaten while walking into the ensuite closet. I

move my clothes over to the right side to make space for hers.

“I’m going to get to work,” I say, watching as she sorts her clothes into groups on the bed.

“Okay.” When I walk to the door, she asks, “Is there food in the kitchen?”

I shake my head. “We’ll go shopping tomorrow. We can go out for dinner if you like.”

Her eyebrow lifts. “That will be a first for us.”

“Think about what you feel like eating and let me know.”

I leave the bedroom and head to my office. Taking a seat in front of the monitors, I program my facial recognition software to focus on finding Jedrik Rusnak.

Besides St. Monarch’s, he’s the only person who has the information I need. While I wait for the program to do its job, I check for any new contracts on St. Monarch’s database.

Seeing two hits have been ordered, I check the targets but don’t recognize the names, so it’s no one important.

I check the monitor where images of faces are flashing across it, and growing impatient, I start to do a search of my own, looking for properties Rusnak might own.

Time slips away, and I don’t realize how late it is until Cami peeks into the office. “It’s eight o’clock. Are we still going out for dinner?”

“Fuck,” I mutter, letting out a sigh. “Sorry, baby. I lost track of time.”

“It’s okay.”

I leave the mainframe on so it can continue to search for Rusnak and walk to the doorway. I press a kiss to Cami’s forehead, then say, “Give me a couple of minutes to shower.”

“Take your time.”

Remembering something, I quickly walk back to the desk and pull a

drawer open. Picking up a tracking device, I head back to Cami and place the small black dot behind her ear. “It’s a tracking device,” I explain. “I’ll get you something more permanent soon.”

She gives me a skeptical look. “Permanent?”

“Implant,” I clarify. “If you’re ever taken, it will help me find you quicker.”

“On one condition,” she says. “You have to get one as well.” Then she points to the computer system behind me. “And you have to show me how to find you with all of that.”

The corner of my mouth lifts, and lifting my hand, I take hold of the back of her neck. “I’ll get one, but if I ever disappear, you must call Nikolai for help. Under no circumstance will you put yourself in danger for me. Nikolai will know how to find me, and he has the resources.”

Cami scrunches her nose, but she doesn’t argue. “I need Nikolai’s phone number.” Suddenly her eyes widen. “Jesus, I can’t remember where my cell phone is.”

Frowning, I ask, “When did you last use it?”

She shakes her head. “I left it off and honestly forgot about it. I didn’t want to see all the messages of condolences.”

“We’ll check through your stuff tomorrow. If you’ve lost it, we’ll get you a new one.”

We walk to the main bedroom, and while I strip out of my clothes, I glance around at all the signs that Cami’s moved in. Her hand lotion and a box of tissues on the left bedside table. Her makeup and skincare products on the dressing table.

Satisfaction fills my chest, and when I walk into the ensuite bathroom and see her toothbrush next to mine, a smile tugs at my mouth.

The realization sinks in that Cami is here, and she’s all mine. Every sexy

inch of her.

Forever.

Chapter 34

Cami

As we drive through the imposing gates of St. Monarch's, my eyes flit everywhere to take in the beautifully landscaped garden and castle.

"God, Max," I breathe. "It feels like we've been transported to another world."

"Just stay by my side. Even though there's a no-killing policy, some of the people here are our enemies." He says as he parks the SUV.

I wait for him to open my door, then get out and stick to his side as we walk to the front doors. We're searched by guards, and Max hands over the two guns he has on his person.

We're here for the tracking device implants. I'm assuming it will be similar to my birth control in my upper arm.

Inside the Castle, the ceiling is painted with old battles, and the floors are marble. There are guards stationed everywhere, and as Max wraps his arm around me, I press closer to his side while trying not to make eye contact with anyone.

When we turn into a hallway, a man in his early fifties comes toward us. He's dressed in an immaculate suit with an air of authority coming from him in waves.

"Director Koslov," Max says as he reaches a hand out to greet the man in charge of St. Monarch's.

Director Koslov smiles at Max. "Mr. Levin, it's always a pleasure to have you visit us." His dark brown eyes flick to me. "Miss DuBois, my condolences for your loss. Your father was a good man."

“Thank you,” I murmur, the smile I’ve perfected over the years on my face.

Director Koslov gestures toward a door. “This way, please.”

When we step inside the room, it looks like an infirmary. A man who seems to be a doctor greets us with a nod.

“Tracking implants?” he checks with Max, and when he nods, the doctor asks, “Where do you prefer I place the devices?”

Max thinks for a moment, then takes hold of my hand. “Behind her left ear.”

The doctor gestures at the nearest bed. “Please take a seat, Miss DuBois.”

I give Max a nervous glance as I climb onto the bed. The doctor takes hold of my hand and cleans the skin with an antiseptic wipe before picking up an injection.

The pinch is sharp as he pushes the needle beneath my skin, and a couple of seconds later, it’s done.

