

DES SWEET



Revenge

B♡DY



KEHO



DES SWEET



Revenge

BODY



XOXO



First published by: Des Sweet

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Trigger Warning

The content of this book is not suitable for all readers. It includes adult themes and situations that may make some uncomfortable. Possible triggers include:

Violence:

Relationship Trauma *Emotional + Verbal Abuse

Toxic Ex

Explicit Sexual Content

Playlist

This book has a playlist full of songs that either inspired me or contributed to my word count as I was writing. You can listen along here:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0zqyU0LjCgZRmDtZf9oe0u>

AUTHOR NOTE



Thank you to all of my influencers and teams who have supported this release. You guys are amazing. I've had a blast writing Austin and Montana's story. I'm so glad my ride or die book besties convinced me to keep writing, even when I worried about it being too off genre for my brand. Megan and Jasmine, you ladies keep me going. This release absolutely wouldn't have been possible without you.



The outpouring of support from bookish communities never stops amazing me. A big shout out to a few groups who are always showing up to support my releases: Insta Book Babes, Smut Bluts, and Good Girls Book Stop. Brittany, Mindy, and April you three have directly contributed to the success I have experienced. Thank you for supporting indie authors in the communities you've built.

I can't leave out a thank you to my husband who provides his endless support, even when it means entertaining my ridiculous questions.

I appreciate all my family and friends who continue to celebrate this journey with me. Remember by reading past this page you are doing so at your own risk.

Last, but not least a thank you to my grandma, who not only shares every single one of my posts, but has also recruited other family members in liking these posts. I'm sure as my biggest fan you're reading this, though I have to say for the record, you absolutely should stop here.



Here's to another release!



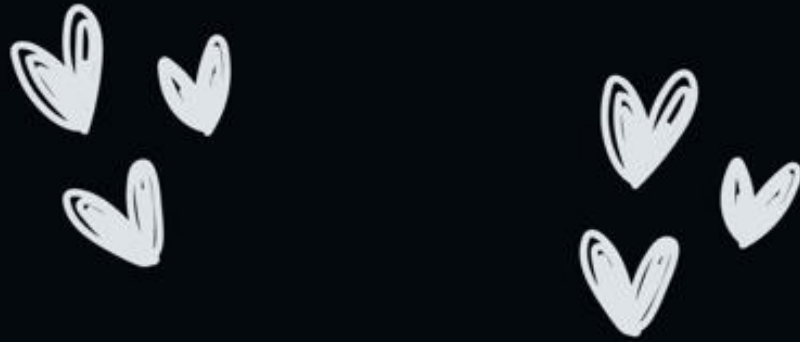
XOXO Des

Dedication

To all the girls out there looking like REVENGE

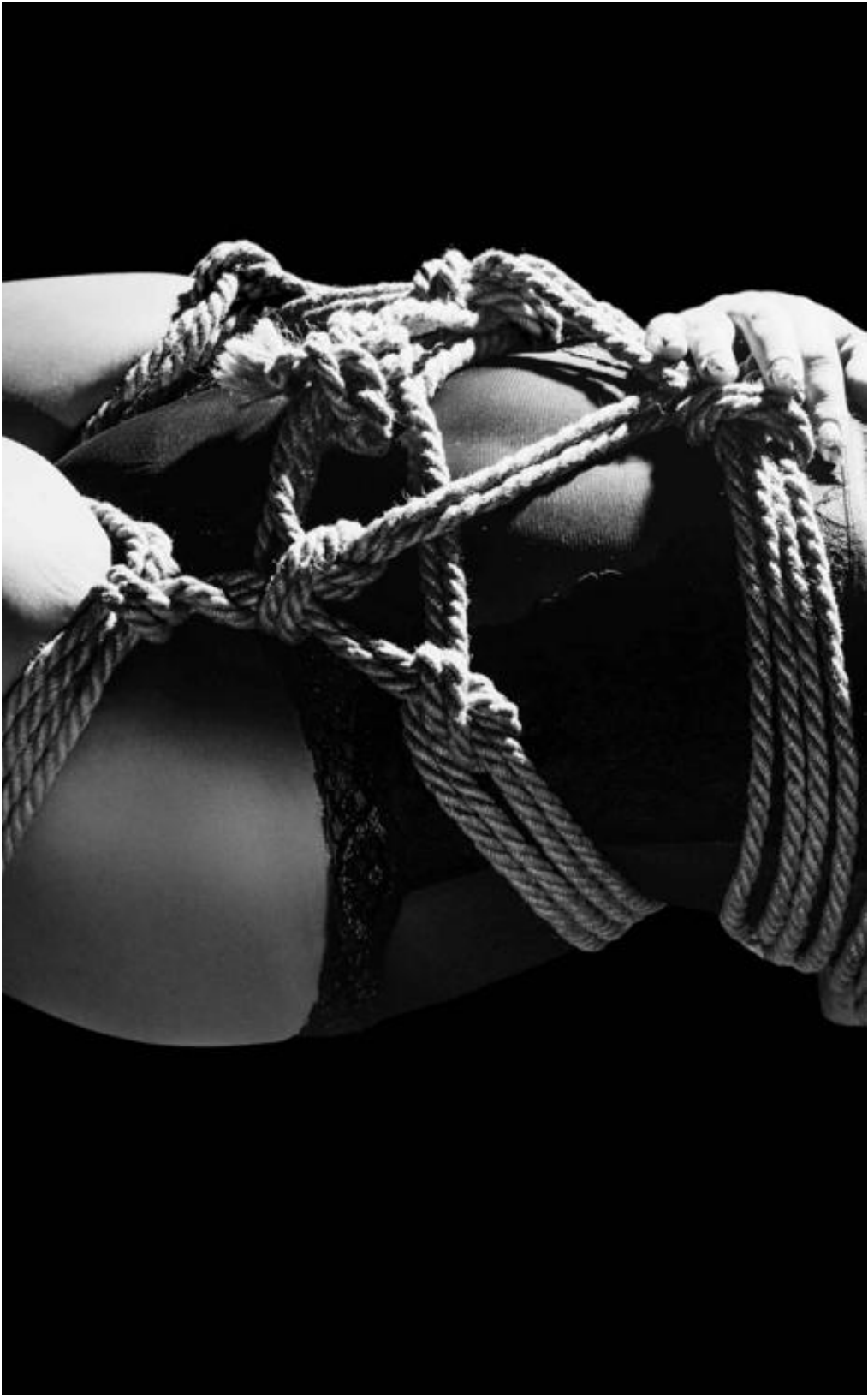
*The best revenge
is massive success*

— **FRANK SINATRA**



Revenge
BODY 

DES SWEET





Prologue

Broken Shattered Heart Ache Pain Unstable
Lonely Grieving Dejected Sorrowful Depressed
Unwanted Alone Hurt Sad Angry Exhausted
Unloved Emotional Crushed Never Enough
Unworthy

None of these words are strong enough to describe the empty feeling in my heart.

The immense pain filled every crevice of my body. The moment I realized everything was already gone. When the person I loved with every ounce of my soul stared back at me, empty, devoid of any emotion but hate. His eyes glazed over staring back at me like I wasn't standing right in front of him.

My heart begs me for a love he is unwilling to return. It cries out for a tender touch. Forever yearning for a sign, something, anything to show me deep down the love is still there. I try hard to convince myself at one point it existed, but there's

nothing. No sign, no magic signal, no small glimmer of hope, because it's not just gone, it never once existed. There was never any love for me in his heart. I'm nothing, I've been nothing, and no matter how hard I tried, my efforts never stood a chance against the army he built to fight me off.

I don't know when I started feeling unworthy. Unworthy of being loved, of feeling loved, and experiencing love. Somewhere along the way he started saying it, and I stupidly believed him. Maybe it was the first time I suspected he was sleeping around, and he quickly insisted I was not just imagining things, but absolutely delusional. I was the broken one. I was the root of all our problems. I instigated every argument. The words, his accusations, still echo through my head. No matter if I know the truth my heart can not be reasoned with, like an idiot I let him manipulate me. Not once, but over and over again. I absorbed every insult, every accusation brought forth by him. I believed every word my narcissist told me to, until my entire life became nothing but a giant apology.

It was all I did. Everyday, I apologized for something. For thinking, feeling, loving, caring, and for fighting for a love that would always be unrequited. I felt nothing, but loneliness because the one person I wanted more than anyone to notice me, to be in love with me, couldn't.

He refused to see me. He refused to answer my cries, leaving me instead to drown in a sea of never ending loneliness. And in the sea of loneliness a monster grew stronger each day. A

monster who was all too eager to swallow me alive, until the day I finally felt brave enough to face it.

Montana XOXO
CH♥PTER 

ONE

A flat. Just my luck lately. Ever since I broke up with my boyfriend a few weeks ago, it seems like my bad luck streak is never ending. My newest dilemma, a flat tire and no idea how to change it. I probably should have taken my dad up on his offer to teach me all those years ago. It's five o'clock, which means rush hour traffic is officially underway. It will take hours for roadside assistance to get here. I'm caked in sweat from my workout. The last thing I want to do is have an uncomfortable encounter with a stranger. In fact, all I want to do is crawl into bed in my empty town-house and drown myself in research for my next project. Right now, even the smallest tasks feel overwhelming. Coming to the gym is part of my new routine, and a promise I made myself a few days after our breakup.

The relationship was toxic, but like a clinging child, I held on longer than I should have. I turned a blind eye to an army of red flags until I couldn't ignore it anymore. After three years together and him constantly insisting I could not bother him at work. I broke his rule. When I showed up, I was excited to share some big news. I spent a few hours getting all dolled up, and I made reservations at one of his favorite restaurants. I was expecting to celebrate after I found out the publisher picked up my book. My agent called this morning to say the deal was officially closed and I would receive my check for the first advance in the mail in a few days.

What I found was my boyfriend balls-deep in another woman while she sat on his lap. I didn't bother knocking on his office door, instead, I just barged right in with a huge smile on my face. I can still remember every last detail about that day.

A shudder runs through my body as my stomach gives a small retch. I can already feel the tears threatening to spill out. They blur my vision, but it doesn't stop me from opening my trunk and trying to find my spare tire. It takes me a few minutes, but I manage to get the tire out and rolled to the front of my car. I lean it against the driver's side door and whip my phone out from the waistband of my yoga tights. My fingers tap in the make and model as I search videos of how to change a tire on my car.

When the first raindrop hits my bare shoulder, I can no longer hold back my tears. I must look like a complete mess.

Sobbing on the curb, in the rain, clutching my phone as a video plays in the background.

“Hey,” a man’s voice says from behind where I am sitting, making me jump to my feet. “I didn’t mean to freak you out,” he continues, taking a step back to show he’s not a threat.

I know better than to ever trust another man again, though, so I stare at him defensively instead. “Hey, what?” I ask bitterly.

“Could you use some help? I can change that for you real quick if you want to head inside. All I need is the lug nut key for your tires.” He says, ignoring my icy reply.

“Even if I wanted to let you help me, I can’t because I just bought this car,” I say, pointing to the temporary tag. “I have no idea where the key is or anything. The dealership didn’t mention anything about it.”

He smiles, extending his hand for a handshake. “My name is Austin. Do you mind if I take a look in the trunk and maybe the glove box? I promise I am not a creeper. Just a nice guy who knows how to change a tire. I’ve been coming to this gym for three years. The owner can vouch for me. Head inside. Tell Hendrix I will be a few minutes late for our training session.”

I hesitate for a split second before pointing to my trunk and telling him to have at it with his search for the key he needs. I can either accept his help or sit here for hours looking like an idiot waiting on roadside assistance.

Montana XOXO
CHAPTER 

Two

Before I step back through the gym doors, I do my best to wipe away the tears. I walk through the door and the bells jingle. The guy behind the welcome desk looks over at me, a bit confused. “Is everything okay? You’re new, right? Do you need help with something?”

I stammer, “No, um, there’s a guy outside changing my tire. He told me to come in and let Hendrix, I am assuming that’s you, know he’s going to be late for his session.”

He drops his head, shaking it with a light chuckle. “Classic. Well, go ahead and wait. I’m just going to be cleaning up and sanitizing some of the equipment. Let me know if the music is too loud or if it’s bothering you.” With that, he walks off, spray bottle and towel in hand.

I push a loose strand of hair behind my ear and walk over to one of the enormous windows that faces the street. The guy is getting soaking wet. It looks like he found the key he needed. He already has my tire off and is putting it in the trunk of my car. I can't help but stare. He's incredibly handsome. Muscular arms flex and bend as droplets of rain cling to his tanned skin. I'm pretty sure this man could be some kind of model. His black tank hugs his upper body, highlighting a toned midsection. I'd put money on it that beneath his shirt is a six-pack.

Hendrix must have noticed my fixation on his friend. He's suddenly beside me and nudging my elbow. "I wouldn't be his best friend if I didn't tell you that he's single."

I laugh nervously, "I don't know what makes you think I would be interested, but I'm not looking for anything. Especially not anything serious. I just got out of a bad relationship, and I'm working on myself right now." I wave my hand in front of myself, painfully aware that I've over shared.

Hendrix's smile falls. "I'm sorry to hear that, for Austin's sake. It's not everyday he offers to change tires for a damsel in distress. I hope things get better for you. I understand needing space to work on yourself. That's actually how I ended up owning a gym. A story for another day, though. It looks like he's about finished."

"Thanks," I reply, offering a genuine smile. I was never allowed to say no to Ben. It felt good to be respected by this

stranger.

“See you tomorrow. What’s your name?”

“Montana.”

“See you tomorrow, Montana. Here, welcome gift.” He says, handing me a bath bomb from a nearby bin. “It will help take the edge off your muscle pain. You need to soak for at least thirty minutes for it to be effective, but I recommend forty-five minutes to an hour.”

“Thank you.” He has no idea how well this will pair with my research reading.

The bells on the door ring and Austin walks in drenched. “I hope Hendrix was on his best behavior.” He cocks an eyebrow and throws a mischievous look in his direction.

Hendrix tosses his hands up. “You better tell him I’m innocent, Montana.” He winks.

“Thank you for the tire change. I can send you some money if you tell me what apps you have. I appreciate it. You didn’t need to help me out, but maybe you really are just a nice guy.” I hold up my phone and wait for a response.

His smile is dazzling, I realize when he looks at me. In fact, everything about him is perfect. “This one is on the house. My treat, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Hey and don’t take the car to the dealership for a tire. There’s a place just up the street that can do it for way less

than the dealership will charge you.” He’s blocking the door, or I would have bolted by now.

Instead, I simply nod my head and take a step in his direction. He opens the door for me, and I don’t even know how to respond except to whisper an awkward, “Thank you.”

Montana XOXO
CHAPTER 

THREE

I climb in my car and turn over the engine, then spend the entire drive home scolding myself for letting this stranger change my tire. I don't want a man to complicate my life right now. Why couldn't I have met Austin before I spent three years of my life wasted on Ben? My conscience answers my own question. We didn't meet a nice guy like Austin, because we were too busy partying it up in exclusive events. Ben is our type, not Austin. We don't like to exercise. We are only doing this because our therapist thought it was a good idea, and so did mom.

Ugh, my mother. I don't even want to think about her right now. She means well, but that woman has no filter. I can't handle her accusations that my hermit-like tendencies are what drove Ben away. If anything, Ben caused these behaviors. I

used to have friends, and go out with them on a regular basis. I used to do way more public appearances, but Ben didn't want me leaving the state, so I had to dial my appearances back and rely on a marketing team to help promote me.

I blink back fresh tears. Thinking about Ben hurts. He hurt me and I shrunk back and allowed it to happen. I want to rebel; get a tattoo, cut my hair, or maybe color it. I study my honey blonde hair in the car mirror. Before I know it, I am turning down a side street and heading for the superstore. Another genuine smile creeps across my face. Being spontaneous feels good. It's nice not having to think about what Ben would say, or how angry he would be. My phone is silent because no one is tracking my every move anymore. A giggle sneaks out of my lips as I imagine my readers' reactions to a drastic color change. Maybe I should post about it. I've been awfully withdrawn this past year, especially.

The car glides into a parking spot in the front row. A tiny bit of good luck considering the rain is coming down even harder now. I jog inside and make my way to the aisle full of hair dyes. There are so many colors and options. Right off the bat, I decide I am not going to pick blonde or light brown. I want something drastic, edgy, and unrecognizable. With both those colors out, it leaves reds, dark browns, actual non-natural colors, and black. I eye a hot pink box and can hear my mother squawking at my father that they need to come out here and visit me. Bold colors are also off the table for the time being, though my eyes do wander back a few times.

I reach for a dark red shade. It's close to purple and mull it over. As I am thinking, I hear a familiar voice on the next aisle.

"How about that girl tonight?" Hendrix is saying.

I freeze. Hendrix, from the gym, is here. They must have canceled their workout on account of me. Now I feel awful for messing up their plans. I also feel guilty for eavesdropping, but not enough to stop.