Director Koslov moves to stand next to Max. “You should be able to access the chip’s location. Let’s test it.”

Max pulls his cell phone out, and after a minute, he says, “I’ve got her.”

Yes, you do.

When it’s Max’s turn, I ask, “Will I be able to see the tracking device’s location on my phone?”

“Yes,” Director Koslov answers. “We’ll download St. Monarch’s program onto your device and give you a password. Max will show you how to use the app.”

I watch as the microchip is injected in the same spot as mine, then I smile. “We got matching tracking devices.”

Director Koslov lets out a chuckle, but Max just shakes his head at me as he mutters, “Only you would find that romantic.”

“Let’s go to my office,” Director Koslov gestures to the doorway, then asks, “Do you have your cell phone on you, Miss DuBois?”

“Ahh...I kind of misplaced it.”

Max takes my hand and rubs his thumb over my skin. “Besides the tracking devices, we’re here for an encrypted cell phone.”

Oh, I like the sound of that.

We follow Director Koslov into a luxurious office, then I see the cabinets filled with guns lining the wall behind a huge oak desk. He gestures to a seating area, and as we sit down, he walks to a vault and opens it.

I can’t see inside, but he comes out with a tray of cell phones. “Which one do you prefer, Miss DuBois?”

I glance over the devices and choose a Samsung that folds open. I’ll be able to read books on it. “This one, please.”

He nods and continues to put a SIM card into it before turning on the phone. I watch as he programs the device, then he sits next to me and holds the screen in front of my face. “Don’t smile.”

When he’s done with the biometric authentication, he hands the phone to me.

“I’ll show you the St. Monarch’s app when we’re home,” Max says, then he rises to his feet and shakes hands with Director Koslov. “Thank you.”

I get up, and with a smile, I say, “It was a pleasure meeting you. Have a great day.”

Director Koslov returns my smile. “The pleasure was mine, Miss Dubois.”

When we walk out of the office, I shove my new cell phone into my handbag. Then I smell food. “Is there a restaurant on the premises?”

“Yes.” Max glances at me. “Are you hungry?”

I give him an incredulous look. “Is that a stupid question?”

The corner of his mouth lifts for a slight moment. “My mistake.”

He leads me to a dining hall and pulls a chair out for me. When I sit down, I glance at the other guests who are enjoying lunch.

There are some scary-looking people, and I quickly turn my attention to my man, who I consider the most badass.

I pick up a menu and peruse the selection of dishes. “I’ll have an open beef and mustard sandwich and a coke.”

When a waiter comes to our table, Max gives my order and only asks for a glass of water for himself.”

“Not hungry?” I ask.

He shakes his head. “Let me have your phone so I can get everything set up for you.”

I quickly take the device from my handbag and hand it over to him.

Max moves his chair closer to mine so I can see what he does. He accesses St. Monarch’s app, and after I key in the numbers Papa gave me in the letter, he shows me how the dashboard works.

Luckily, I memorized the numbers. I thought they were a bank account number and not a passcode.

Max returns the phone to me then says, “In the finance section, you’ll see the account your father had set up for you.”

I go into the section, and a wave of sadness hits when I see Papa transferred a large sum into the account. He wanted to make sure I would never lack anything.

Oh, Papa. I’d much rather have you with me but thank you for taking care of me.

I exit the finance section and click on “Track & Trace.”

My lips curve into a smile when I see the map showing a red dot at our location.

“I like that I can keep an eye on you,” I tease Max.

He rests his arm on the chair behind me and leans into me. “Now there’s no getting away from me.”

Chapter 35

Max

While Cami's enjoying her sandwich, my eyes lock on Rusnak as he walks into the dining hall.

No fucking wonder I haven't been able to find him. He's been hiding at St. Monarch's.

"Stay here," I order Cami. "I'll be back in a couple of minutes."

"Where are you going?" she asks.

"To talk to someone," I answer as I get up.

As I walk to Rusnak, he glances in my direction, then a wide fucking smile spreads over his face. "Maxim, what a surprise."

He takes a seat at a table and gestures to one of the open chairs. "Care to join me? I suspect we have a lot to talk about."

When his eyes flick in Cami's direction, I growl, "Don't fucking look at my woman."

His eyebrow lifts as he turns his attention to me. "Your woman? I wasn't aware."

"Now you are," I mutter. Getting down to business, I say, "Tell me who hired you."

A chuckle escapes him as he shakes his head. "You know that's not how it works. Confidentiality and all."

I lean forward, and resting my forearms on the table, I lock eyes with the fucker. "I will hunt you to the ends of the earth. If you ever want a moment's peace again, you'll give me the name."

Again he shakes his head. "I can stay here for the rest of my life."

Threatening me won't work."

Jesus Christ.

I lean back in my chair and ask, "What's your price?"

His smile widens. "Information is costly, Maxim."

I swear to God, this man is testing the little patience I have. "How. Fucking. Much?"