"I don't think she's interested like that. She was more worried about whether or not I was going to stuff her in the trunk of my car or something, than she was about if I would ask for her number." Austin answers with a scoff.

"If you want her number, I happen to know someone who has it." Hendrix laughs, amused with himself. "Seriously though, I think she's into you. I totally caught her staring."

Austin answers him. His tone is defeated. "Nah, man, you said that she told you she's not looking for anything right now."

"All I am saying is, if you play it cool, you could swoop in once she is ready." Hendrix's voice is getting louder and so is the sound of their footsteps.

I shove the dye back on the shelf and frantically snatch a few different shades off the shelf in a sweep. My feet book it to the end of the aisle furthest from them. I slide behind the endcap just in time. A few seconds later, I can hear them walk by, still

talking. I check the time and wander the makeup aisles for another fifteen minutes, before deciding it's safe to pay.

Montana XOXO
CHAPTER 

FOUR

When I finally arrive home to my condo, Audrey, my rescue dog, greets me. She's helped me get through some of the harder days, cuddling with me in bed, or laying by the shower door while I cry. She licks my fingers. "Are you hungry, sugar? Let's get you some food. I know I'm late. Tomorrow, maybe we can go to the dog park. I'll make it up to you. I promise."

She twists her scrunchy white face at me and lifts one ear in a sassy glare as I open the cupboard and scoop out some food for her. Once she's fed and happy, I sort through my impulsive color choices while the toaster oven preheats. I end up selecting an inky black. Once I pop the pizza in to cook, I grab the dye and walk to my bedroom to change and grab an old towel. The directions seem easy enough. I rip open the

packaging and begin the process of coloring my hair. I used to do this myself all the time, but then Ben insisted I get my hair done professionally.

I manage to get the color on without making too much of a mess of myself. It says it needs to sit for almost forty-five minutes for the best results. I secure my hair in a bun with a clip and grab some pizza. From a chair on the kitchen island, I eat my dinner for one. I know I shouldn't, but I feed Audrey a piece of pizza crust when she whines at me. She looks for Ben every once and awhile, running to the room where his office should be and looking at me confused. It breaks my heart thinking about how confusing this must be. She loved Ben, even if he didn't like her all that much. I put my dishes in the sink haphazardly and tell myself I will wash them in the morning. There's really no reason to run the dishwasher. I let Audrey out the sliding glass door and into the tiny backyard of my condo. I throw the tennis ball for her from the patio a few times before she gets distracted trying to eat all the bugs in sight. My alarm to rinse my hair goes off. Time to see how it turned out.

"Come on, Audrey," I call to the only friend I still have. After our breakup, I realized my friends were really Ben's friends and their wives or flavors of the month. I don't have any desire to kindle a friendship with these people. It's better just to get a fresh start, my dad keeps saying. I know he's trying to be supportive, since he knows my mother can be insensitive. In the bathroom, I rinse my hair thoroughly and watch as the grayish black dye swirls around the drain. When

it finally runs clear for the most part, I ring out my new black locks, slap the conditioning cream in my hair and turn on the shower. Hendrix may have given me a bath bomb, but it doesn't mean I have to use it. I laugh at myself, rebelling against the trainer at a gym just to feel like I have a voice.

“We won't let a man tell us what to do anymore, Audrey. I promise. Just you, me, and whatever comes our way.” She gives me an excited bark, then sits down next to the shower door, wagging her tail. I give her head a pat before stepping in and letting the warm water caress me. My body aches, my soul aches, and just when I think maybe I won't cry in the shower for the first time since he left, the crippling anxiety and loneliness hits. The tears mix into the water as I go through the motions. All the while, Audrey waits for me like a good dog, ready to comfort me with a nose nudge and a slobbery kiss the moment I emerge clean and emotionally spent.

When I do emerge, I don't even bother drying my hair or looking in the mirror. I don't care. I just want to crawl into bed, and curl up with my dog and my book.

Montana XOXO
CHAPTER 

FIVE

Audrey wakes me up by licking my hand to let me know she needs to go out. “Okay, sweet girl. I’m awake. Let’s get some potties and coffee.”

I trudge down the hallway, still partially asleep. The stone flooring in the kitchen is cold against my bare feet. I shiver and pull my robe tighter around myself. Yesterday we spent the day at the park. Audrey’s favorite place. We walked around the entire park and I logged it all on my watch. It’s silly the way I’m constantly collecting evidence to prove I’ve done what I say, but that’s what life with Ben was like. If I couldn’t prove it, then it didn’t happen. I look down at my watch and think about deleting the data. For a minute, my finger hovers over the trash icon, but then I drop my hand. It’s a workout log. I don’t need it to prove anything, but I did set several

goals for myself and this information makes me feel good about where I am on my fitness journey.

I peek out at Audrey on my way to the fridge for half and half. She's chasing after a bird that dared to land on her fence. It makes me smile. That's been happening a lot more often. As if she senses my watchful gaze, Audrey comes trotting back inside to lay on her dog bed in front of the fireplace.

I curl up on the couch next to her with my coffee cup and my tablet. Then knock out a couple of promotional graphics to send off to my team. As I work, I find myself looking for models that resemble Austin from the gym. "Tell me to forget all about him and never go back to the gym again, Audrey." She twists her head at me and yawns in response. "A fling could be fun. It's been a while since I've enjoyed myself." Audrey groans, laying her head on her paws as if she's protesting my over share. She side-eyes me and groans again. "You're right, we are working on me. I can still flirt with him, though. Come on, let's get our run in before it's too hot." At the mention of a run, Audrey springs to life, prancing around the living room with excitement. I laugh again. It's almost like I'm actually healing. Who knew the pain could also be so freeing? The sadness is still lingering, but with the help of my therapist I am starting to see the gaslighting and narcissism and realizing Ben wasn't good for me.

I've been avoiding mirrors since last night, terrified to see the results of my impulsive decision making. It's the moment of truth. As I step into my bathroom to get ready for my morning run, I stare into the mirror in awe for several

moments, taking my new look in. I'm going to have to scrub my hairline because it definitely bled, but I think I love it. I scoop my inky tresses into a high ponytail and grab some makeup wipes for the dye on my hairline. After a few minutes, I've made some decent progress on removing the stains and then blend a bit of foundation to cover it better. When I am satisfied with my blending, I walk into the closet and toss on my workout clothes. We'll get our run in, then I'll drop off Audrey and force myself to go to the gym.

I start to feel the anxiety creep in over the gym and push it away. I am just going to enjoy myself, plus I like the gym. Hendrix is a good instructor, and Austin is a great excuse to go. I told them I'm not interested, and they're okay with that. I can still have fun flirting without committing to anything. I take a deep breath.

Montana XOXO
CHAPTER 

SIX

I checked the times for sessions on the gym's website and then looked at my watch. I'm walking in right on time, which makes for a perfect excuse to avoid awkward conversation for the time being. The walk from my car to the gym door feels a mile long, and yet I reach the door too soon. I smother a smile, open the door, and step inside. The gym is never this empty. There are a few people doing their own thing, and maybe four other women stretching in the free weight area, prepping for the class.

A long whistle startles me from my thoughts. "There's our girl," Hendrix calls out to me. "I almost didn't recognize you. I like the new look. It's hot." He talks to me like we are old pals.

Austin walks out of a supply closet, arms full of paper towels, and does a double take on me. “Hey, new girl, it looks good.” He gives me a goofy grin, then turns and continues his work.

I smile, biting my lip nervously. *Has he always been here working in the background and I never even noticed him,* I wonder, or is this some new thing so he can swoop in at just the right minute? I join the others on the floor and start stretching. I try not to look at either of them, but I swear I catch Hendrix winking at Austin out of the corner of my eye. I can feel another smile trying to creep out, but I hold it back. Hendrix goes over the workout on the whiteboard. He demonstrates each one, then runs us through a warmup. I’m secretly excited it’s a lift day. Back squats are my jam and I’m certain I will have an audience. Hendrix counts us down for the timer and then starts the music. Round one is burpees, followed by some plate lifts. In round two, we move on to a mile outside run and back squats. As I am running, I think about all the ways I plan to catch him staring without him seeing me. I set up my station and weights in front of the mirrors so I can catch him. I grab some water after the sprint, then get into position with the bar. I practice my stance a few times, then raise my hand to have Hendrix nod off on it. He doesn’t correct me, which gives me a huge confidence boost. This time, I can’t help but hold back a smile. I sink into my first rep and just as I clear the first rep; I catch Austin stealing a glance at me, but he doesn’t notice. I linger a few seconds longer when I bend over to grab a drink. Then jog out for my

second sprint. This time, while I run, I daydream about him coming over to get a better look, not caring if I catch him staring. When I jog back in, I try not to look for him. I get in position with the bar, using the mirror to help me scan the gym, hoping to see Austin, but there's no sign of him. I complete my reps, and remind myself this is totally nuts. Not to mention borderline stalkery. On my third and final sprint, I imagine him coming over, cupping me right above my ribs and running his hands down to my hips. All the while whispering in my ear that I need to straighten out my spine. My nipples are peaked and hard beneath my sports bra. I assume Austin left, so I don't even bother looking for him. There are only ten minutes left on the timer. I focus on banging out my reps instead. I'm mid-squat when suddenly I spot Austin in the mirror. He's holding the cool towel bucket and coming from the back room. Behind me, he's frozen in place. I watch as his eyes run up and down me. On his second pass, his eyes catch mine and he gives me a goofy grin before walking off to set them on the weight shelf. I've never felt so alive. It feels good to be noticed by a man, even if he was undressing me with his eyes.

Montana XOXO
CH♥PTER 

SEVEN

I'm punching out at the front desk, ecstatic to have avoided a conversation with either of these two men, when I hear Austin's voice behind me. "Hey, new girl, you need to take your car in and do something about that tire. You shouldn't be driving on the donut."

My face flushes. I totally forgot about my car and I've definitely been driving around on the spare tire. "Um, I've been busy. I kind of forgot," I confess.

"Well, what are you doing after this?" Austin asks.

I shrug. "I don't really have any plans, probably just going to go home and work."

"How about you follow me to the tire shop and then I give you a lift home?"

My heart is hammering in my chest as I stare at him, unresponsive. Is he asking me on a date to a tire shop? Should I even be considering getting into a car with a stranger? Why do I feel like a character in one of my books right now? I swallow hard, stammering out a quiet, “Okay.”

“Good luck, Austin!” Hendrix shouts across the gym. “Good luck, new girl. I swear he’s a good guy, but if you don’t come to the gym tomorrow, I can be your wingman and call the cops.” He waits a beat, pausing for a moment. “Hey, Austin. Don’t worry, man, if the cops ask, I’ll say you were with me all night.” He’s grinning from ear to ear.

“My name is Montana, in case the police need to know,” I tease back.

“Come on, Montana, let’s get out of here. You egged him on and if we stick around, he might never stop,” Austin says, walking to the front door and holding it open for me.

We climb into our cars and he rolls down his window to shout, “follow me.”

I follow behind him, silently cursing myself for agreeing to this situation. At the tire shop, he walks in and asks for his buddy. The two talk for a few minutes and then he introduces me. “Hey Montana, this is my buddy, Alex. He owns the shop and he’ll get you back on the road tomorrow.”

My smile drops. Tomorrow? What does he mean tomorrow? It’s just a tire change. “Tomorrow,” I stammer out.

“Yeah,” Alex replies, “You have specialty tires and to get you an exact match, it has to be ordered from the distributor downtown. I’ll get it either late tonight or early in the morning. Once the tire is here, we will get it put on and give you a call to let you know the car is ready. If you take it to the dealership, they will do the same thing, plus it’s triple the price. You have the upgraded tire package on this car. Does that sound good?”

I look towards Austin and shrug. “I guess so. I don’t think I really have a choice.”

“Great, let me grab you some paperwork and a tag for the key,” Alex says, grabbing a clipboard from the front desk and handing it to me.

I work on filling out the information, all the while Austin and Alex chat away off to the side. When I finish, I stand and deliver the clipboard back, along with my lone car key. “Thanks, that’s all I need for now. I’ll call you tomorrow.”

“When do I pay you?” I ask.

The two of them look at one another and burst into laughter. I stare at them, confused, until Austin waves goodbye and says, “Come on, Montana, let’s get something to eat and then I’ll drive you home.”

“Lucky bastard,” Alex shouts after him. Austin raises his hand and flips him off. He opens the car door for me like a perfect gentleman moments later.

Montana XOXO
CHAPTER 

EIGHT

In the car, his music is loud. He doesn't turn it down or talk to me. He just drives. Fifteen minutes later, we pull into a cute little burger and beer joint in the upper downtown area. For a minute, I panic and think about Ben seeing me here with another man. He works downtown. Honestly, it's been a little over a month since I hired movers to pack up all my things while he was at work and move all my stuff to the new condo I bought. *I have nothing to feel guilty about*, I remind myself.

Before I can open the car door, Austin is around the front of his car and opening it for me. He grabs my hand to help me out, and I let him. I don't mind it one bit. I'm going to enjoy myself today.

“Are you okay with sitting on the patio?”

Austin's question pulls me out of my head, back into the moment. "Sure!" He opens the door for me, then grabs two menus from the host station and waves to the bartender. We walk out to the patio, seating ourselves. "Do you know the owner or something?" I hiss while he casually leans back in his chair.

A smirk forms on his lips for a few seconds before he replies. "Maybe. How badly would you like me to answer that?"

I giggle. "I don't care all that much, but if they ask questions, I will not hesitate to blame this completely on you."

"Oh burn, you would throw your only ride under the bus just like that?"

I smile, "Well, I think my only ride values his services a little too much because he could easily be replaced by a driver pick up."

"Montana, you are brutal. Have you always been this way or is it a new hair, new attitude thing?"

I can't stop smiling. Thankfully, the bartender from earlier saves me from a reply by walking up and asking for a drink order. They chat for a few minutes and Austin asks him for the chef's special and to let him know he's here. I'm really beginning to have second thoughts. Who is this handsome stranger and how does he know so many people? "Inquiring minds want to know," I say. "How do you know the bartender and the chef?"

It's Austin's turn to laugh. "I know a lot of people that will surprise you. You asked about the bartender and the chef, though. The chef is my big brother, and the bartender is his best friend."

My mouth drops open in surprise. I totally caught that first bit about knowing people who will surprise me and make a mental note to search for him on social media later. "Oh, well, that's pretty cool. Do you always take girls from the gym to your brother's restaurant?"

"No," he confesses, eyes dancing with mischief as he grins at me. "My turn to ask a question. You said you work from home. What do you do?"

I blush. "Oh, my gosh, this is so embarrassing."

"Don't tell me you are a sex phone operator," he blurts out, making my cheeks flush even brighter.

"No," I laugh, trying to explain. "No, I'm not a sex phone operator. I'm an author."

"Shut up." Austin slams his hands on the table and leans in closer to me. "If we went to the bookstore after this, would I be able to find your book?"

"Yes," I answer.

"If I pick it up and guess it, will you sign it?" He asks excitedly.

"What, no! I am not telling you which books are mine." I squeak.

“Books,” Austin blurts. “As in there are more than one of your books in the store?”

I nod, and he stares at me in amazement. “I am going to figure it out and when I do, you better tell me if I am right.”

I shrug, feigning disinterest. “Alright, Mr Nosy. What do you do?”

Montana XOXO
CH♥PTER 

NINE

Austin grins, like he knows exactly how I am going to react when he answers my question. “You’re already judging me. I can feel it.”

“I swear no judgment from me.”

He pauses for a minute. Looks down at the table then raises his head to look at me with a smolder. “I’m a dancer.”

“A dancer!”

“You didn’t let me finish.” He teases, getting back into position for the smolder again. “I’m also a male fitness model.”

I burst into laughter. “Anything else you want to confess to?”

“You promised not to judge.” He pretends to take a knife to the heart.

“I’m not judging. You never said anything about laughing.”

“Ouch, that hurts. I didn’t laugh at you,” Austin retorts.

“There’s nothing funny about what I do.”

He rolls his eyes, “I will have you know, little missy, there is nothing funny about being a professional backup dancer. It pays the bills, allows me to travel. You know the finer things in life.”

“Is that why you’re single? Crazy travel schedule?” I ask, raising an eyebrow.

“As a matter of fact, it is. You just don’t know it yet because we just wrapped up a European tour.” He answers smugly.

“A European tour, well have you ever been to the great Down Under?”

“Montana! That is not an appropriate question to ask during our first friendly lunch.”

I reach across the table and slap him in the arm. He flexes right as my hand connects and gives me a wink. “Male fitness model.”

“Show off.” I say, staring him down.

“A man’s got to do what a man’s got to do, to impress the ladies.” He flashes me a toothy smile. Damn it, if it doesn’t awaken something inside of me that sends blood rushing to inappropriate places.

I can't catch feelings for this guy. I don't even know him, and yet I can't stop thinking about what it might feel like to fall into his arms. They look so warm and safe. "Okay, you win. I am impressed. I really want to get into shape for a big event in October. Do you think all these group sessions with Hendrix will help?"

"Be honest, Montana, is that the only reason you want to get in shape?" He asks.

I retreat for a moment, feeling the intrusion on my relationship status a little too much. I hope he doesn't notice the shift in my body language. When I don't respond right away, he grabs my hand. "Hey, if you want a revenge body. I, for one, am all for it. I also think you look great as you are, but imagine being able to pack a punch and taking whoever hurt you so badly by surprise."

My lips slowly form a small smile. "A revenge body might be part of it, but I do have an important event in October."

"Like I said, I am all for a revenge body." His eyes run up and down my figure before landing on my face to stare into my eyes.

I'm not sure how long we stare at each other, but it's longer than we should be for some friends grabbing a bite to eat. It's perfect timing. A handsome man dressed in a black chef uniform pops onto the patio carrying a platter of sliders and a basket of fries. I can only presume the man is Austin's brother, and he's like an expensive bottle of wine aged to perfection. Their parents must be gods or something. His brother is just as

good looking as him. I instantly zero in on a wedding ring and feel a twinge of guilt for my inappropriate thoughts.

Austin and his brother exchange light conversation while he sizes me up silently. It's as if he is evaluating whether or not I am good enough for his brother. I don't blame him. When he leaves to return to the kitchen, we continue our late lunch and exchange more light-hearted conversation. Austin is easy to talk to. He makes me smile a lot.

When we leave, he tosses a hundred on the table before they even bring us a bill. I'm not sure if I should offer to pay for my meal or not. I don't know what the social custom is. Ben always paid for everything. I opt not to insult him and casually pretend not to be over thinking any of this.

Austin drives me home as I give him terrible instructions. He refuses to let me just put the address into the gps. At my condo, he opens the car door for me and we share an awkward goodbye. He climbs back in the driver's side, rolls down the window, and calls, "Hey, be ready around ten. I'll swing by and pick you up for the gym."

Before I can tell him there's not a class until two tomorrow, he's gone, speeding off down the street. I guess I am at his mercy with no choice but to be ready by ten.

Montana XOXO
CH♥PTER 

TEN

Audrey wakes me up late. The sun is creeping in through the slats in the blinds. I haven't had time to measure the windows or order those room darkening curtains I love. Maybe I'll pick something a little different. I can do whatever I want here. It's my own blank canvas and I think I secretly love that. I've always wanted to do wallpaper and wainscoting to fancy up a space. Maybe I'll start in here. I grab a pen from the small desk on the adjacent wall and make myself a reminder on a sticky note. I add it to the other thousand scattered across the empty side of my desk. My back up alarm goes off and I reach to check my messages. As usual, my social media is out of control. I open a few apps and skim through everything, focusing my energy on anything important

for today. Once I'm caught up on social media, I check my calendar. Everything on there has already been handled.

"Come on Audrey," I call, swinging my legs out of the bed and onto the floor. I let her out and toss together some fruit and yogurt with a bit of granola on top. Austin said he would be here at ten and I want to make sure I am ready on time. After a light breakfast, I head off to shower and get dressed. When I am ready, I steal a glance at the clock. Thirty minutes is plenty of time to squeeze some work in. I set an alarm for a fifteen minute buffer. It gives me time to freshen up, take Audrey out, and panic about this arrangement I agreed to.

The doorbell rings early, just as I am cleaning up my work mess. Austin doesn't strike me as the kind of guy who shows up ten minutes early. I peer through the peephole on the door and my heart sinks. Today of all days had to be the day Ben decides to show up on my doorstep. Go figure. I roll my eyes in disgust and decide to pretend I'm not home. My driveway is around back and my car is at the tire shop. He might buy it. What will I do about Austin, though? He's going to be here in ten minutes or less, and I don't want Ben here. Out of habit, I chew on my thumb nervously while I evaluate my options. Ben knocks, and I jump. I may as well just open the door and get this over with.

When I open the door to face him, waves of emotions wash over me. It feels like my heart is getting ripped open all over again. "Ben," I say, surprised. "What brings you here?"

He's not even apologetic. Instead, he's all business, free from any sort of emotion. Cold, just the way I remembered our relationship. "I'm here because there are a few things I've noted are missing since your move and since I paid for them, I would like those items returned."

Ben shoves a folded slip of paper into my hand. I open it up to find a list of childish things. Jewelry, designer dresses and shoes, as well as other things that were purchased as gifts for me during our relationship. I continue to skim the list until I reach the bottom. Audrey's name is the last thing on the list. I blink back a tear. I refuse to let Ben make me cry. My hands act on their own. They shove the list back at him. "I've already spoken to an attorney. Anything that was a gift I am entitled to."

When I move to slam the door in his face, he stops it with his foot. "Get out of here, Ben!" I shout, hoping someone might hear me.

"Montana, please just give me the dog, and then this can all be over. You can keep the expensive clothes and jewelry as a way to remember me, and the lifestyle you lost." His voice is silky and dangerous. He speaks to me as if I am some kind of charity case.

"Fuck off, Ben. You don't even like the dog."

"But you do, and that's the point," he sneers.

"Gee, you wonder why I left? You're nothing but a controlling narcissist. Now leave before I call the police." A tear slides down my cheek, and I brush it away hastily.

The sound of a car door slamming captures my attention. My head turns to see Austin walking up the front steps. He's cool and collected. Those tan muscular arms have Ben giving him the up and down. My heart skips a beat when our eyes lock. My knight in shining armor has arrived to save the day and whisk me away from this monster.

“Who are you?” Ben demands, spinning on Austin.

Austin CHAPTER

ELEVEN

I can tell from her body language and the look of sadness plastered all over Montana's face this is the douche canoe that hurt her. Two can play this game though, and if he wants to show up unannounced engaging in mind games, then he's going to answer to me. I ignore this guy and scoop her into my arms protectively. He can be jealous all he wants. He had a chance and from what I can tell, he should have treated her better. She falls into my chest, crumbling against me. My fingers run through her hair. I'm completely lost in this moment. No longer in control of my own actions. I lift her chin, staring deep into her eyes. "Is this guy bothering you, kitten?" I whisper to her, not caring if he hears me.

Montana nods slowly, unsure of how to react. I kiss her on the forehead, closing my eyes to savor the moment, asserting

my dominance over the intruder. “Get in the car, angel.”

She starts to protest, but I place a finger against her lips. Montana looks at me in surprise, her eyes searching mine for some kind of secret answer. She’s not going to find one. We’re putting on a show and neither one of us is going to break character. One last look into my steely eyes and she reaches in the door to grab her keys and locks it. Then, with a flip of her hair, she walks off in the direction of my car. I watch as she goes, and make a promise to myself that the next time this jerk sees her, she’s even more in shape. He’s going to regret hurting Montana and I’m going to show her the way she deserves to be treated by a man. I let my gaze linger longer than I should and click the unlock button. Then, remote start the car once she’s in. I don’t want my passenger princess for the day to overheat. She looks over her shoulder at me, blushing when I give her a wink.

I can feel this guy glaring at me before I even turn to look at him. His eyes cut from mine as Montana opens the door.

“So that’s what you’re into now?” Ben seethes, shouting at her. “Enjoy your little fling.”

“I’m Austin, by the way, and now if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to go break that pussy in properly, since you clearly didn’t.” My eyes give him the up and down as I cross my arms over my chest. His jaw twitches as he eyes my muscles. He doesn’t stand a chance, and he knows it. I can’t help what happens next. A smug smile spreads over my lips. “Before I

do, I think I'll run my hands all over her body during our private session." I whisper, wearing my gloating wink.

I don't give him any power or control over the situation. Narcissists like him need to be left powerless. I turn around, strolling back to the car like I give zero fucks. I've already won, and he knows it.

I climb into the car and turn the music up. Then roll the windows down, while peeling out of the parking space and down the road. I watch in the rear-view mirror as I leave Ben standing there like an idiot on Montana's front drive.

Once we get a few blocks away, I turn the music down and glance at her. She hasn't stopped smiling since I got in the car. "You're smiling again." I gloat with a cheesy grin. "Good thing I convinced you to let me pick you up today, Montana. That was the most fun I've had in months."

"Careful, now you're smiling again," she teases back.

I shake my head and grin, then turn the radio up so we can't talk anymore. She's one gorgeous passenger princess. This girl is going to be a handful; I, however, regret nothing.

Austin CHAPTER

TWELVE

I pull into the gas station down the street from the gym. She's not getting a choice. I run inside and pay for two giant waters. When I climb back in, I lay the cold bottle across her thigh, making her squeal. "Sorry," I shout over the music, but she's not buying it with my mischievous grin giving me away.

The gym is completely empty when we pull up. There's not a single car in the parking lot, not even Hendrix's. That's because I own half the gym. I financed everything and have helped Hendrix grow a solid client base. It's been a great business venture for both of us. When he could, I let him buy half because we're more than friends, we're like brothers. After Hendrix's wife up and left him behind with twins to raise as a single dad, I knew together we could make this an empire.

We had to. On this particular day, it just so happens to be my personal training block. We each have twelve hours a week when we can use the gym for whatever we want.

“Come on,” I say, parking the car and cutting the engine. “Private training sessions start today. We’ll get your revenge body ready before your event.”

She stares at me like a deer in headlights. Bless her, because it’s fucking adorable.

“I can’t accept all of this. If you think I need extra sessions to reach my goal, then I have no problem paying for them. Let me know the price and how to pay,” she says, uncomfortably.

“The price is your company. I want to spend time with you. Be a friend, which it seems like you need right now. We can take things as slow as you like, or completely non-existent if you’d like that too, but I want to be honest with you. I hope that you’ll let me take you on a proper first date sometime. I know you’re still healing, but I want to be a part of that journey.”

“A date,” she squeaks. “I haven’t been on a first date in years. Won’t this complicate things between us? Can you even date your clients?” Her questions come in rapid successions.

“I own this gym,” her eyes bulge in surprise. “I can do whatever I want with my clients. If I wanted to bend them over and fuck them, I would. Don’t worry, I’ll only do that if you ask me to.” I say, winking, trying to ease the tension.

“Oh my God, have you?” She shouts.

I say nothing. Silence seems better than answering this question right now. Her eyes narrow in slits, judging me. She's overly cautious. I forget how broken she really is. He really did a number on her heart. "Look, there are many," I stress the word many, "things that have happened in this gym. Some I am more proud of than others. You might even say I am feeling very ashamed of myself at this very moment, even for participating in."

She says nothing. I'm about to start panicking, but then she blinks, looks me up, then down, licks her lips, and says, "Are you done with your confession? If you need to go to another gym so you can date me, I understand."

I sigh. "You really had me nervous there for a minute. I thought you might turn tail and run for the woods, little kitten."

"Maybe I got a taste of what it feels like to be in your arms, and I liked it." She flirts.

Stick a fork in me, I'm done. This girl is going to be the death of me. I may have just met my match and Hendrix isn't going to believe a word of it.

"Little kitty's got your tongue, I guess."

It's my turn to laugh. "Are you going to write about this?"

She throws her head back. "That's cute, but you aren't my book boyfriend type. At least, I don't think you are." Her brow arches.

"So tell me, what's your book boyfriend type?"

“I will take that to the grave.” She pretends to lock her lips with a key.

“Challenge accepted. Is this why you question my intentions?”

“What! No, Austin, that’s not it. I’m just nervous. I’m afraid of getting hurt. What happened with Ben, I’m still not over it,” Montana confesses.

“It’s not a no to dating, so I’ll take it.”

Montana laughs. “Are we going to work out or what?”

Austin CHAPTER

THIRTEEN

When we step into the gym, I turn on all the lights and start going through the motions of opening everything up for the day. I lock the door behind us, because I don't want any surprise visitors. I write a warm-up on the whiteboard really fast, then walk off to turn on the music, turning to holler over my shoulder, "You can begin with a few stretches and then we will get started."

She reads over the warm up and laughs, "Bear crawls, squats, and the bike. I hate cardio."

"Typical complaint. Everyone wants a revenge body, but no one likes the cardio." I roll my eyes in her direction. "Come on, I'm doing it with you. I have to stay in shape for work."

“Right work,” she air quotes. “It’s not so you can pick up girls at the gym.”

“Who, me? Never,” I reply sarcastically.

We both drop to the ground and start the warm up. I try to maintain an even pace with her, so I’m not obviously staring at her ass. We breeze through the warm-up and hit the bikes. “Two miles, and I will take you to get a healthy protein smoothie as an apology after this.”

“What about my car?” She asks. “I have to pick it up today.”

“Have you gotten a call?”

“Well, no,” she replies, looking down at her watch.

“Then it’s not ready, besides I should at least follow you home and make sure that guy from earlier isn’t around.”

“Yeah, what did you say to him to make him so angry?”

I grin. “Sorry, I’ll take that to the grave. Enough chatter, more biking.”

She rolls her eyes but focuses on hitting the two miles. The minute she hits it, she climbs off the bike and lays on the ground. I let her chug some water, then snap at her to follow me to grab some dumbbell weights. We are going to work on arms and shoulders today.

“Here, let’s try five and ten.” I hand her the two sets and grab a fifteen pound kettlebell.

She gives me the stink eye. “Do you think I am a total weakling?”

“Trust me, you want to build up to this. We are going to be hitting the smaller muscles and you want to avoid noodle arms. We also want to keep you trim and toned.” I move my weights into a pile next to her on the open floor. I show Montana the movements I want her to do and a rep count.

“What about the weird ball weight over there?” She asks, after finishing her assignment, wiping off the dumbbells, and putting them back on the shelf.

“Those are for kettlebell swings. You need to try to get one hundred.”

“One hundred! You definitely owe me that smoothie.” Her face is scrunched up in a scowl, that makes her even more adorable.

“Let me demonstrate. You’re going to thrust with your hips. You’ll need a wide stance like this.” I walk around and correct her form. When my fingers tap the inside of her thigh, I have to put some distance between us.

As if she senses my wavering self control, she asks me innocently, “How exactly do I thrust with my hips? I understand what it looked like when you did it, but I don’t think I can move like that.”

What I want to say to her is wildly inappropriate for the friend zone. I step behind her, squeezing each of her hips between my fingers. “Bend your knees a little,” I breathe against her neck. Then use my hands to guide the motion of her hips a few times. She was right. She has no idea what she’s

supposed to be doing. “Promise not to take this the wrong way, but you’re awful at this.”

She turns and gives me a well-deserved punch in the shoulder. “Another way then. Teach me another way.”

“Not yet. You need to strengthen your core and the pelvic muscles more. I want you to do this correctly. Let me grab a lift plate. Lay down like you’re going to do sit-ups. I promise it’s only weighted pelvic lifts.” I grab the ten-pound plate and lay it on top of her pelvis. Then I grabbed a thirty-pound plate for myself, and lay down next to her to demonstrate the movement.

“That was hard. It’s going to hurt to laugh tomorrow,” Montana says after hitting one hundred.

“We worked hard today. Do you want to hit up yoga tomorrow and take the day off for recovery?”

“Don’t tell me you do yoga,” she laughs nervously.

“Guilty.”

“Of course you are,” she sighs. “How much is yoga going to set me back and how many days a week is this?” She asks, pulling her phone out and opening her calendar.

I steal a glance at her calendar. I need to figure out who she is, because I’ve never seen anything with that many colors and notifications before.

“You are a busy woman.” I whistle.

“Lucky for you, I have time for a smoothie. I think I can pencil you in before I pick up my car and have a friend over for a movie,” she says.

“So you’re going to invite me inside your house? Aren’t you worried I might snoop and find out who you are?”

She rolls her eyes. “You better not.”

“I can’t guarantee I won’t try to snoop. You’re so mysterious, Montana.” I flash her a dazzling smile.

I don’t know what it is about this girl, but she brings out a side of me I haven’t seen in years. When we’re together, it feels like spending time with an old friend. She feels like home and from what I saw this morning, she could really use some stability. That Ben character was lucky I didn’t knock him the fuck out. Showing up at her house like that and making her cry. If I ever catch him alone, I’m going to fuck his world up. He will wish he never met me, shit he will wish he never hurt this girl, I’m determined to make mine.

Her stomach growls, interrupting my thoughts. “Come on, let’s get you a recovery smoothie, then we can swing by and check on your car.”

Austin CHAPTER

FOURTEEN

“Next stop, the repair shop,” I say, flashing her an innocent grin, with our stomachs happily filled full of fresh smoothies and light-hearted banter. It’s time to check on her car. I, for one, hope it’s delayed. The thought makes me smirk, because I know full well all it will take is some silent communication with Alex to arrange another day without her car. I’m trying to be on my best behavior, even though my toxic traits are threatening to screw everything up. It’s not an ill intention, *just a selfish one*, I think to myself as I steal a glance at her in my passenger seat before closing the door and rounding the car.