"I'm feeling generous." He shrugs. "Ten million. Right now."

My eyes flick to Cami, and I see her watching us.

Taking out my cell phone, I access my account and authorize a transfer of ten million to Ruznak. A code is generated, which I have to give to him so he can gain access to the funds.

"I want the name before I give you the code," I say. "It's not negotiable."

He pulls a serviette closer, and taking a pen from his pocket, he writes something on the square. Keeping his hand over the serviette, he lifts an eyebrow at me. "On three. Do you want to count, or should I?"

"Three," I mutter. "Two...One." I turn my phone's screen so he can see the numbers while I read the name.

Fabian Roux.

As I rise from the chair, I grab the pen from Rusnak and stab it into his hand before I punch him so hard he falls off -his chair.

"That's for killing my woman's father," I growl as I stalk around the table, and before he can get up, I kick him in the chin, rendering him unconscious. "Fucking piece of shit."

"Max," Cami hisses, her eyes filled with panic.

She glances around as if she's expecting an attack.

Guards enter the dining hall, and I hold my arms up, saying, "I'm leaving."

I move closer to Cami, and grabbing her arm, I steer her out of the dining

hall.

“Do you feel better, Mr. Levin?” Director Koslov calls out from the hallway we’re passing by.

“Not by a long shot, but it will have to do for the time being,” I answer before I continue to walk to the front doors.

As much as the fucker annoys me, he’s not worth the energy it would take to hunt and kill him, and there’s an unwritten rule that we don’t go after other assassins as a professional courtesy.

I stop by the guard to collect my guns, and as we head to the SUV, Cami whispers, “Jesus, Max. I don’t know why you beat him, but it was freaking hot.”

I bundle her into the passenger seat and strap the safety belt across her chest. Shutting the door, I stalk around the vehicle, taking a deep breath to ease my temper.

When I slide behind the steering wheel, I can feel her eyes on me. I start the engine, and as I drive to the exit, I say, “Rusnak killed your father, and I have the name of the man who ordered the hit.”

My eyes flick to Cami, and I see her lips part with shock. “The man you just beat up killed Papa?” Her features tighten as anger pours through her. “Who ordered the assassination?”

Only when we leave the grounds of St. Monarch’s behind do I answer, “Fabian Roux. Does the name ring a bell?”

“No.” She digs her phone out of her bag and searches the name on Google. “He’s the CEO of Comprehensive Energies. It’s the largest energy company in France.”

“Fucking finally,” I mutter. “That’s the reason he went after your father. The green policy your father wanted to implement would’ve cost the company a loss.”

Cami shakes her head, then she finds a photo of Fabian Roux, and disgust tightens her features. “I want him dead, Max.”

“I’ll take care of the fucker,” I promise.

“When?” she asks, still reading up on information about the man.

“Once I’ve arranged with Nikolai for you to stay with them on the island.”

Her eyes fly to me, and as I pull up the driveway of our home, she says, “No, I’m going with you.”

When I shake my head, she reminds me, “You said we’ll always stick together. Where you go, I go. I’ll be safer with you, and I don’t know the Vetrovs that well.”

Christ.

I park the car then turn in my seat to face her. “The whole of France knows who you are, and it will be dangerous. You got along with Abigail at the wedding. At the most, I’ll be gone twenty-four hours.”

Cami takes a calming breath then nods. “Sorry, my emotions got the best of me.”

I lean across the console and place my hand at the side of her neck. Locking eyes with her, I say, “I’m doing what’s best for you, baby.”

She nods again before wrapping her arms around my neck. Near my ear, she whispers, “I want him to know he’s going to die. I want him to feel what Papa felt.”

I press a kiss to the side of her head and promise, “He’ll know. I promise.”

We pull away from each other and climb out of the SUV. As we walk to the front door, Cami asks, “When will it happen?”

“I need a couple of days to find out what his routine is,” I reply. Stepping inside the house, I add, “And to decide on the method I’ll use to eliminate

him.”

Cami places her hand back on the table in the foyer, then lets out a sigh. “I’m tired.”

Walking closer to her, I take her hand and pull her to the living room. I push her down on the couch and hand her the TV remote. “Snacks?”

She gives me a grateful smile. “Please.”

Luckily we did some shopping before we went to St. Monarch’s, so we’re all stocked up on comfort food for my woman.

I grab a box of chocolate-covered pretzel sticks and a soda, then head back to the living room. I hand them to her and press a kiss to her mouth. “I’ll be in my office.”

“Okay.” Just as I pull away, she says, “You’re an incredible man, Max. I love you.”

“Love you too, baby.”

Chapter 36

Cami

For the past three days, Max has been working non-stop. At first, I left him alone so I wouldn't get in the way, but that didn't last long.

I'm sitting next to him in the office and watching security footage of Fabian Roux going about his daily routine as if he didn't have my father killed.

The bastard.