I can’t shake the way I feel around Montana. I could very well get used to our comfortable conversations. The musical sound of her laughter makes my stomach flip-flop full of

nerves- and not the bad kind. It's the kind that makes you realize you might be catching feelings for someone. I don't want to just be a random rebound guy, someone who floats in and out of her life as fast as her last relationship ended. No, I want to be her last relationship. I want to be her beginning and her end. The man that shows up to teach her what fairytales are made of, that a happily ever after exists. I will gladly put on a suit of armor to ride into battle and defend her honor. Perfectly content to be her knight in shining armor, especially if it means having the privilege of rocking Mr. Douche Canoe's world. That guy, just thinking about him and the way he treated Montana earlier today, has me bristling with agitation. I flex my fist, fighting the tingling sensation begging to connect with his face.

When we pull up to the shop, Montana jumps out of the car before I can even make it around to open the door for her. "Hey there, little lady, slow down. You're making me look bad in front of the boys," I joke, nodding my head toward the open garage where Alex stands wearing a shit-eating grin.

Her laughter fills the surrounding air, and fuck if it doesn't have me joining in to laugh with her. She has one of those laughs where you can't help but want to partake in her joy for a few fleeting moments. Alex shoots me a questioning look and I jerk my chin up to acknowledge he has my silent attention. He surprises me by dropping his eyes and shaking his head. I give him a questioning look to be sure I am understanding correctly.

“Wait here, kitten.” The words slip off of my tongue before I realize what I am saying, as my arm reaches out to stop her.

She waits, obediently. It’s obvious she’s used to taking orders from a man. Catching myself, I smile and correct my behavior. “I’m sorry, Montana, what I should have said is excuse me while I check in with Alex really fast. I’m disappointed he didn’t call either of us, and I want to make sure he’s okay.”

She smiles at me nervously, “Why, Austin, I believe you are going out of your way on my behalf and you absolutely do not owe me an apology for trying to shield me from what looks to be bad news,” she says, pointing past Alex, to where her car sits on a lift waiting on tires while one of the employees in his gray worksuit tinkers with the brake pads.

“Understood,” I concede, offering her my hand. When her soft skin slides against mine, it triggers every nerve in my body. Electricity pulses through my nerves as I smile at her like a foolish schoolboy.

“Hey, Alex,” I greet him as I approach, still holding her hand in mine and enjoying every second of it.

He returns a smile that reaches all the way to his eyes. “Hey, you two, I apologize for not calling. Unfortunately, we noticed an issue with the way the rotors are wearing down the brake pad. It looks like it might be a bad caliper. I’ve been playing phone tag with the dealership all day, trying to arrange for them to cover it under your car’s warranty.”

All the worry I was holding onto dissipates, as I remember why Alex is such a good guy. He didn't have to go through all the trouble of playing middleman, but it's the type of thing he would do for any of his customers. He's the only honest mechanic I know, and I'm thankful to know him. "Thanks, Alex. I know you would do it for any customer, but it never ceases to amaze me the way you go above and beyond for every single customer you service."

He turns his focus on Montana for a second to explain the situation. After all, he's a professional, and she's not even my girlfriend. He doesn't owe me any information about her situation. He clears his throat. "Nothing to worry about. I think my buddy, Austin, here is enjoying acting as your personal chauffeur, so while you can request a rental car, I really don't think it's necessary. If you're okay with declining, I can use it as a bargaining point to push them into covering the repair."

She nods her head. "Yeah, it's fine to decline the rental as long as Austin is okay with driving me around for another day."

My cock jumps when she says my name. I'm trying hard not to focus on the way it rolled off her lips. "I would love to drive you around every day indefinitely if you'd let me." My tone is playful and joking, but deep down, I am completely serious.

Alex laughs. "That's a pretty solid offer. If I were you, I would take him up on it."

"Bet, maybe I will," she replies, leaving me shocked.

Austin CHAPTER

FIFTEEN

Once everything is settled with her car, I drive Montana home, eager to take her up on the movie offer. When we get to her street, she stops me before I turn. “Park in the driveway, Austin, the alley is gated. I would feel terrible if Ben did anything to mess with your car.”

I nod my head in silence. *So he’s that level of petty*, I think to myself. Honestly, I really shouldn’t be surprised, given how the morning started. I pull the car up to the keypad for the gate and roll down my window.

“five—two—eight—zero,” she recites for me.

The gate creaks, shifting open slowly, to let us in. She navigates me to the correct driveway, then jumps out to key in the garage code. The heavy door groans open to reveal an

empty two-car garage. There are no tools, no storage totes, and no gardening supplies. There's absolutely nothing but walls and cement. I pull inside.

"I just realized you might want to grab a shower after our workout. You're welcome to borrow my guest bathroom, or we can rain check this if you want to. I completely understand." She says, the moment I climb out of the car.

"It's okay," I reply, walking to my trunk and grabbing my gym bag. "I always travel prepared. The guest bathroom is perfectly fine with me."

She laughs, "I suppose most people travel with a gym bag and I really need to upgrade my gym rat game."

"I mean, it's not always necessary, but I travel a lot, so I almost always keep a few changes of clothing in the car and some travel supplies." I'm trying to play it off cool, but I am secretly glad I keep condoms in my travel supplies. As much as I want to take things slow, my dick is in disagreement. It wants to rail her the moment it gets a chance. Things at the gym were easily on the verge of going just a little too far. The thought of her in the shower already has me hard, imagining what it would be like to throw her against the tile walls and slam inside of her while the water beats down my back. I shake my head, clearing my thoughts in an attempt to focus on what Montana is saying.

"That works. I'll show you where to go and tidy up a little while you shower. I wasn't planning on company and just need to make sure everything is where it belongs. Please excuse any

boxes. I literally just moved in. I'm still getting unpacked and settled." She's blushing as she tries to explain away being human, like I actually have an issue with the way her house looks.

She's leaning her shoulder into the door, about to let us in. Suddenly, I'm overcome with the need to comfort her and offer my reassurance. I pull her away from the door and into my chest, kissing the top of her head. "You don't need to worry or apologize for anything, angel. My place is a complete mess from traveling. I would never expect you to be anything but perfectly human. Even if you're a complete slob, I still wouldn't judge you. I know you have a lot going on. I saw your insane color coded calendar, I met your overbearing, pretentious ex, and life is too short to be upset over a mess. If it's that bad, I am happy to help you tidy up before I shower, but something tells me your home is just as perfect as you are. Take a deep breath and relax." I say, releasing her from my hug, after I feel her melt into my arms.

"You made a good point. You know a lot about me. It has me curious about you," she teases, looking over her shoulder as she opens the door, leading us into a mudroom. "I'm curious," she continues as she slides her shoes off and places them in a shoe cubby. "I think you have some explaining to do. How is it exactly that a man like you is single? Don't get me wrong, I think you're perfect too, but I think you're too perfect, which has me wondering what you're hiding."

I throw my head back and laugh. "Too perfect. I'm more like a walking, hopeless disaster. My work keeps me busy. The

ladies don't exactly appreciate my travel schedule and work life balance. I'm always working because in both my industries I need to be relevant in order to continue to do well."

She smiles. "I can relate. Come on, let me give you a quick tour."

She leads me through her townhouse. The first stop is the kitchen, which opens up to a large island, sliding glass door leading out to a patio, and a living room with a cozy fireplace. On the opposite side of the entryway is a large front room she has set up as an office. There are built-in shelves filled with books and boxes galore, along with a large desk. She pulls the pocket doors closed, hiding the space as we walk by.

"That's my office and you can't go in there yet. I don't want you to know who I am. It's really hard to meet genuine people. It's one of my only boundaries and I would really appreciate it if you let me tell you when I am ready." Montana says, hurrying toward another door at the end of the hall.

My face must be hilarious because she's trying hard not to laugh at me. I can feel my mouth gaping open in awe at her only boundary being telling me who she is to the public when she's ready. It's becoming even more clear that her last man didn't show her any kind of basic respect. I'm trying to hide my shock, but I'm not doing a good job. Apparently she must be a pretty famous author or she probably wouldn't be bringing this stuff up- either that, or she's embarrassed. I hope she's not embarrassed. "Fine by me. I can understand exactly

why you might want to get to know each other first. Let's agree not to find each other on social media. I don't want you to see something and judge my public image, either. It will be nice to be two normal people, doing normal people things."

Montana shoots me a dubious look, which has me wondering whether she's already stalked me. "Wait, what is that look for? Did you already stalk me?"

Austin CHAPTER

SIXTEEN

“This is the guest room. The shower is right through there,” she points. “There’s a basket for men and a basket for the ladies under the sink. Select what you need. There are towels out but if you need more, grab whatever you would like from the shelf. I have a tankless system, so don’t worry about speed showering. There’s plenty of hot water.”

Fuck, we are both awkward as I mumble a thanks and walk to the bathroom alone.

“I’ll order a pizza for later. What do you want on yours?” She asks.

“I’ll have whatever you’re getting.” I dig into my pocket for my wallet.

Montana scrunches up her nose and furrows her brows in response to my order. “You don’t have to like what I like. I’m a pineapple-belongs-on-pizza kind of person.”

Her laughter is light, erasing any tension left between us. I smile. “Well, it’s your lucky day, Montana. I’m a pineapple-belongs-on-pizza kind of guy. Any other toppings, surprise me.” I give her a wink that makes her blush. She turns her head, trying to hide it. This girl is fucking adorable. I try to hand her my card, but she bats it away.

“My treat, friend,” she taunts with a wicked grin before walking out and closing the door behind herself.

“Fuck,” I curse under my breath.

She knows exactly how to torment me, putting me in my place, just when I was really starting to fantasize about what could happen tonight. I take a deep breath, reminding myself she’s worth it enough for us to take things slow. My intentions are sincere, and I’m in this for the long haul because I want to make her my forever. Before undressing for a quick shower, I check out all the supplies beneath the sink and start the water. In the shower, I go through all the motions of washing up while trying to balance my time. I don’t want to take too long in here, but I don’t want to be too fast either.

Once I’ve toweled off, I grab my clothes from the gym bag. A pair of jeans and a basic black athletic tee keep me comfortable and the jeans will help hide my hard cock. I run a comb through my hair and style it before spraying cologne and cleaning up my mess. When I emerge, I find her in the kitchen

wiping down the counters. I glance around and can tell she also ran the vacuum while I showered. The dog notices me and jumps up from her dog bed, tail wagging.

“Do you want me to take her with me while I shower?” Montana asks, eyeing my reaction to the dog.

“No, she’s fine,” I answer, dropping to one knee to pet her and letting her sniff me.

“Okay. Pizza should be here in about forty-five minutes. I paid and tipped with the card. They just ring the bell and leave it on the porch, so you’ll just need to bring it in.”

I nod my head at her instructions. She turns to walk off to the stairs, then looks back at me and over her shoulder. “No snooping. Behave.”

“I promise I will try my best,” I laugh.

It’s tempting to snoop around her place while she’s in the shower, but respect is earned, not given. Once I earn her respect, maybe she will tell me who she is. I wish she was a little more careless, but my eyes have scanned every inch of the room and I didn’t see any books in her living room. Her dog snorts at me, and I reach down to pat her. If only the dog could talk, I’m sure we could trade a nice tummy rub or juicy steak for all the secrets she’s holding back. I can’t wait to watch Montana grow into her true self. I plan to do my very best to put her back together and mend her broken soul. She deserves to know what it’s like to be with a real man. One who is content to wait for her to be ready to trust again, even if it’s driving me nuts.

I sit with the dog cuddled up next to me on her couch. While the dog snores, I thumb through my social media, deleting posts that I would never want her to see. When I finish, I shoot off a text to Hendrix.

Me- SOS, bro.

Hendrix- What happened.

Me- I'm at her house and she's in the shower.

Hendrix- I fail to see how this is an SOS. It seems more like you are rubbing it in that you are about to score.

Me- She friend-zoned me and paid for dinner.

Hendrix- <Laughing Emoji>

Me- It's not funny.

Hendrix- Figure it out, bro, you got this.

Me- Not helpful.

Hendrix- Look, if you want me to come over and help you pound her out, just say the words. You know I am always available for assistance.

Me- Fuck off, Hendrix.

Hendrix- I'm sending you fuck vibes since I'm not invited to the party.

Me- Asshole

I pocket my phone, giving up on getting any useful advice from my scumbag best friend. The water to the shower shuts off upstairs, and a few minutes later, the doorbell rings. The

dog wakes up with a loud bark and I give her a pat on the head. “It’s just the pizza,” I say, standing up to grab it from the front door and bring it inside.

Austin CHAPTER

SEVENTEEN

“**S**hit!” I mutter, looking through the little peephole in the door. It’s not the pizza after all. It’s something even better than pineapple pizza. Karma has hand delivered me a special gift this evening. I smile to myself as a loud pounding sounds against the door, pulling me from my fantasy where I am beating the absolute shit out of this guy. “Be on your best behavior,” I remind myself, reaching for the door handle.

When I open the door I am standing face to face with the loser from this morning. I lean into the door frame and give him a cocky grin. “How can I help you, Ben?”

At first, his face falls. He is clearly more than a little surprised that I know his name. As soon as he recovers, he grunts at me, clearly annoyed that he has to interact with me at

all. “Look beef for brains, where’s Montana? I want the fucking dog.”

“Beef for brains, that’s a new one,” I repeat, laughing. “I’ll have you know this beef,” I motion to my body, “and these brains,” I point to my head, “earned me over a million dollars last year.”

He rolls his eyes, and scoffs, “How great for you. A million dollars is nothing to me.” He snaps his fingers in my face. “Now where is Montana?”

I fight the urge to punch him. Every nerve in my body is begging me to lay his pompous ass out. I can’t help but wonder what his obsession is with the dog. She’s standing behind me, growling like she doesn’t even like him. Instead of punching him, I go for an under the belt approach. “She’s in the shower cleaning up.” I wink, knowing it will get under his skin.

“Fantastic. That’s just great,” he replies dryly, clenching his fists. “You can just send me on my way with the dog and our business will be done.” There’s nothing that would have prepared me for his disinterest. If I hadn’t noticed the way his fingers flexed in agitation, I wouldn’t have even known I successfully hit a nerve. I don’t draw any attention to his tell. I only chuckle while giving him a quick once over glance.

“So?” he asks, clearing his throat. “The dog, please.”

I laugh again. “Go buy yourself a new one with all the money you make, since you have it so good, loser.”

I raise an eyebrow at him, calling his bluff, and he sees the challenge through. “That’s part of why we broke up. I have no shortage of beautiful women lining up to do anything I’ve ever imagined for me. Montana had a hard time understanding her place.” He snarls. “Even now, she thinks she can keep the dog, but I’m going to get the dog to prove a point to her. I want to try one last time to teach her where exactly she belongs.”

“Fucking scumbag. Montana doesn’t have the time for you. I think I need to go give her another good session to help her forget all about ever having been with a weak ass, manipulative pussy like you. It’s a shame you couldn’t recognize what a gem you had, because when you stepped aside, you opened the door for me to swoop in and make her mine.” My smart mouth could no longer be contained as I spouted off at him. “Thanks for doing me a favor and seeing yourself out of that relationship. A chance with Montana is a chance with my dream girl. I hope when you fall asleep at night, you miss her so much you can’t sleep.” It was no surprise when moments later his knuckles collided with the skin right above my eyebrow, splitting it open.

I did the same thing I always do in situations when someone else lands the first punch. I fucked him up one side and down the other, unloading on him. His ribs crack against my fingers as he doubles over on impact. I just broke a few ribs with one punch. He should really think about the people he starts fights with. Did he really think he could take me?

I hear a high-pitched squeal from behind me, and steal a quick look to see why. Montana is standing there holding

Audrey in her arms and shaking. Her eyes are fearfully locked on Ben.

“Give me the dog, you stupid little cunt.” Ben screams, hurling his insult at her.

Hearing him call her a cunt is enough to have me black out angry. I grab Ben by the collar of his shirt, squeezing it so tight he’s choking before throwing him into the door frame. When I bring my face close enough to his so he can hear me, I hiss through clenched teeth. “You no longer have the right to speak to my kitten at all. This is your only warning. If you do it again, I will knock your pretty little smile in and you will no longer have girls lining up to do anything you want. Have I made myself clear?”

He nods, so I release my grip, allowing him to slide against the frame. I’m completely caught off guard when he uses the opportunity to push himself into the entryway. I land a punch on his lip as I shout at him, “Get the fuck out of here!”

It only takes one hard shove to move him back out the door. Once he’s on the porch again, I slam the door and lock it.

Suddenly I am feeling really guilty and self conscious about everything that just happened.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper, “Excuse me for a minute.”

Austin CHAPTER

EIGHTEEN

I stumble to her kitchen, but she beats me there. Neither one of us is speaking. It's obvious we are both embarrassed. A heavy silence drones on between us as she retrieves an ice bag, filling it with ice from the fridge. I lean against the counter, hanging my head in silent, unsuspected celebration. My smart mouth and temper often get the best of me. Normally, I would feel some sort of remorse, but I have zero regrets over the things I said to Ben and for swinging on him when he insulted Montana. He may have landed a good punch, splitting my eyebrow a little, but I landed several blows to his stomach and face. I would bet money I broke at least one of his ribs. His blood stains my knuckles from where I split his lip open. I'm only embarrassed Montana had to watch me beat the fuck out of him, and I'm disappointed this all might blow my chance at

getting a little action tonight. The sexual energy between the two of us is out of control. The adrenaline pumping through my body is increasing my urges to give her what we both want. All of her boundary lines are looking blurry. I halfway expected her to stick around for the shower the way she was eye-fucking me. She might think she got away with that, but I definitely caught her. I'll play along for now. Eventually I'm going to bust her.

Montana interrupts my musings. "Here," she says, thrusting the ice at my forehead and leaning in close so our bodies just barely touch. Her skin smells sweet, like cinnamon and honey. She's still shaking from the fight-or-flight adrenaline response. I noticed the way she completely froze up in a trauma response before backing up the stairs, clutching Audrey to her chest like an expensive string of pearls. The way she's holding back is like she's begging for permission to want me. I can feel her body yearning for the comfort of human touch as the sexual electricity buzzes away between us. The sensation of her grazing against my skin lightly has me straining into her in hopes of more. My free hand slides around her waist, pulling her in closer, satisfying my craving for more of her touch. I slide my fingertips up and down her spine and lean my head against her chest. Her heart is pounding rhythmically.

"What are you doing?" She whispers, nervously breaking our silence.

"Pulling you closer." I reply, my voice deep and husky.

"Why?" Montana asks, running her finger along my jawline.

“I like the way it feels, and I wanted to feel better.” I answer.

She surprises me by lifting my chin, bringing her lips in slowly to connect with mine. Before hers lands against me, it’s my turn to question her. “What are you doing?” I ask.

“Kissing you,” she responds, which makes me smile.

“Why are you kissing me, kitten?” I ask right as her lips collide with mine. They are warm, soft, luscious, and everything I imagined they would be. It sends my senses over the edge.

“Because I want to make you feel better, and because I’ve wanted to feel your lips against mine since the moment I met you in the rain.”

“Mmmm,” I growl, spinning on her, and lifting her onto the kitchen counter.

“What are you doing, Austin?” She places the ice back on my head.

“You were trembling. I couldn’t stand to watch you tremble like that, knowing I have myself to blame.”

She leans into me as I run my hands up and down her thighs. It tickles her, and she pulls her feet in, allowing them to rest on the counter stools on either side of us. It also gives me the perfect opportunity to slide my hard, throbbing cock right against her, but I don’t.

“You’re so fucking adorable, Montana,” I whisper, dragging my fingers down her jaw.

She melts into my touch as she sighs. “Why?”

“Because you’re waiting for me to make the first move, but I won’t. You’ve made it very clear we are supposed to stay in the friend-zone and you aren’t interested in a relationship right now.” I rasp.

“That was before I watched you punch my ex and tell him he’s not allowed to talk to me that way. No one has ever stood up to him like that for me.” She confesses.

Her confession has my anger boiling again. What does she mean no one has said anything before? “Montana,” I say, suddenly serious. “Has he acted that way in front of other people toward you and they just turned a blind eye to it?”

She bites her lip nervously, not admitting I am right in my assumption, but giving me enough of a hint that I am. Fuck, I don’t care how hard I am, or how inappropriate it might be, I fill what little space is left between us trying not to think about how I can feel her pressed against my dick. I wrap my arms around her still trembling body, smothering her completely in my embrace. “I promise you, no one will ever treat you that way again. It’s not okay and the fact others have allowed it—“ I pause, disgusted with the people who failed her. “The people who allowed it are no better than him. If you haven’t already, you should cut ties with any of those so-called friends.”

“They were never my friends,” she replies, her tone full of bitter resentment. “They were his friends, and they treated their women the same way.”

My stomach sinks and my heart aches for her, yet at the same time, I am amazed at her resilience and ability to overcome such abuse. I inhale deeply, savoring the scent of her shampoo as I run my fingers through her hair. “You are a strong woman, to overcome all that and have a successful career. Ben doesn’t even realize what he’s lost. Women like you are a rarity who deserve to be treasured. I’m sorry it took me so long to find you, Montana, but I’m here now.”

She cradles my face, caressing my stubble, then tangles her fingers in the hair at the back of my neck. Her face is so close I could take any kisses I want from her, and fuck if I don’t want an endless supply. Instead, I wait. This is her choice. She’s in control, and I won’t take that away from her.

Montana’s hand traces the outline of my lips as she whispers, “You know the first thing I thought after you changed my tire?”

“Tell me,” I mumble, fighting the urge to suck her fingers into my mouth.

“I thought, why couldn’t I have met Austin three years ago, before I got mixed up with Ben? You would have loved the old me.” Her voice trembles as she fights the emotions of her confession.

“I still can,” my deep voice rumbles. “But I can give you more than that. I can love every version of you and cheer you on as you recover.”

“I would like that.” Her words are barely a whisper as she fights back tears.

Everything changes in a split second. Montana's lips find mine and the moment they touch me, my entire world explodes. She's kissing me, soft and gentle at first, until suddenly her kisses become hard and hungry. I kiss her back with the same amount of passion. Electricity crackles between us, filling my senses, and I never want it to end. Her lips part, inviting my tongue inside. I want more. I want so much more, but she has to be the one to decide. "Tell me what you want, Montana. All you have to do is ask."

"I want you," she sighs between kisses. "And I don't need a relationship to know I want you. I want to feel what it's like to be with a real man. I haven't stopped thinking about you since we met. I've tried to ignore these feelings, but I can't."

Austin CHAPTER

NINETEEN

The doorbell rings again, but this time I ignore it. I'm about to show Montana what it feels like to be with a real man. She's never going back to him. I reluctantly pull myself away from our kiss to pant. "I have a condom in my bag."

"I don't want you to leave." Montana pouts.

"Trust me, I don't either. I will be fast." I jog to the car in the garage and am thankful to find it unlocked because my brain can only think about one thing right now and it's not where I put my car keys.

When I return, I slam it on the counter and give her a smoldering look up and down.

“I’m going to make you feel like a fucking goddess. Are you ready?”

She bites her lip, nodding her head as I grab the waistband of her sweat shorts and pull them down, sliding them off her ankles. She squeals in surprise. “What are you doing, Austin?”

“What I promised, making you feel like a goddess, kitten.” I drop to my knees, spread her legs open, and dive in. My tongue lands against her warm pussy and after three flicks, I have her moaning as her fingers pull my hair. She’s trying to smother my face with her pussy, and I am here for it. I suck her clit in between my lips, swirling my tongue around her as her legs begin to shake. It makes me smile and I lose the suction. Coming up for air, I tease her. “Should I keep going? Do you feel like a goddess yet?”

“Please,” she begs.

“Please what, kitten?”

“Please don’t stop,” she moans.

“Anything for you. Lay back,” I demand, greedily.

She lays back and I drag my flat tongue from her entrance to her clit then suck it back between my lips again. I slide my finger into her and my cock bounces with excitement. She’s so fucking wet. I work her slowly, edging her closer stroke by stroke. She’s so fucking perfect. Waiting my turn is pure torture, but I’m willing to endure it. Montana is a melted mess,

splayed out on the countertop. I finally give her the release she's been craving. She explodes and I lick up every last drop.

As soon as she recovers, she sits up, dazed and out of breath. It's sexy as hell, the way she's struggling to function. "Are you ready for round two?" I ask with a smirk.

"I don't think I can handle round two. I'm ready for dessert. If you're that good with your mouth, then I'm dying to find out how good you are with your other body parts."

"How bad do you want to find out?" I arch my brow at Montana.

She catches me by surprise when she grabs me by the waistband of my jeans, pulling me closer and popping the button with her finger and thumb.

I whistle at her. "Hey, that's a fun trick," I say, grabbing her hand and snaking my other up her shirt, unclasping her bra the same way. "I have moves too."

She giggles, fighting her hand free from my grip and tugging at the edges of my shirt until she's pulled it over my head. Her hands greedily run down my toned chest, tracing my abs until she's made her way back to my waistband. This time I let her unzip my pants. As they fall to the ground, it's my turn to peel her shirt from her body. I slide a finger under one strap of her bra and remove it, tossing it over my shoulder and onto the ground. She grabs the edge of my boxer briefs and pulls slowly until my cock bounces free. Her reaction is priceless. Eyes bulging, she grabs for the condom, but it's just out of her reach.

I pick it up for her, holding it hostage between us. “It’s probably better if you don’t know how big I am,” I growl in her ear as I lift the condom to my teeth and rip it open.

I slide the stretchy latex over my throbbing cock like a pro and line myself up with her entrance. Her legs wrap around my waist, pulling my tip inside. I hiss in surprise. She’s hot and drenched as I ease my way in deeper. My lips deliver soft kisses on her shoulder and against her collarbone. She moans as my hand slides from her hip to cup one breast. Her nipples are peaked and hard as my fingers pinch her lightly. Her head falls back as she moans, slamming my dick the rest of the way inside of her.

“You have me fucking buried, kitten,” I rasp. “I’m surprised you know how to handle a dick like this.”

She laughs and I know I’m in trouble. I’ve never wanted to know as bad as I do at this moment what books she writes. “I guess I have a few surprises in store for you.” Her voice is light and teasing.

“I can’t fucking wait,” I grunt as I thrust into her.

Her back arches at the same time that she rolls her hips forward to grind into me. She has me so turned on I don’t know how much longer I’m going to last. I slide my fingers between her legs to stroke her clit, desperate to feel her pussy throbbing around me. “Will you be a good girl and come all over my dick for me, angel?”

“I think I can do that,” she whispers.

“Oh my fucking God,” I moan, pumping faster as my fingers stroke her swollen clit.

“Not God. Goddess. Get it right.”

“Oh my fucking goddess,” I moan.

I kiss her hard, my tongue dominating hers as I send her over. Wave after wave of orgasm pulses through her, and then as requested she comes all over my cock. She comes so hard I have to slam back into her. Which makes her orgasm again. This time, she pulls me over with her. I thrust harder, faster, and deeper until I explode into the condom. Then I slide out quickly. I don't want the condom to break. When you're a bigger guy, reliability can be hard to find. I'm not taking any chances tonight.

She whimpers when I slide out, and I kiss her forehead. “I will gladly do that again for you anytime. All you have to do is ask.”

She smiles, and I know it's not good. “Anytime?”

“Anytime, but that was my only condom.” I reply.

“I guess you should stock up so you can be ready anytime.” She says, sliding off the counter and grabbing some bleach and paper towels to clean up our mess.

I laugh. “I'll be right back.” In the bathroom, I toss the used condom, then grab a fresh pair of boxers and a pair of sweats from my gym bag. I return to the kitchen, but she's gone.

Austin CHAPTER

TWENTY

The front door opens and I turn on edge, ready to fight. Montana pops into view carrying the pizza. She's put her pajamas back on with no underwear. I spy them on the floor right where I left them, and instantly think about running to the gas station while she's asleep so I can wake her up nicely tomorrow, but then curse myself for thinking it. I don't want Montana to feel like just a hookup, but I don't want her to feel like it was a one time thing either. Fuck, making this girl my forever is going to be harder than I thought, but she's so damn worth it. I'll fight as hard as I have to.

"Why are you grinning like that?" Montana asks, interrupting my thoughts.

"I'm just happy, I guess."

“Why’s that?” She asks, setting the pizza on the counter and walking to the cupboard for plates.

“Well, for one, I’ve been wanting to do that for a while now. For two, since you said I need to stock up on condoms, it means I did such a good job you want to do it again.” I’m grinning from ear to ear like a giant idiot.

“Oh yeah,” she teases me, “those are the only reasons?”

She doesn’t realize that I’ve slipped in behind her until I wrap around her to whisper in her ear. “And I really like you, so I hope I can eventually win you over even more so that you let me stick around as more than just a friend with benefits.” I release her, taking the plates from her hands and setting them next to the pizza.

She pauses for a second. When she darts to the fridge, I can see the tears threatening to spill over and run down her cheeks. “Montana, why are you crying?” I ask, concerned.

She wipes at her eyes with her shaking hands. “It’s just,” she takes a deep breath, “you’re so nice. It’s all just too good to be true. I feel like I’m in some kind of adorably sweet, meet cute romance you watch at Christmastime.”

The tears spill over as I pull her into me. “I promise I’m not too good to be true. You’ve just never met a nice guy before.”

“Oh my God, I think it’s true,” she moans, sobbing a little harder. My chest is wet with tears, but I know from life with my mom growing up this is what healing from abuse looks like. It’s messy, emotional, and anything can be a trigger. I

promised her the day my dad left in handcuffs, I would never grow up to be like him. I swore I would be everything he wasn't- for her, and for every other woman in my life. Even though she's no longer with us, my older brother and I still hold each other accountable. I stroke Montana's hair gently, giving her a few more minutes to recover. When she finally pulls away from me, she wipes her tears, blushing with embarrassment.

"I'm sorry," she apologizes. "I don't know why that upset me so much. I just can't believe I've never met a nice guy like you before."

I bite my tongue. She's in no state to hear that she's probably met plenty of nice guys, but she ignored them for the good-looking assholes. "Well, now that you've met one, and you've experienced one of my many talents, what are you going to do with the good guy?" I ask.

She cracks a smile at me. "I don't know what I'm going to do yet, Mr. Good Guy,"

She kisses me softly on the cheek before walking out of the kitchen to plop on the couch with her pizza. I follow her, wanting nothing more than to hold her in my arms all night long. There's something about her that has me completely obsessed. I can't get this girl out of my mind. She flips on the TV for background, but neither of us are really paying it any attention. We are both way too busy eating. It doesn't feel the least bit uncomfortable and when we finish; I take her plate from her and carry it to the trash.

“Where are you going?” She whimpers.

A low chuckle rolls off my lips. “Don’t worry, kitten, I’m not going anywhere, but we are putting you to bed. Yoga is at ten, unless you want to go to sunrise yoga in a few hours.”

Her laughter interrupts me. “Sunrise yoga is a hard no for me. I’m not going anywhere without coffee.”

“Trust me, you don’t want anything but water before yoga. I promise to take you for coffee after, and we can take Audrey for a walk around the lake.” I suggest, helping her up.

She doesn’t fight me, allowing me to pull her along to the guest bedroom. “Come on, you can tuck me in.” I say.

She doesn’t say anything. She doesn’t have to. I know she’s not comfortable inviting me into her bed, but I also know she won’t say no to sleeping with me in the guest bedroom. In the room, I pull the bedcovers back on both sides of the bed and point my finger at it. “Get in so I can hold you. I want to fall asleep with you in my arms tonight.”

She climbs into bed without putting up a fight and I slide in behind her. I pull her into my chest, running my fingers lightly up and down her body, caressing her until I feel her succumb to my touch. “Good night, kitten,” I whisper before I fall asleep cradling her. Our bodies tangled together perfectly. I know she’s the one; she was made for me.

Montana XOXO
CHAPTER 

TWENTY-ONE

Voices echoing from the front of the house make me stir. I rub my eyes, which are still heavy with sleep, as I slowly piece together where I am. What the fuck was I thinking, having sex with Austin last night? *Stupid fucking girl*, I think, cursing myself silently. I wanted to take things slow and not complicate things, but as I think about it, I slowly come to realize I've made every wrong move. The only right move would have been to never go back to the gym and practically invite Austin to take advantage of my broken heart. Except, that's not even fair to put on him because he's been nothing but a perfect gentleman. Everything that's happened has been under my direction.

I don't have time to dwell on any of this. The voices sound familiar, but there's one I don't recognize. I swing my feet out

of the bed and almost step on Audrey. *Why would Austin lock her in the room with me?* I place my ear against the door, listening. Austin is talking.

“Sorry, officer. Montana and Audrey aren’t here at the moment. I dropped them off early for a spa day together. You know how it is, right? I like to treat my girl.”

“I understand. No need for details,” the officer grumbles. “Look, she’s not here and without the dog or any sort of proof really that it belongs to you, there’s not much I can do. You can have a citation issued, but you will need to pay for service and an attorney. This is really a civil matter. My advice is just go get yourself another dog, pal. It looks like you can afford the adoption fee at the shelter.”

Ben’s voice snarls back a reply, sending goosebumps up my arm and my hands to shake. “I don’t want to just buy another dog. She’s here, he’s lying, but that’s fine. I have plenty of money to spend on a motion with the court. Have a nice day, officer. I wish I could say your services have been of help.”

“Are we through here?” Austin asks impatiently.

“Yes, sir, sorry to bother you so early. Between me and you, I think your girl’s going to need a lawyer. If I were you, I would try to file first. It might work out in her favor if she wants to file a civil suit against him for ownership and harassment. If he shows up here again, tell her to give us a call.”