I never knew I could hate another person with such a vengeance.

Fabian spends most of his time at the office. Max somehow hacked into the company's security system, and now I'm binge-watching the asshole working.

On another monitor, Max is memorizing the layout of Fabian's house. God only knows where he got the plans for the property.

Exhausted, he lets out a sigh, then another monitor starts flashing the word, 'Confirmed.'

Immediately he straightens up and presses a key.

Jedrik Ruznak. Switzerland, Geneva.

46.2044° N, 6.1432° E

TARGET FOUND

There's a camera feed showing Ruznak sitting in an SUV at a traffic light.

"You're tracking him?" I ask.

"Yes. I like to keep an eye on the competition."

My eyes dart between the monitor and Max's face. "He's a trained assassin, right? Like you?"

He shakes his head. “He’s nothing like me. He’s cocky and likes to take risks. That’s why he’s a B-level assassin. He thinks he’s good, but he’s not.”

“Why haven’t you killed him yet?” I ask out of pure curiosity.

“There’s an unspoken truce among assassins unless a contract is taken out on one. Then all bets are off.”

“Interesting,” I murmur before I grin at him. “I like knowing the best assassin belongs to me.”

“I’m all yours, baby.” Max relaxes back in his chair and turns his eyes to me. “I’m leaving early tomorrow morning.”

Surprised, I gape at him. “That soon?”

He nods, and bringing a hand to my face, he strokes my cheek. “You have to pack so I can take you to Nikolai’s island.”

I’m not happy I’ll be separated from Max, but I understand he wants to keep me safe.

“Okay,” I reply, and getting up, I walk to the door.

Before I can reach it, Max says, “I’ll be up in a minute. Get undressed and wait on the bed for me.”

A smile splits over my face, and glancing at him from over my shoulder, I smack my ass. “Don’t make me wait long, or I’ll start without you.”

The corner of his mouth lifts before he focuses on the monitors again.

I head up to our bedroom, and walking inside, I quickly pack my luggage for the trip. When I’m sure I have everything, I take off my clothes and throw them in the laundry basket before crawling onto the bed and lying on my stomach.

Hearing Max come down the hallway, I pretend to be asleep, wanting to see what he’ll do.

I listen to the rustle of his clothes as he probably takes them off, then the bed dips as he climbs on.

When his hand connects with my butt, I let out a playful shriek. His finger teases my clit, and knowing it will turn him on, I moan, “I need you inside me.”

Max moves me onto my side before lying down behind me. I feel his hardness pressing against my ass as he pulls my back flush with his chest.

Like always, I don’t get much warning before he enters me with a ruthless thrust. His hand grips my hip, and he pushes his other arm beneath my head, keeping me locked to him with a chokehold.

“Yes,” I encourage him. “Take me roughly, my love.”

He pulls out of me before slamming freaking hard back inside me, then he proceeds to fuck me like a savage.

His rock-hard abdomen slaps the everliving hell out of my asscheeks, and I love it.

As his thrusts come harder and faster, I’m pushed onto my stomach, his full weight pushing me hard into the mattress.

I open my legs as wide as I can while whimpers spill over my lips. “Yes. Yes. Yes,” I moan the words over and over.

His breaths are ragged, his body moving like a violent storm against mine. “Christ,” he grunts. “I fucking love how well you take my cock.”

“Max,” I gasp, unadulterated desire and need tensing my muscles. “Harder. I want to feel you inside me while you’re gone.”

His hand wraps around the back of my neck, and I’m pressed deeper into the mattress. With the brutal grip he has on me, he fucks me raw until I’m deliriously begging, “Please. Please. Please.”

“Come,” he growls the order I desperately need to hear.

His other hand connects with my asscheek, and it has pleasure tearing through me. It’s so intense I can’t breathe and only manage a moan.

God, the way this man fucks me is mind-blowing.

Max buries himself deep inside me with a harsh grunt, then his body collapses on top of mine as he orgasms, his cock jerking inside me.

“Jesus,” I gasp, trying to catch my breath.

He pulls out and rolls off me, his breath racing over his parted lips.

I move closer to him and snuggle against his side while my eyes drift over his naked body, that’s nothing short of a masterpiece.

I rest my hand on his chest and say, “I’m going to miss you.”

He wraps his arm around my shoulders and kisses the top of my head, “I’ll be back before you know it.”

God, I hope so.

Once we’ve caught our breaths, Max climbs out of bed and walks to the bathroom. I hear the shower turn on, then he says, “Come join me.”

With a smile, I slip off the bed and going to the bathroom, I step into the shower with him. Taking the body wash, I squirt some into my hand, then say, “Stand still while I wash you.”

His mouth lifts in a rare hot smirk as my palms glide over his skin. I try to memorize every inch of his body before I’m done.

Max takes his time washing me, and the moment he’s finished, he kisses me tenderly. It’s filled with the promise that he’ll come back to me.