The door thuds closed and I scurry back into bed, squeezing my eyes shut. I can hear Austin’s footsteps in the hallway and

the sound of the door opening. When he comes in, he stops to talk to Audrey. “Don’t worry, Audrey, I’ll pay for the lawyer myself. There’s no way I’m going to let that guy get his hands on you. What do you think about coming with us to yoga? I know the owners will keep an eye on you.”

She barks with excitement, and feeling guilty, I sit up. I don’t want to invade his privacy like that. I’m not sure how to feel about a man like Austin, because he really is too good to be true.

“Bad news, kitten. What’s that calendar of yours look like today?” He asks. His rough morning voice has my pussy tingling.

“It’s pretty flexible. I can move a few things around if I need to.”

“Good, I think you should come stay at my place for a few days. That guy is a total creep, and I don’t like the way he keeps showing up here.” Austin’s jaw twitches with agitation and it’s got me so turned on.

“I can’t leave Audrey like that, Austin, or I would. I appreciate the thought, but I’ll be ok here.” I do my best to sound normal.

“Audrey would come too. I don’t like either of you here, knowing he keeps showing up like this. How long has this been going on?” Austin asks, sitting on the bed.

“It just started,” I answer.

“How long will it take you to pack what you need?” He’s not leaving me any room to say no.

Honestly, it should be a red flag. Guy meets girl, guy lures girl and her dog back to his place and murders them, because he’s way too nice and far too perfect to be real. *Oh my God. I will not write this story. Shut the fuck up, brain.* I need to pull my thoughts together.

“I just need some clothes and her dog bowl. We can stop for a bag of food and some toys at the store. So not long at all. Why?”

“Because, kitten, we are still going to yoga. Trust me when I say the owner is going to fall in love with Audrey. She owes me all kinds of favors for endorsing her studio and upselling it to all my clients.” Austin smiles at me. “Do whatever you need and I’ll tidy up in here and any mess we left last night.”

My pussy is a melted mess as my body screams at me to jump him right now and say *fuck yoga*, but he seems pretty set on going. “I’m going to go take a cold shower and try to wake up some more. I’ll pack us a few things and meet you back downstairs in a little while.” I say, jumping from the bed and putting some distance between the two of us.

He doesn’t stop me, he only laughs. I’m sure he knows full well what he’s doing to my mind and my body, but I don’t care. I’m enjoying every bit of it.

Montana XOXO
CH♥PTER 

TWENTY-TWO

The shower did absolutely nothing to cool me off. Life is throwing me a curve ball and I don't know if I can resist the temptation to go back on my promise to swear off men. My pathetic oath to keep things in the friend-zone with Austin. That cover was blown the minute I lied to myself about not being attracted to him. Instead, here I am, head over heels, catching feelings, and I barely know Austin. I mean, it's a good thing he hasn't turned out to be a serial killer, or a bigger psychopath than Ben, but hey this whole *come stay at my place* thing could just be his way of luring me into a situation where I am trapped so he can chop my body up into teeny tiny pieces. I laugh nervously at my thoughts. *Shut the fuck up, Montana*, I think to myself as I realize what a raving lunatic I sound like.

I toss my bags in the trunk of Austin's car and place Audrey in the backseat. She looks at me, confused. Our drive to the yoga studio is quiet and uneventful. Our silent car rides are something I've gotten used to. They don't bother me and I appreciate that he never tries to push a conversation when he knows I'm barely functioning. As promised, he withheld my coffee, providing me with an ice cold water in place of it. I side-eye the water taunting me in the cup holder with a groan and reach for the bottle.

Austin stifles a laugh. "Montana, it's not that bad. I promise to get you all the coffee you want after yoga. You can order a coffee every day and have it delivered if you want."

His grin is mischievous, and it's so fucking contagious. I drop my head to hide my giant grin.

"You, sir, are a monster," I giggle, failing epically to contain my laughter.

"At least I'm a sexy monster." He winks.

I'm blushing, but I can't help myself. "You are a sexy monster, and I do like your muscles." I reach over and give them a squeeze right as he flexes. Our laughter fills the car. It's so contagious Audrey wags her tail and barks with excitement.

"Okay, Audrey. Calm down." I say, reaching back to give her a reassuring pat.

Austin glides into a parking space and shuts off the car. "Are you ready, Audrey?"

She barks, tail wagging all over again in response. “Stop getting her all worked up. Do you want her to pee in the car?” I joke, opening my door, which earns me a glare from Austin.

“What have I told you about opening your own door?” He scolds.

“What have I told you about being a major switch brat?” I spout back, pulling Audrey from the car, leaving him with his jaw on the ground, struggling to recover.

“Later, we are going to talk about when it is and is not appropriate to talk like that.” He jokes.

I arch my eyebrow at him. “I don’t think you know how being a switch brat works.”

I’m taunting him and loving every minute of it. He locks the car with one hand, adjusting himself with his other. I can’t help but notice and smirk. Good, I hope he enjoys a taste of his own medicine this morning. I think I’m going to be a tease the rest of the day in true switch brat form and see how long he takes to cave.

Easy, girl, I try to warn myself. This could all backfire, ending with you caving first. I glance at Austin, ignoring the warning loud and clear in my head and think game on. My eyes are glued to him, leading the way into the studio. I’m enjoying my view a little too much, and a little too obviously, so much so that the receptionist catches me. She looks like she’s old enough to be my mother.

“Oh my, Austin,” she gushes. “It seems you’ve got yourself an admirer.”

I feel the heat in my cheeks as I blush awkwardly. Thank god Austin doesn’t look at me as he replies, “Hey, Renae, this is Montana.”

“Hey, Montana.” She winks at me. “And who is this adorable little thing?” She asks, looking at Audrey.

“That’s Audrey. I don’t suppose she can hang out during the session? Maybe I can finally cash in on that favor you owe me?” Austin answers.

“Austin, you don’t have to cash in your favor, but I’ll definitely take you up on it.” Renae laughs, and Austin joins in.

“I figured you would love Audrey. I hope the two of you have fun together,” he says, motioning for me to hand over Audrey’s leash.

I hand him the leash and give her a pat goodbye. “Don’t worry,” Austin reassures me, as he reaches for my hand. “Audrey is in great hands. Renae is like a second mother to me. Her daughter, Lexi, is the instructor. We are taking her beginner class. It specifically focuses on helping you build balance. Don’t be embarrassed either, Montana.” He pauses to look me in the eye. “Everyone is more unbalanced than they realize, but you get better at it pretty quickly.”

My mouth is unable to form words. I simply nod in response, terrified strangers are going to realize how bad at this I am, but

then I remember I'm playing the part of a confident switch brat today, and at the very least I can minimize Austin's ability to see how awful I am.

"I guess I am going to need to watch you, so I get the poses right," I pop back at him.

"Oh yeah," he says, smiling with a cocky grin. "I guess as your personal trainer, I am happy to demonstrate good form for you, kitten."

My pussy clenches, which has me instantly regretting the way skipping coffee forced me to choose violence today. He makes it so hard to resist him.

Montana XOXO
CH  PTER 

TWENTY-THREE

Inside of the yoga studio, Austin helps me lay out a mat and set up my space. At first I felt a little weird borrowing one, but as more people trickled in, I realized many of them didn't have their own mat either. Austin set us up near the back and I wholeheartedly appreciate that he took self-conscious me into consideration when selecting the perfect spot. The instructor walks out of a supply closet with straps and begins passing them out to everyone. She's drop dead gorgeous, tall, slender, blonde, everything I am not. I feel a twinge of jealousy when she waves at Austin.

"Hey, cuz." Her voice is bubbly and sweet as she greets Austin, handing him a strap.

"Lexi," he replies warmly, pulling her in for a giant bear hug. "How's my favorite cousin's yoga studio doing?"

She punches him in the arm before answering his question. “I just hired another instructor to help out. Thanks to you, I’ve had so many new customers.”

He beams at her proudly. “I’m glad to hear that, Lexi. I really am. Don’t forget you owe me that double date, and I may just need to cash it in sooner than expected.”

Lexi looks from Austin to me, then back to Austin. She squeals, then runs off to pass out the rest of the straps.

“What was all that about a double date?” I ask, still feeling spicy from my lack of coffee.

Austin laughs me off. “That was my cousin. She owes me a favor in exchange for running some advertisements for her.”

“What kind of favor?” I ask, genuinely curious.

The way he smiles, like he’s guilty and he knows it, has my heart racing with excitement. “She has to go on a date with Hendrix. Lexi countered with it has to be a double. Let’s just say she and my aunt have been trying to convince me to settle down for a few years.”

“Let me guess, you think I am going to agree to being your double?” I side eye him with every ounce of sass I can muster.

“You’re going to more than agree to go, kitten.” He replies cockily. “You’re going to fucking love every minute, and then I’m going to take you home and—“

“Ehem,” the lady next to Austin clears her throat, glaring at Austin, who smirks and winks at her.

It has me covering my mouth, trying not to let the laughter spill out. Hot damn, though I wish he would have finished telling me what he planned to do to me. As if right on cue, Lexi starts the class and my attention turns to her immediately as she walks us through the first few poses. They seem easy enough, but Austin was right. I have horrid balance, and it's thousands of times worse than I thought it would be. Austin, on the other hand, has perfect balance. I've been drooling over his hard muscular lines since the moment the class began. He's absolutely perfect. As I follow along, I find not only are my eyes glued to him, but my brain is obsessing over him with non-stop thoughts and fantasies about what he might do to me if we were alone in the studio.

I can't help myself and the way I am staring, not giving a fuck how uncomfortable it must be for the other guests in the class. Austin can most certainly feel the heat from my uninterrupted attention, but it's as if he's intentionally showing off, enjoying being my eye candy. When I finally pull my eyes off of him to pick up the straps and grab a sip of water, I feel the warmth of Austin's body hovering directly over my shoulder. His lips brush my ear softly as he whispers, "Are you enjoying yourself, kitten?"

My cheeks flush momentarily at the realization he knew, but I'm no longer playing games. The embarrassment fades just as quickly as it appeared and I turn into his stance, looking him dead in the eyes to whisper back, "I always enjoy a good show."

Poor Austin is left speechless as Lexi goes over the floor routine. I take a seat on my mat. Austin does the same and now he's facing me. I have two choices: look away or engage in a stare down fuck fest of the most epic proportions. He winks at me, wearing a devilish smirk on his face, and my traitorous pussy aches for him. *Has it really been so long since I've been properly satisfied?* I return his heat filled gaze, walking my hands out slowly down the mat into the stretch as my cleavage hangs from my sports bra. Austin's eyes drop. He's making no effort to conceal his intentions as he rests his chin in his hands fully bent into the stretch like the show off he is.

Our eyes do the undressing for us, no words needed as we engage in our sensual tug-of-war for the rest of the class. My body is betraying every part of myself that begged to take things slow and keep him in the friend-zone. My heart gives another lurch as his perfectly chiseled muscles ripple across his body. In downward dog I can see each set of abs carved into his stomach while his shirt drapes open, inviting my eyes to explore on their own. Ben didn't like for me to look at him. He didn't want my attention, but Austin welcomes it, basking in my attention and returning it tenfold.

Is this what a healthy relationship feels like, or is this just the head over heels infatuation period all new couples go through? I reprimand myself; we are not even a couple. We are friends. He defended me and then some things happened, but we are not dating. *"But he wants to date you, and he has offered multiple times to take you on a proper date."* A small voice

inside of me whispers. I silence it. I'm not ready. My brain is screaming at my heart. I give myself a pep talk, silencing my internal struggles and deciding to just continue to enjoy myself. It's okay to let a relationship unfold naturally. There's that word again, relationship. It haunts me. I take a deep breath and let it go, like Lexi is telling everyone to do.

“Close your eyes. Now imagine all the negativity leaving your body. Release your breath and let it go.” Lexi's voice is calm as she leads us through a meditation cool down. “Imagine all your negative thoughts, all your stress, and anxiety melting away. Take a deep breath in and blow it away.”

I follow her instructions, feeling an intense relaxation spread over my body. It feels like that sensation you get when you are falling asleep, but still conscious and fully relaxed. I feel so at ease until I feel something cold cover my face. It rips me from my meditation and I spring into a sitting position, pulling the wetness from my face.

“Sorry,” Lexi gasped. “Austin must not have told you about the cold washcloth and essential oils treatment at the end of the session.” She smiles at me.

I look around and everyone with a washcloth is using it to wipe down their sweat beaded bodies. When my eyes land on Austin, he's laughing silently.

“Don't worry,” I hiss at him. “Payback is coming when you least expect it.”

“Ohhh, I like her.” Lexi chimes in from a row over. “She doesn’t put up with your shenanigans.”

Montana XOXO
CH  PTER 

TWENTY-FOUR

Austin thanks his aunt for watching Audrey. I buy myself a membership, refusing to allow Austin to pay for it, and then we are off to grab some coffee.

“Do you want to grab coffee and shower before we go to the store and pick up anything you need for Audrey?” Austin asks, opening my car door.

I sink into the seat, watching as he helps Audrey in the car, then slides into the driver’s seat. “I don’t like admitting this, but my intense, murderous feelings about not getting coffee have subsided. I still want some, but I don’t feel like I need it to get through my day.”

Next to me, Austin is smiling and I know he’s resisting the urge to say I told you so. “I’m glad you liked yoga. I think it

will be a good addition to your fitness plan. It will help you stay toned and lean.”

“I liked the meditation part, too. Everything about yoga was great.” I reply.

“You heard my aunt. She would love for you to bring Audrey back for the dog and me class next month.” Austin shrugs casually.

I realize I am really excited about yoga. It feels like it will help me on my journey to recovering from a life with Ben. The thought of him disgusts me. I can't believe he is trying to take Audrey from me. He was so angry the day I brought her home and now he wants to take her away from me to hurt me all over again. I can hear my therapist in the back of my head telling me it's what a narcissist does to manipulate the other person. Thankfully, Austin was there to keep him from pushing his way inside to take Audrey. There's no telling what else he might have done if Austin wasn't there. I steal an uneasy glance at him to reassure myself and hope he doesn't notice, but he does. He notices instantly that something is wrong and I feel like such a hot mess for coming undone like this for a second time as tears threaten to spill out.

“Montana, are you okay?” He asks.

“I'm fine. It's just my thoughts ran away with themselves and I had this sick realization that if you weren't there last night, well then there's no telling what else Ben could have done to me. He most certainly would have left with Audrey,

but he could have come there with the intent to hurt me.” I confess.

Saying it out loud makes me feel absolutely insane, but if Austin wants to be a part of my life, then he is going to need to realize that I am damaged goods. He can either stand beside me while I work through all these demons or he can walk away and never look back. “I’m sorry,” I say, apologizing for no reason.

“Do not apologize to me because of your trauma, Montana. Whatever it is you are feeling, please know that it is valid. Never let anyone tell you it isn’t. I don’t know what Ben put you through in the time the two of you were together, but I can tell that he’s not a good guy after meeting him twice.” He reaches over and gives my hand a reassuring squeeze.

The tears drip out, and I swipe them away. “So you don’t want to run away and find someone who isn’t an absolute trainwreck?” I ask, with a snuffle and a nervous laugh.

“First of all, kitten, I can’t run away from something that isn’t mine. Remember we are just, well I don’t know what we are and that’s ok, but your healing is what comes first. You told me you aren’t ready for a relationship and I am okay with that. I’m perfectly content waiting for you to figure out what you want us to be.” He brings my hand to his lips, kissing my knuckle softly.

I am fucking melting away inside. How the fuck am I supposed to stay true to myself when the best man in the world is standing right in front of me, begging me to make him

mine? “Thank you, Austin. I don’t know how I am supposed to just focus on myself when I have you here next to me and you’ve been more supportive in the last few days than anyone in my life has ever been to me.”

“Montana, I promise I’ll tell you all about it when I think you are ready to hear how I got to be the way I am.”

We drive in silence after picking up our coffee order. I’m excited to see his place. I silently sip my warm caramel macchiato as it drips down the back of my throat, filling me with the familiar soothing sensation of warmth. He pulls up to the gates and I glance around as he types in his code. He lives on the golf course. It’s my turn for my jaw to drop open.

“You live on the golf course?” I gush, excitement filling my voice as I crane my neck to get a better view.

“Yes, do you play?” Austin asks me.

“No, I’ve never played golf before. I have no idea how, but do you want to hear something crazy?” I ask.

“Of course I do,” he replies, pulling through the gates.

“I’ve always wanted to live on a golf course and tell my friends I am going out to play golf for the day, drink fancy drinks and eat little golf sandwiches.”

Austin laughs, “Well, I think I can not only arrange for that experience, but I can give you some private lessons,” he says, giving me a smoldering hot eye fucking.

“I would love private lessons, but that shower is going to need to happen first, and I need to order a cute outfit and get

some golf clubs,” I ramble enthusiastically.

“Don’t buy golf clubs. I think I have some that will work perfectly and you can borrow them as long as you are staying here with me.”

“You know it’s hard for me to accept kindness, because with Ben, everything came with a price. It was never just a gift or a token of kindness. There were always invisible strings attached I never knew about until it was too late. But I’m working on it, so I promise not to buy golf clubs, but I am buying a cute outfit.”