His arms engulf me against his chest, and he holds me for a long while.

“Don’t worry, baby. This is what I do. I’ll come back to you. I promise.”

“You better,” I whisper. “I can’t lose you too.”

He pushes me back and locks eyes with me. “I’m the best at what I do. You can’t worry every time I leave.”

Lifting my hand, I place my palm against his jaw. “I’ll always worry, Max.” My lips curve up into a tender smile. “When you told me you loved me, you signed up for a lifetime of me worrying about every little thing you do. I know you’re used to being a lone wolf, but you’re not alone anymore.

I'm here now."

Emotion fills his eyes, and he looks at me as if I'm his beginning and end. "Thank you, Camille." He tilts his head, his love for me showing on his face. "Thank you for falling in love with me, for caring about what happens to me, for bringing happiness into my life."

I lift myself onto my tiptoes and press a soft kiss to his mouth. "I love you, Max. With all my heart."

Chapter 37

Max

As we touch down on the island just before midnight, I hold Cami's hand tightly, wanting to savor every moment I get to touch her before I have to leave her behind.

Until the emotional moment we shared in the shower, I haven't recently thought of the secret I'm keeping from her.

It's not that I've forgotten, but we've been busy settling into our life together and discovering who was behind Maurice's death.

I thought I could keep the secret forever and take it to my grave. I thought I didn't have to marry Cami, that we could just enjoy our lives together as a couple.

I was wrong.

After the emotional moment in the shower where she made me understand I now have someone who worries about my safety, I realized I want the ultimate commitment between us. I want her to take my last name. I want to have children with her.

I want to marry Cami.

And for that to happen, I have to come clean and hope to all that's holy, she forgives me. It's either that or I'll fucking hold her prisoner until she learns to love me again.

We step off the plane, and I can't bring myself to smile at Nikolai and Abigail, who are waiting for us.

"Thank you for letting Cami visit while I take care of business."

My friend smiles at me. "It's our pleasure to have her."

"I don't have time to stay," I inform him. "The sooner I get going, the sooner I'm back."

He nods. "Go, brother. I'll make sure nothing happens to Cami."

I turn to face her and hate the worry in her eyes. She forces a brave smile to her face. "Don't make me wait too long."

I press a kiss to her mouth, then reply, "I won't."

Turning away from her, I walk back to the plane and climb the steps. At the door, I glance back at the woman I love before I disappear into the cabin.

I instruct the pilot to take off, and finding my seat, I strap the safety belt on. I pull my phone out of my pocket and quickly type a message for Cami before I turn off the device.

When I get back, I have a question to ask you.

After arriving in France, I went straight to Cami's family home.

Philippe isn't happy that I'm alone. The man is grumbling under his breath while he cleans the kitchen.

"How is she settling in? Is she doing better?" he asks, not even glancing my way.

"She's happy, Philippe," I assure him.

"Good," he mutters, wiping his hands on a towel. "Thank you for taking care of her. She seems to really love you."

"And I love her." I pick up the glass of water and take a sip before saying. "I'm heading out. I'll be back later."

He just nods as I walk out of the kitchen. I'm dressed in my usual black suit, and as I leave the house, I grab my duffle bag I left in the foyer.

Roux's property isn't far from Cami's family home.

After checking the company's security, it was clear I wouldn't be able to get into his company's building. The security is fucking tight. So it's left me with only two options. Either I take him out while he's traveling, which wouldn't make it personal like Cami requested, or I kill him at his house.

I'm going with the house option so I can take my time. Luckily Roux lives alone. Seems he learned his lesson after his fourth divorce.

I park the SUV a couple of miles away from Roux's mansion, and picking up the duffle bag, I climb out of the vehicle.

It's after eleven, and the street is empty as I walk the short distance to the corner property. Under cover of darkness, I throw the bag over the wall and hoisting myself up, I quickly jump over, landing in a crouched position.

I zip the bag open before pulling out my Heckler & Koch and attaching a silencer. Taking a KA-BAR and a holster out, I attach it to my belt before I zip the bag shut.

Rising to my feet, I leave the duffle bag by the wall and creep toward the back of the house.

The sliding doors are wide open, and the lights are on in the house. Living in a gated community makes people let down their guard. Because he lives in the same area as Cami, I've been able to time the guards' schedule and know they're not due to patrol the area for another thirty minutes.

I'm unsure which room Roux will be in, and as I slip through the doors, I quickly move to the wall and press my body against it. I stand still for a moment and listen for any movement.

Not hearing anything, I head through the living room and up the stairs.

Suddenly, Roux coughs, giving me an indication of where he is. Holding my gun ready, I move closer to the room he's in, and when I appear in the doorway, he doesn't even look up.

Dumb fuck.

I step inside, and he glances up, looks down at the paperwork he's busy with, then glances up again. His eyes go wide as saucers, and he tries to scramble up from his chair but only manages to fall on his ass.