“I can accept your compromise,” Austin pulls the car into the driveway of an oversized mansion.

“You seriously live on the back nine!” I squeal. “I guess dancing really must pay well.” I tease, implying he’s a stripper.

“I guess I can show you my skills if you would like to request a dance.” He has no shame in the sexual innuendo.

“Oh my God, Austin. I can’t with you right now. I just can’t. Where have you been all my life?” I ask.

“I think I’ve been under your nose all along, kitten.” His response is a playful growl as he hurries around the car to open my door first, and then Audrey’s.

Montana XOXO
CH♥PTER 

TWENTY-FIVE

Austin's place is to die for. It's honestly what every princess's dreams are made of. I can't believe he lives here all alone. He doesn't even bother with a tour, instead he leads me directly to a large bedroom on the main floor. I can't tell if it's his master bedroom or a guest room. He's not speaking to me and I can't help but wonder if I've upset him. He leaves me, walking to the en-suite bathroom. I hear the water turn on.

"Montana," he calls. "Come in here."

Shrugging to Audrey, who has made herself comfortable basking in a pool of sunshine, I wander into the bathroom in search of Austin. He's adjusting the water in a walk-in shower.

“There’s a towel in the warmer.” He points to a towel warmer. “I’ll run out and grab your bag for you. Is there anything else you need from me?”

“I should probably take Audrey out before I shower. Do you have somewhere you want me to take her? I brought her a leash so I can walk her.” I’m rambling like an idiot, suddenly self-conscious.

“Montana, don’t be silly. I have a giant backyard. Audrey is welcome anywhere. I do have a pool though, so you might want to keep an eye on her,” he says, opening a door that leads out to the backyard patio. “I’ll be right back. If she poops, don’t worry about it. I can have my lawn company just add it to my monthly bill. I must confess, I am not a hands-on, mow my own grass guy. It costs me less to pay a yearly maintenance fee for when I am traveling, anyway.”

“It’s fine, Austin. You don’t have to confess your *I’m not a real man* sins to me.” I tease.

“Oh yeah, hilarious,” he laughs. “Let me think of some more. How about I don’t fix things myself and know nothing about plumbing? Um, I’m sure there are more I am forgetting. I guess you’ll have to be surprised.” He chuckles, shaking his head, as he leaves to retrieve my bags from the car.

Audrey prances around outside. She’s chasing the bugs and having a blast. Austin sneaks up behind me, wrapping his arms around me. “Come here, kitten.”

I don’t resist allowing our bodies to meld together. “Audrey looks happy.” He says.

“Yeah she does. I can’t believe your backyard has a pool, a fire pit and a cute BBQ area. I can’t wait to make s’mores. Can we make s’mores?” I ask.

“We can make s’mores and watch a movie. On one condition.”

“What’s the condition?” He has me eating out of his hand, fishing for details.

“Never, ever, call my BBQ cute. It is a manly grill station.” He’s trying really hard to keep from laughing. I can feel his stomach muscles clenching against me.

“Yes, sir.” I’m pressing my luck.

He plays along, dragging his lips against my ear. It has my pussy tingling, giving him its full attention.

“I have a projector. I actually used to set it up with my mom for summer movie nights. In fact, that’s how I came to own this place. I bought it for my mom before she passed away. When she was first diagnosed with cancer, I moved back here full-time from the coast. I went into business with Hendrix, did a lot of modeling and a lot less touring.” His deep voice rumbles in my ear, laced with pain and sorrow.

I place my hand on his arm lightly. “You don’t have to, Austin. You don’t have to tell me all this.”

He kisses the top of my head. “I don’t have to, but I want to. I don’t want to have secrets. Whatever we are, I’ve made my fair share of mistakes before, and I don’t want to keep any skeletons in my closet.”

“I wish I could have met you sooner.” I sulk.

“The important thing is what you do now that you have an opportunity.” He rasps in my ear sensually. He knows exactly what he’s doing as he continues. “How about I make you a welcome bbq dinner tonight, complete with s’mores and a movie?”

“That sounds perfect, but then I better shower and get ready.”

“I’ll let you shower. If I don’t leave, I can’t promise to keep my hands off of you much longer.” He spins me around, pressing me into the door frame as his lips hover dangerously close to my own.

I tilt my chin up to brush against his lips, kissing him lightly. He warned me and now his lips dominate mine, devouring every inch of permission I just gave him. If only I could bring myself to tell him how much I want him to. That these feelings are more than one sided and I haven’t been able to stop fantasizing about him since the day we first met.

When Austin pulls away, I wrap my arms around his neck, pulling him back in for more. He doesn’t fight me, allowing me to take as much of him as I want before begging me to stop. This time, I break the kiss. “I better get in the shower before I use all your hot water.”

“If you send me a picture of Audrey’s dog food, I’ll pick some up for her. Is there anything else you need me to grab while I’m there?”

His question leaves him walking right into a dangerous trap. I bite my bottom lip playfully and give him a sultry look while fighting off the urge to reply with condoms.

“Nope.” I say with a mischievous giggle.

He shakes his head and steps out the door, leaving me reeling. He calls Audrey back inside. I’m surprised she listens to him, wagging her tail happily. She curls up back in her spot full of sunshine, and Austin leaves us both, closing the bedroom door behind him.

I give a nap-ready Audrey one more glance before scurrying off to shower.

Austin CHAPTER

TWENTY-SIX

I take a quick shower before leaving for the grocery store. Alone at last, I can finally call Hendrix and ask him for a favor. He picks up on the second ring. His voice is extra loud on the Bluetooth.

“Austin, I want to know the details. How did things with Montana go after you left here?” Hendrix doesn’t waste any time with small talk.

“We are just going to do it like this? Just jump right in with the nosy questions?” I taunt, avoiding an answer.

Hendrix knows me all too well, though. “I know this side of you, Austin. You’re avoiding an answer, which means you definitely tapped that ass. Now, my man, spill the details. Was it amazing?”

“Hendrix, you know I actually respect Montana, and all the other girls I’ve ever slept with. I am not going to tell you the dirty details, you freak. Get out there and date, then you don’t have to live through me.”

“Ok, at least give me a number on a scale of one to ten. How great was it?”

“Twenty.” I can hear Hendrix silently cursing me.

“Where is she now? What are you doing?” Hendrix asks, changing the subject, knowing I won’t budge on details.

“I’m going to the store. I stayed at her house last night, and man, do I have so much to catch you up on. Her ex came to her house, Hendrix. We both got a few jabs in—“

He interrupts me. “Did you just say he showed up and assaulted you? What are you getting yourself into? We don’t get involved with women who have baggage like this, dude. It’s been one of our rules for years.”

“I know, bro, but she needs me, and Hendrix, I’m in way too deep.” I confess.

“Fuck, man. Where is she now?” He asks, concern heavy in his voice.

“My place.”

“You sly fucking dog, you. I see the game you’re playing,” Hendrix snickers.

“I’m not playing a fucking game, Hendrix.” I bark. “I’m not fucking around. I want her to be the one. I want her to be my

last.”

He’s silent. I know he’s freaking out just as much as I am. For years, everyone I know has begged me to settle down. They’ve set me up on dates, they’ve orchestrated huge and embarrassing scenarios, and now I am telling my best friend in the entire world that I think I found the girl I want to marry outside our gym on an ordinary rainy day. I haven’t told my brother anything yet either, and I know he’s not going to take this news any better. Montana needs me. She deserves to have a man like me in her life, and I am more than happy to deliver a happily ever after like none other. I can tell I am breaking down her walls slowly. Neither one of us were looking for a long-term relationship, but now I can’t imagine spending a single day without seeing her. I’ll wait as long as she makes me to make her mine, but she will be mine if I have any say in the matter.

“Look, Hendrix. Her ex-boyfriend problem, that’s part of why I called. Is your dad still doing his thing? You know, does he still do security and all that? Do you think if I gave you the address, he would install the same setup I have over at her house?”

“Whoa, Austin. That is a really big move, man. You need to slow down. I don’t know if that’s the best idea. What if she gets the wrong idea and freaks out that you are doing all this?”

“It’s not a big move, and she will never know about it, because no one is going to tell her about it, but me. I will tell

her about it when something happens or when I think she can handle hearing it. Are we clear? No one, not you, and not your dad either, will tell Montana about this.” My voice is cold, devoid of any emotion other than anger.

“Yeah, Austin, I feel you. It’s clear. Look, my dad will do anything for you, just say the word, but I still think this is a bad idea.” Hendrix replies.

“I understand where you’re coming from, and I know you are just trying to do your part as my best friend, but look, there’s something about him. He’s a psychopath, and my gut is telling me he’s going to come back to her place, and I want the cameras for two reasons. The first is to fight him where the battle is fair, in a court of law, and to get her a restraining order put in place. The second is because that motherfucker is bad news, and I will enjoy nothing more than getting into his head to fuck with him.”

“Austin, you better promise me one thing, because I promised your mama I would never let anything happen to you. I’ll have my dad do it if you promise to never go over there alone. If he’s as crazy as you say and he catches you there alone, or worse, outnumbered, I am not going to break my promise.” His voice cracks and I know he’s doing his best not to get emotional.

“I promise, Hendrix. I won’t go over there alone and I could never let you break your promise to her. Now come on, man. I saw my cousin. She’s still single. How about that date sometime? I know your dad would be more than happy to

watch the girls. I also know my aunt would be thrilled to babysit for you.”

“I’ll think about it. How about that? Let’s get through one thing at a time.” Hendrix replies.

I can hear the hesitation in his voice, and opt not to press the matter. “Hey, I have to run into the store. I just got here, and I’m trying to be fast. I’ll be in tomorrow afternoon. Plus, I have Jake running some extra hours this week. Take some time off, spend some time with the girls. If you want me to cover a few of your shifts, let me know. I don’t mind helping out while I am between jobs.” I don’t give him time to argue, instead I hang up the phone.

Having cameras installed will give me some peace of mind if she decides to go home. I feel like I’m invading her privacy, but it’s all for the best. I just want her to be safe.

Austin CHAPTER

TWENTY-SEVEN

The house is quiet when I return. It feels like my heart has stopped beating as I zip my way through the house to the kitchen. I drop off an armful of grocery bags, then hurry to find Montana. I can't handle the suspense. I open the door slowly and find her all curled up in bed. There's a small tablet still in her hand. It looks like she dozed off reading. I tip toe my way back from the door and close it softly. Poor thing is probably exhausted from working out with me non-stop and emotionally drained from her ex. I need to build in more recovery days like yoga or maybe hiking. I would love to take her hiking to a secluded little hot springs deep in the forest. There I go, getting ahead of myself again. Hiking to the hot springs is definitely a plan for another day. As I prep

everything for our BBQ, I think about Montana. She feels like home and when I'm with her, nothing else matters.

Once the food is ready, I head outside to set up the space. All the blankets and pillows are exactly where I left them after my mom passed away. Having Montana here reminds me of all the things I miss doing with her. Those last two years were some of the best years I got to spend with her, but they were also the most difficult. At first I was worried bringing Montana here would be a mistake, but I realize now that it might be for the best. Remembering my mom makes me happy. Having someone to spend my time with has made me realize how lonely I've been since she passed. My family and friends have been worried about me and it took meeting Montana to realize why.

Outside, everything is perfect. I turn on all the yard lights and the twinkling lights in the pergola. The grill is heating and the only thing missing is my sleeping beauty. I hate the idea of waking her, but I know she's going to be mad at me for not waking her when I got back, anyway. I opt for the patio entrance and catch Audrey off guard. She barks, greeting me, making Montana jump in surprise. She sits up and looks around.

“I fell asleep waiting for you, didn't I?”

I smile and nod at her. “Don't worry. I got everything all set up, and you needed a nap. It's been a crazy week.”

She cracks her neck and stretches. “Crazy is an understatement.”

“Everything is about ready. I just need you to pick a movie. Burgers won’t take long to cook, and then I’m all yours for the rest of the night.” I offer her my arm as if I’m escorting her on a red carpet.

She hops up from the bed to take my arm and I realize it’s the first time I’ve ever seen her wearing anything other than leggings or yoga tights. “I was beginning to think you didn’t own any jeans.” I say, tugging at the waistband with one finger.

“Do you like when I wear jeans?” She asks, surprised.

My hand runs through my hair nervously as I weigh the options of my response. Montana notices, taking the opportunity to call me out on my lack of reply. “What’s wrong, kitten’s got your tongue again?”

Fuck, all I can think of are dirty responses and I’m trying so hard to behave myself right now. “I couldn’t think of an appropriate response, sorry.”

She punches me in the arm, but I flex just in time to deflect her blow. “Asshole,” she hisses, shaking her hand.

Sighing, I look over my shoulder and down at her. I can’t help but let my eyes wander across the curves her cami top is outlining. “Well, sweetness, I guess we need to add boxing classes to our to-do list. I can’t have you walking around all vulnerable, not knowing how to punch.”

Montana scoffs, then laughs at my response. “So what you’re saying is I totally punch like a girl.”

“I’m not saying you don’t.” I laugh.

Outside, I turn on the fire pit for Montana and hand her my phone. “Here,” I say, swiping open the app. “This will control the remote for the projector. The original fell in the pool a few years ago and I never replaced it. Pick anything you want.”

She gives me a mischievous grin. “Anything I want? You are brave. What if I pick something torturous?”

“I can promise you, kitten, there’s nothing worse you can subject me to. My mother made me watch them all. I swear I used to tease that she was doing it on purpose, grooming me into husband material. That woman.” I shake my head, and Montana laughs.

“She sounds amazing.” Montana whispers, squeezing my hand.

“She was.” I change the subject, not wanting to make her uncomfortable. “Pick away and I’ll get these burgers going. Do you want cheese or no cheese on yours?”

“I don’t care. Whatever you’re making is fine.”

“That’s not what I asked. How do you like your burger? I will make it however you want.” I say, giving her a stern look.

She looks back at me, unsure how to respond, which makes me feel like a total ass, because it’s obvious Ben never let her decide anything for herself. It’s fucking bullshit the way he fucked her up so much emotionally. “I want you to enjoy what you like.” I explain, trying to recover. “You don’t have to like

what I like, or do what I say. Please don't be less for me. I want you to be comfortable just being you."

She smiles. "I appreciate you more than you are ever going to understand, Austin. Surprise me. I want to experience the very best Austin burger ever."

The way she says my name has me ready to drop to my knees. I'm a wreck, completely obsessed. I never want to let her go. She can say my name over and over and it's still going to send shivers up my spine with each utterance. She gave me a challenge and I will happily rise to it. "One burger, the best you've ever tasted, coming right up."

We are snuggled up beneath the stars while a movie plays on the projector. I have Montana's knee pulled between my own. All I can think about is how perfect this moment is. My fingers run through her hair, playing with the inky locks. The black gives her more of an edgy badass look. I like it, but I also liked her before the change. I've liked her from the moment I first saw her. When Hendrix pointed her out and bet that I couldn't win her over. I almost didn't take him up on it. Come to think of it, he still owes me twenty bucks. Montana snuggles into me closer, and I move my arm from her hair to drape across her hips. I don't need anything more than this. Tonight, at this moment, it's all perfect. I hope she doesn't think I'm looking to score or anything.

At the bottom of this oversized lounge, Audrey lays sprawled out, touching us both. Audrey is already growing on me. I know they are a package deal and honestly, I can see why Ben wants the dog so badly. She's perfect. I smile to myself, realizing I have everything he lost, and I plan to thank him again the next time I run into him. I'm going to make Montana my last and it's all thanks to him. Her hand slips down my chest, pulling me from my thoughts.

"Where do you think this is going?" I whisper, grabbing her hand and stopping its descent.

She looks up at me with big, round eyes, batting her eyelashes innocently.

"Do you really think that can work on me?" I give her a stern look.

She tries to stare me down, but after about ten seconds, she bursts out laughing. "I take it you didn't buy condoms at the store?"

"No, kitten, I didn't buy condoms at the store." I cup her face, forcing her to look me in the eye. "I'm a nice guy, Montana, and as much as I would love to take advantage of you right now, I'm not going to." Gradually, I slide her hand down to feel how hard I am. "Trust me, I can't wait to rock your world again, but you need to let me take you on a proper date first."

She sighs against me, running her hand up the length of my cock. "This is exactly why nice guys finish last, because sometimes good girls just want to fuck, too."

I can feel the cum leaking out. Fuck, this girl is giving me a run for my money. It's getting harder and harder to resist trying to figure out who she is.

"Maybe I'm saving myself for serious offers only." I lift my brow and give her a smoldering half smile.

"You're really going to manipulate me into going on a date with you while hiding behind this nice guy agenda?"

"If that's what I've got to do in order to get you to let me take you out, then that's the card I'm playing, and not just because I want to fuck, either. I like you, Montana. I like you a lot. I want you to be my last first date."