"Mr. Levin, wait. Wait!"

I lower the gun and shake my head at the man. "Fine, I'll wait."

He finally climbs to his feet, and shaking like a leaf, he wildly glances around the room. "I can pay you."

I shake my head.

"It was business."

I let out a sigh and step deeper into the room. "I'm glad you know why I'm here. It saves me the time of explaining."

I take a good look at the man who killed Maurice, then say, "I'm here on behalf of Camille DuBois."

His face is pale, all the blood drained from it.

"I can pay double whatever she's paying you," he tries to bargain for his life.

"Unfortunately, you can't. I'm doing my fiancée a favor."

"Oh God," he whimpers.

This is why I don't like up close and personal killings. They always piss themselves and try to make a deal. It's not my style. A clean shot from a distance is so much better.

I planned on torturing him a little, but now that I'm face to face with the fucker, I just want to get the job over with so I can get back to Cami.

Needing one question answered, I ask, "Were you responsible for the attack on Camille's penthouse?"

Shakily, he nods. "I can explain. Let's talk like rational men. I'm sure we can make a deal that will benefit us both."

Raising my arm, I aim the silencer at Roux. "Maurice was a good man,

and you should've done your homework before killing him. You would've known not to make such a stupid mistake.”

“He was going t—”

I pull the trigger, burying a bullet in his throat. For a moment, I watch as he grabs at his neck while the blood spills from the hole, then I fire another shot right between his eyes.

I let out another sigh. “All this could've been avoided, but then I wouldn't have Cami.” I walk closer to the body and fire another shot into the side of his head to ensure the fucker doesn't miraculously survive.

With the job done, I leave the house the way I entered it and place my weapons back in the duffle bag. I toss the bag over the wall before hoisting myself over too.

When I return to the SUV, I start the engine and drive back to Cami's house.

With this chapter closed, I now only have one thing left to do, and then I'll be able to live my life with Cami in peace.

Well, as much peace as an assassin can have.

Chapter 38

Cami

I'm practically bouncing with excitement as I watch the plane land, and the moment it comes to a stop, I begin to walk closer.

It takes too long for the doors to open and the steps to be put in place, and when Max finally appears, I dart forward.

At the bottom of the steps, I plow into his chest and hug the living hell out of him. "God, I missed you so much."

He lets out a chuckle as he lifts me against his body. "It was only a couple of days, baby. But I love the warm welcome."

"Did everything go well?" Nikolai asks behind me.

The Vetrovs were the perfect hosts, and I got to know Abigail a little better. She's not much younger than me, and I hope we can cultivate a friendship in the future.

Max pulls away from me to shake his friend's hand while answering, "Yes, it was an easy hit." He turns his gaze to me. "The target has been eliminated."

A wave of emotion hits, and knowing Fabian Roux paid for what he did to us – for killing my father – there's also a sense of justice I desperately needed.

There's closure.

Max quickly pulls me back into his arms, and a second later, a sob escapes me. For the first time since my father passed away, I'm not crying because of grief but because of the intense relief.

"Thank you," I whisper as I fight to regain control over my emotions.

Max peppers my hair with kisses and holds me tighter. “You’re welcome, baby.”

When I’ve calmed down, Nikolai asks, “Are you staying?”

Max shakes his head. “Unfortunately not. I have something important to take care of.”

While the men shake hands, I hurry to where I left my overnight bag and pick it up. As I walk back to Max, he takes the luggage from me.

“Once again, thank you for watching over Cami,” he says to Nikolai.

“Anytime, brother.”

“Thank you for having me,” I say with a smile. “Tell Abigail I’ll text her soon.”

“Will do,” Nikolai replies. “It’s a pity she had a dentist appointment and couldn’t be here to see you off.”

Max grips my hand in his and leads me up the steps. In the cabin, I take my seat while he places my luggage in a compartment before notifying the pilot to take off.

When Max sits down next to me, I grab hold of his jaw and kiss the ever-loving crap out of him. My man returns the kiss with the passion I’ve come to expect of him.

Pulling back, I ask, “What did you want to ask me?”

I’ve been dying to know. I have an idea what the question might be, but I don’t want to get my hopes up. He may just want to take me on a vacation.

“Wait until we’re in the air, then you can’t get off the plane,” he says.

My brow furrows. “Now you have me worried.”

So much for my guess.

Max links his fingers with mine and just stares at me as the plane takes off.

I wait.

And I wait some more.

When I can't stand it any longer, I say, "Ask the question already."

A serious expression tightens his features, and my heart sets off at a crazy pace.

Max takes a deep breath, and when worry creeps into his eyes, anxiety pours into my heart.

"The gunshot wound on your back..."

"Oh. Dear God," I let out a relieved chuckle. "I thought it was going to be something bad."

The gunshot wound.

I never told Max what happened.

My heartbeat slows down as I think about one of the darkest times in my life.

I shift in my seat. "It happened when I was seventeen."

It looks like Max wants to say something, but I shake my head. "I kind of have to get it all out in one go. It's difficult for me to talk about, so it would be great if you could just listen until I'm done."

He nods and grips my hand tighter.

"So..." I draw my bottom lip between my teeth as I try to think of how to word it. "I had depression, and honestly, I can't even remember why. It gradually crept up on me and dragged me down into a dark hole."

Not able to keep looking at Max, I lower my gaze to our joint hands.

"Anyway, I got involved with this guy, Alain Barnard. Papa disapproved of him, but I didn't listen." I let out a bitter chuckle. "I thought I was in love."

I take a deep breath, but it doesn't help. The regret of the stupidest thing I've ever done weighs heavy on my heart.

"He took me to his house, and once we were there, his demeanor changed. Turns out I let myself get kidnapped for ransom." *Jesus, was I*

gullible back then. “Alain and his father wanted to make a recording of me where I had to tell my father to pay twenty million euros. I overheard them saying they were going to have to kill me after they got the money from my father. I panicked and started fighting. I just kept thinking I had to get out of there.”

I gather my courage and lift my eyes to Max’s. There’s compassion on his face, and it gives me the strength to finish my story.

“As I stormed Alain, thinking I could actually take him on, bullets started flying. One hit me, and when I woke up, I was in the hospital.” I shrug and let out an awkward burst of laughter. “And that’s the story of the stupidest shit I’ve ever done.”

Max shakes his head at me. Remorse tightens his features, then he says, “I shot you, Cami.”

His words don’t quite register. “What?”

“There’s more to your story. The Barnards owed the bratva money, and I was contracted to kill them. When I took the shot, you came out of nowhere and took the bullet meant for the son. It was the only mistake I’ve made in my entire career.”

My jaw drops, and staring at Max, I try to process what he’s telling me.

“I’ve never run so fast in my entire fucking life. You were unconscious when I got to you, and I did the only thing I could think of. I took you to the nearest hospital and left you there.”

Holy. Freaking. Shit.

At a loss for words, I can only stare at Max.

“I’m sorry, Cami. I’ve lived with the regret for the past ten years, and when the opportunity arose to pay you back for what I did to you, I took it. That’s why I agreed to protect you.”

Again. Holy fucking shit.

When I keep blinking at him, he pleads, “Say something.”

Max never pleads.

I shake my head and try to form a word. “Ahh…”

“Baby?” He lifts his hand to my cheek. “Talk to me.”

“You shot me?”

“Yes.”

“Oh.” It takes another minute before I’m actually able to say, “So, you making a mistake is what actually saved my life?”

Max frowns at me. “What?”

“They were going to kill me after they got the money. Sure, there was a chance the police would find me, but the odds weren’t in my favor. You *accidentally* shot me and took me to the hospital.”

“Christ, woman,” he mutters. “Why are you taking this so well?”

“Should I lose my shit instead? Will it help?”

“No.”

I stare at the man I love, and I can’t find it in me to get angry. “What do you want me to say? I know you didn’t mean to shoot me, Max. You took the job to protect me to make up for it. You’ve given me so much more than what you *think* you took from me that day.”

Max locks eyes with me. “I never thought I’d get the chance to ask for your forgiveness, but will you forgive me?”

“God, this was the question you wanted to ask me? Damn, did I get it wrong,” I mutter. “Of course, I forgive you, Max.”

“Technically, it wasn’t the question I wanted to ask,” he says. “I needed to get this secret out of the way so I could ask you *the* question.”

“Jesus, that sounded confusing.” A smile curves my lips. “What did you want to ask?”

He lifts my hand to his mouth and presses a kiss to my fingers. “Marry

me.”

I blink at the man as if he’s lost his mind. “Seriously? That’s an order.” I pull my hand from his. “Try again.”

The corner of his mouth lifts, and unbuckling his seat belt, he moves into a kneeling position in front of me. “Cami, will you marry me?”

I used to think I wanted an elaborate proposal, but as I look at Max kneeling before me, I wouldn’t want it any other way.

I let out a chuckle. “Okay.”

Intense relief washes over his features, and darting up, he frames my face with his hands and kisses me with a burning passion.

Epilogue

Max

(Six months later...)

I'm the luckiest bastard alive.

I watch as Cami takes photos of surfboards planted into the sand on a beach in Rio de Janeiro.

We're here because I have a contract to take out an arms dealer, and while I'm scoping the area and target, Cami gets to explore this beautiful country.

There's a happy smile on her face, and as she lowers the camera, she glances at me. For the past week, something has been different about her, but I can't put my finger on it.

I loosen the tie from around my neck, and sitting down on the sand, I scan the beach before watching my fiancée do what she loves most.

Suddenly she turns around, and I manage to lift my arm to cover my face as she snaps a photo of me.

"Oh, come on," she complains. "I just want one photo."

"No." I shake my head and gesture to the nature around us. "There's plenty for you to photograph."

"I want one of you, not some rock sticking out of the ocean."

She walks closer and plops down beside me. "Let's negotiate."

"Okay," I agree. "What's your offer?"

"A blowjob."

I let out a chuckle. "No. I want something better."

She thinks for a moment, then says, “Tell me what you want.”

I don’t hesitate as I answer, “A wedding and a baby. In no specific order.”

“Whoa.” She stares at me with wide eyes. “That’s going to cost you a dozen photos in which you will pose exactly how I want you to pose.”

“Twelve photos for a wedding and a baby,” I agree. “You have a deal.”

She lets out a burst of laughter as she lies back in the sand. “It sounds like a lame title for a romance movie.”

I lean over her and press a kiss to her mouth. “A deal’s a deal. No backing out.”

She brings the camera between us and points it up at me. “Smile, Max.”

I let out a sigh and give her what she wants. When she’s done taking the photo, she says, “You said in no particular order, right?”

“Yes.”

She sits up and points the damn camera at me again, then she takes a photo as she says, “I’m pregnant.”

It takes a moment for her words to register. “You’re pregnant?”

“Yes.” Setting the camera down, she climbs onto my lap and wraps her arms around my neck. “We’re going to be parents in approximately six months. I took a pregnancy test last week, and it was positive.”

I stare at Cami as an intense wave of happiness hits me square in the chest.

Her eyes flit over my face. “Say something.”

Slowly a smile tugs at my mouth. “Are you serious?”

She nods quickly. “Yes.”

“Cami...” My voice disappears.

I’ve only cried once, and that was when I had to watch my sister die. But fuck, my eyes actually start to burn as tears prick them.

“Aww, Max,” Cami coos. She wraps me in a tight hug, pressing kisses to

my neck.

“Fuck, baby,” I say, my voice hoarse from the intense happiness I feel. “Thank you for this...for everything. Thank you for being in my life and choosing to love me.”

Cami pulls back and brushes her fingers over my jaw. “I’ll always choose you.”

Christ, she’s really doing her best to get a tear out of me.

“And I’ll always choose you, too.”

Lifting my hand to the back of her neck, I pull her closer, and as my mouth takes hers, I’m glad she took a photo of me. It will always be a reminder of one of the happiest days of my life.

Cami

(1 year later...)

Taking Nikita out of his car seat, I cradle my six-month-old son in my arms and kick the car door shut.

He makes fussing sounds and starts to suck on his fist as I walk down the path.

Smiling down at Nikita, I coo, “Mommy just needs ten minutes, then we’re going home so you can take a nap.”

I cut across the perfectly mowed lawn, and when I reach Papa’s grave, I carefully sit down. My eyes touch on Papa’s headstone, then I say, “I’m sorry I haven’t visited in a while. My life’s been a little crazy. I want you to meet Nikita. He’s your grandson, Papa.” A smile curves my lips. “Max chose the name. He says it means unconquered. It’s also Max’s middle name.”

Nikita stops fussing, and with wide eyes, he stares at the sky.

“The past year flew by so quickly, Papa. The pregnancy was actually easy, and I was only in labor for three hours. Nikita popped out with a full head of hair.”

A wave of emotion hits as I whisper, “I wish you could see him, Papa. He’s beautiful.”

I take a moment to breathe so the emotion will pass, then say, “Max and I got married. I know you wouldn’t have approved if you were still here, but he really makes me happy. He’s an incredible husband and father.”

I glance over the other graves before my eyes rest on Papa’s headstone again.

“Thank you so much for the amazing life you’ve given me. I’m going to follow in your footsteps and be the best parent I can be to your grandson. I’ll always make time to listen to him the way you made time for me.” My voice disappears, and I take a deep breath. “I’ll tell him all about you and what a wonderful father you were to me.”

Lowering my head, I press a kiss to Nikita’s forehead and close my eyes.

I hear movement behind me, and glancing over my shoulder, I see Max walking toward us. I let out a chuckle and shake my head.

My overprotective husband will never change his ways.

He probably followed my tracking device’s signal like he’s done countless times before.

“This is called stalking,” I say when he crouches beside us.

“No, it’s called making sure my wife and son are safe.” He leans forward and presses a kiss to my temple. “Let me take Nikita so you can spend time alone with your father.”

I hand our son over to Max and watch as he walks to where he parked behind my car.

“As you can see, Nikita and I are in good hands, Papa. You’d be happy to know Max is more controlling and protective than you.”

A playful breeze picks up, and some leaves fall on Papa’s resting place. I reach for one and twirl it between my fingers.

“I’m happy, Papa,” I whisper. “Like honest to God, insanely happy.”

Getting up, I press a kiss to the tips of my fingers and caress my father’s name, where it’s engraved onto the granite. “I love you, Papa. Sweet dreams.”

The End.

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