She stops entertaining herself with my cock, resting her hand against my heart, which is racing at an embarrassingly fast speed. She's freaking out. Great, I've scared her off by being too honest. I'm not going to sugarcoat my feelings to protect her. I want her to know how I feel so she doesn't need to second guess her own feelings. Suddenly, her arm wraps around my waist and she pulls herself in even closer to me. It surprises me, but I accept her silent admission that she likes me too.

"I like you too, Austin." She mumbles into my chest.

I kiss her head. We don't need words. This is all we need. Inside, I feel like a teenage boy celebrating a girl telling me she likes me back. Her lips find mine capturing them and all I can think about is how much fucking trouble she is. I'm in way too deep, and there's no turning back. I'm an addict and she's my drug of choice.

She breaks our kisses first this time. “Sorry,” she pants. “You didn’t buy condoms and if I keep kissing you, I’m going to lose all control.”

I kiss her forehead. “Does that mean you’re going to let me take you on a date?”

“Yes.”

“Let me check my calendar and see what my availability looks like,” I tease. “Hmmm, I think I can pencil you in next week.”

“That’s too long,” Montana complains.

“Excuse me, but a few minutes ago you wouldn’t even entertain a date. Now, having to wait a week is out of the question.” I taunt, tracing her lips with one finger.

She sucks my finger into her mouth and my cock jumps with excitement. This girl is more trouble than I thought. She’s right, a week will be torture, but I am a masochist and willing to endure it. When she’s had her fun with my finger, she pops it from her mouth and whispers, “Mmm, maybe don’t fuck a girl so good the first time, and you won’t have her following you around all lost and looking for more.”

I laugh nervously, “Don’t give me too many compliments. You don’t want it going to my head.”

She giggles, immaturely. “Sorry, it just sounds so dirty the way you said it.”

I groan, “Of course you made it sexual.” I shake my head. “So, Montana, if I take you on a date, are you going to tell me

about your work and the books you have written?”

“We’ll see.” She replies, “I guess it will depend on where the night takes us.”

I clear my throat, giving her a look.

“You can start by reading the books I like, and if those don’t scare you off, then maybe you can graduate to one of mine.” She’s saucy when she’s starved for pleasure.

“You’re a feisty little kitten when you’re sexually frustrated. I like it.” I say, kissing her on the nose. “Be a good girl and watch the movie.” I cover her eyes with my hand.

“Austin,” she moans, “stop it. I can’t see the movie.” We both laugh until we are practically crying. She’s the one. I just know it.

Austin CHAPTER

TWENTY-EIGHT

Today Montana is working from my place and I am headed to the gym for a quick meeting with Hendrix, then we are going to Montana's to install the security system. His dad will meet us there and we should be able to bang out the install in a few hours. It will leave me just enough time to finish setting up everything for date night tomorrow. I was planning on taking Montana somewhere really fancy, but then I realized that isn't her. She isn't the dress up and go out for tons of attention type, and since I don't know how famous she is, I don't want to put her in any awkward or dangerous situations. My plan is to keep things simple: dinner, drinks, and taking her back to my place. I picked up condoms first thing this morning after I left. I won't be making that mistake twice.

Here, I was worried about showing Montana what it's like to be with a nice guy and she just wants to fuck. I'd be lying if I said I haven't thought about doing it again every day after that first time.

My phone rings. It's Hendrix. I'm a block away from the gym and this fucker better not be calling to cancel.

"Hey."

"Hey, change of plans. Are you almost here? Let's meet in the car. My dad wants to get this done early. Besides, we both know the meeting was a cover up to begin with. You just needed an excuse to sneak out of the house."

"Fine, I'll be pulling up in a minute." I reply and hang up.

A few seconds later, Hendrix is sliding into the front seat of my car. He gives me a nod. "You look refreshed and happy, bro. What's that girl doing to you?"

"I'm not telling you the details, Hendrix. Fuck, you know this. I told you to go on a date with my cousin. She needs a good man. The two of you would be perfect for one another. And on another note, I'm not sneaking out of my own house."

"Sure, buddy, just keep lying to yourself there." He snickers.

I'm glad I tossed the condoms in the trunk. I knew Hendrix was going to give me a hard time today, but damn, he's on a roll and seeing those would not have helped me.

"Here," Hendrix tosses me his phone. "Text my dad the address."

I type in the address, then hit send.

“Cool, so tell me something about her, anything. You should see yourself, man. You just look fucking happy and I’m regretting not keeping her for myself.” Hendrix crosses his arms, and leans back in the seat. “Unless you would rather talk about the gym and business.”

He’s a smartass, but then I guess that’s why he’s been my best friend for as long as I can remember. It was like we walked into the same kindergarten class and were inseparable until college. He got Mikayla pregnant at the end of senior year and started working for his dad’s company right after graduation and I went off to the West Coast, booked an agent and started dancing and touring while doing a few community college classes on the side. Business school was one of the best investments I ever made in myself. I did it all without taking out loans or going into debt. I saved every penny until I had a few million between my investments and my paychecks. In the time since then, I’ve helped my brother fund and establish a successful restaurant. When I moved back home, I helped Hendrix open the gym, and most recently, I helped my cousin out by getting her yoga studio off the ground. I also bought my mom the most amazing house in town so she could live out her final days pampered like the queen I knew she was. I sigh, trying to think of something to tell Hendrix about her.

“Well, she’s everything I’ve ever wanted in a woman and so much more. My mom would have loved her.” It’s the best I can come up with right now.

Hendrix laughs. “You weren’t kidding, man. You’ve got it bad.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I huff at Hendrix, annoyed.

“I only mean you just met her and look at you. We are sneaking over to her house to install a security system with cameras that she knows nothing about.”

“So?” I snap.

“So this is fucking insane, bro. You even got in a fight with her ex. Can’t you see the red flags, man? This girl is screaming trouble and you can’t hear it.”

Hendrix is about to piss me off. My hands tighten on the steering wheel and I slam the car into a higher gear, speeding up in frustration. I’m zooming in and out of traffic not giving a fuck, jaw clenched silently, trying to decide how to respond. “Look, I don’t expect you to understand. Your life was nothing like mine. You know. Your parents were normal. What this guy did to her, Hendrix, it’s just as bad as the physical. If you met him, you would lay his ass out on the ground in two-point-five seconds. He’s verbally abusive, and he had the balls to call her a cunt right in front of me. He got everything he deserved. If I ever find out he laid a finger on her, I would find a way to have him fucking murdered.”

Hendrix looks at me, eyes wide in complete and utter shock at what I’m saying to him.

“Look at me like that all you want, but you don’t understand. Montana is special. She’s perfect, kind, funny, and amazing to be around. That good-for-nothing, sorry excuse for a man, he broke everything about her. She couldn’t even tell me how she likes a cheeseburger the other night. A fucking cheese burger. I asked her if she wanted cheese or no cheese, bro, and she completely shut down. So trust me when I say I’m ready to have Ben’s head hand-delivered to me on a silver platter.” It feels good to get that off my chest.

“Maybe we should have hit the gym first, Austin. You’re all kinds of tense and angry. I’m worried you might need to blow off some steam before you do something stupid. You can’t get all old school gangster on me and demand the death of your enemies.” He slaps me on the shoulder. “Seriously, man. You should hear the way you’re talking. Maybe once the cameras are in the two of you should give each other more space.”

“I don’t need space, Hendrix. I’m trying to protect her. This is me telling you something is off with the guy and it was a good thing I was there when he showed up. I don’t want to talk about it anymore. It’s putting me in a bad mood. Let’s just get this done.” My jaw is clenched firmly and my eyes remain trained on the road ahead of us.

It almost makes me hope Ben shows up during the install so Hendrix can have the pleasure of meeting him. The chances of that are slim. We drive in silence until we arrive at Montana’s. I key in the gate code she gave me the other night and pull into her driveway. “We’ll have to walk around to the front, but I

didn't want to draw any attention to my car. I don't want Montana to know I am doing this."

Hendrix punches me in the arm lightly. "And that, my friend, is yet another red flag to add to my laundry list of reasons I'm worried about you."

"I'm fine, it's fine. Come on, let's go. And Hendrix, her office is off limits to both of us. I promised not to snoop. She doesn't want me to know who she is on paper yet, and I'm trying like hell to respect that. We both know you suck at secrets, so this is me asking you to just avoid having to keep something like that a secret." I give him a hard look.

He dips his chin in acknowledgement. "Yeah, I get it. Austin, you're being a dick today. There's so much fun we could have in her house, and I bet you aren't even going to go through her panty drawer."

I smile at him mischievously. "I mean, I guess we could have a little fun while we wait for the old man. Do you want to go through her panty drawer, Hendrix?"

"Fuck yeah! That's what I'm talking about, my man."

"No! Wrong answer. How am I ever going to trust you alone with Montana if you are willing to go through her panty drawer, you perv?" I laugh, side eyeing him as I unlock the front door using the keys I swiped from Montana last night. I feel guilty for doing it, but I have a gut feeling about all of this and my gut is never wrong.

“See,” Hendrix snorts. “You’re being a fucking party pooping asshole today.”

“Oh, I’m definitely checking out her panty drawer,” I say, taunting him, and walking up the stairs. “You watch for your dad and let me know if you see anything suspicious.”

I shouldn’t be doing this, but what can I say every once in a while, I’m a bad boy.

Austin CHAPTER

TWENTY-NINE

My phone rings, waking me from a dead sleep. I look at the time and the number. That's odd, it's the security company. Everything went smoothly with Hendrix's dad. The last thing I expected was to hear from the live monitoring. They already did the set up confirmation call when we were at Montana's place. "Hello," I mumble sleepily, answering the call.

"Mr. Kinsington," the operator says matter-of-factly. "I'm calling to notify you of property damage to a front window at your second address. We have live footage of the perpetrator and have called the local authorities to respond to the scene."

"Fuck," I curse.

The operator, confusing my frustration, responds compassionately, “Don’t worry, sir, there is no immediate threat or danger. The alarm spooked them and we can confirm they left the premises. We are getting police confirmation that they have dispatched an officer to that address.”

“Thank you. As you know, that is not my primary address. Will they be able to get what they need without me being present?” I ask, glancing over at Montana, sleeping peacefully next to me.

“Yes, sir, I see you are a platinum member with our monitoring company. Thank you for trusting us to manage your properties. We will cooperate with law enforcement fully on your behalf and the officer assigned to the incident will reach out by form to take over from there. Please notify us once you have made the repairs to the property and we will send a tech out to reinstall the alarm on that location. Do you have any further questions for me this evening?” She asks.

“Will you email me an incident number so I can track this on my end?”

“That email has already been sent, Mr. Kinsington. If you have no further questions than I would like to thank you for your time and for being a valued custom—“

I hang up the phone before she can finish her sentence. The time on my phone shows just past three a.m. I swipe my phone open to access the security footage. I would bet anything that it’s Ben, or someone Ben sent there to get the dog. It feels like it’s taking forever for the app to load. When I finally navigate

to the footage, I am not surprised to see Ben clear as day on the hidden camera. He walks right up to the front window and smashes through the glass with a brick. He's just about to shove his arm inside to unlock it when the alarm goes off and he turns to take off, running back to his car. I download the video and immediately send it to Hendrix with a text that says I told him so.

I shut my phone off, deciding I'll deal with this later in the morning. I am going to have to come clean with Montana, and I think she's going to be upset with me for hiding this from her. Hendrix was right. My plan had red flags all over it and I ignored them. I pull Montana closer, savoring these moments with her. Inhaling the scent of her hair, as I curse myself for my overprotective, knee jerk response. I take a deep breath and close my eyes. No sense in letting it keep me up. I will face the consequences of my actions in the morning. For now, I just want to enjoy the way she feels in my arms. It may be the last time she allows me to hold her like this. I can't blame her if she packs up and leaves with Audrey tomorrow, but I will never forgive myself for letting it happen. *Everything will be fine. I will apologize and make things right with her.* I think, reassuring myself before drifting off into a restless sleep.

I wake up to Montana, swirling her fingers across my chest. She's tracing my muscles again. It's adorable. It might even be her favorite thing to do when she thinks I am asleep.

I crack an eyelid open, trying to steal a peek at her and am immediately met with her big blue eyes staring right back at me. I smile, rolling over to face her. “Good morning, beautiful,” I whisper, cupping her face and kissing her forehead.

“Good morning, sexy.” She replies.

I laugh. She’s in one of those moods today. It’s probably not going to last once I confess what I’ve done. “How about I make us some coffee, kitten? We need to talk about something, and I’m not sure how you’re going to feel about what I need to tell you.”

She yanks her hand from my chest and sits straight up in bed, drawing her knees into her chest. “Did I do something wrong? I am sorry if it creeps you out that I was watching you sleep. I like looking at you, but I can promise to stop.”

“It’s not anything you did. It’s something I did, Montana. And for the record, I don’t mind. I like it. In fact, I think it’s fucking adorable. You can stare at me all you want. I’m not going anywhere, but I made a mistake and I understand if you’re upset with me. Come on,” I say, sitting up. “Do you want hot or cold coffee?”

“Surprise me,” she replies, glaring at me through slitted eyes.

I watch as she gets out of bed and walks to the bathroom. Haphazardly, I throw on a pair of sweats over my boxers and stumble to the bathroom in the hall, then the kitchen to start the coffee. I brew the espresso then put everything together

into an iced coffee for each of us. Montana walks into the kitchen, yoga pants, a loose t-shirt that hangs off one shoulder, and a messy bun. She crosses her arms and clears her throat. “So, what do you want to tell me?”

I nod to the family room, carrying both our coffees. She sits down on the couch and I hand her coffee over, then take a seat next to her. I wait for her to take a few sips before I begin my confession.

“I just want to start by saying that I am sorry and I should have never crossed the line like this without saying something to you first. I just had a bad feeling, and I didn’t want you to worry about any of it. You’ve been through so much already. The last thing you needed was to have anything else on your plate.” I’m staring at her, but she refuses to look at me.

“Go on, Austin. Just get this over with.” She says, her voice catching. “I’ve been cheated on a thousand times before. I’m used to these conversations, but this one has got to be the strangest confession, hands down.”

“Kitten, believe me when I say I didn’t cheat on you, and let me remind you that we are not a thing, so it wouldn’t be cheating if I took up company with someone else.” She looks at me, confused. I continue to explain. “I betrayed your trust because I thought I was doing it to keep you safe. You see, Ben rubbed me the wrong way that night he showed up at your place. I just had a bad feeling about him and what he would have done had I not been there. Anyway, yesterday I didn’t just go to the gym to meet with Hendrix.”

“Where did you go then, Austin?” She snaps, turning to look me dead in the eyes.

I gulp. “I went to your house with Hendrix and his dad.”

“You went to my house?” She whispers, confused.

“I went to your house, stole your keys, and I had a security system with a camera system installed and live monitoring set up. Don’t freak out. Please don’t overreact. I’m not a psycho stalker or anything. That’s not why I did it. I just had a terrible feeling about Ben and I was certain he would come back.” I pause, waiting to see if she’s going to say anything, but so far she’s only continuing to stare at me in disbelief.

“This morning, the security company called me.” I open my phone and show her the call at three-eleven. “Ben went to your house. He threw a brick through your window. It’s all on camera and the police already responded. They’ll be following up with us, or with you as soon as today, or maybe even in a few days. I think he’s watching the house, and he saw I was not only there, but I left. I think he thought you were there alone and I don’t know what he was planning to do, but baby, kitten, Montana, I am so sorry for betraying your trust. The only reason I did it was to keep you safe. Believe me, I feel horrible. I also can’t, in good conscience, let you go back there until we get you a restraining order in place. I don’t mind taking you to the police station and driving you home, but I only want you to be safe.”

Her hand finds mine, surprising me. It’s my turn to look at her, confused. Tears line her eyes and I feel terrible. I did this

to her.

“Austin,” she says softly. “Why do you think I would be mad? Why do you think I would want to go home? I don’t want to go back there. I didn’t feel safe after he showed up and I definitely don’t feel safe now knowing what just happened. Was it wrong for you to lie to me? Yes, and that’s important to me, but I understand why you did it.”

A lone tear escapes, rolling down her cheek and I wipe it away, stroking her face and scooting closer to her so I can put my arm around her and comfort her. “I’m sorry for being sneaky. I won’t do it again. That’s a promise. I’ve felt horrible about it.”

Montana leans her head against my shoulder, taking a deep breath. “It’s okay, Austin. I forgive you. It’s not like you were trying to hurt me, and now we have him on video. This is probably a good thing. I can get a restraining order and then when you go back over to fix the window, maybe I can get some more clothes and things to bring back here.”

“Sorry to disappoint you with another one of my *I am not a real man* confessions. I won’t be fixing the window myself, but I know a great contractor and I can take you by your place today after we file a report with the police station. Do you want to cancel date night?”

“Absolutely not. I do not want to cancel date night. In fact, I would like you to reconsider asking me out again on our date. I think I may have changed my mind about you. This big heart of yours has me hooked.” She lays her hand against my chest.

I kiss her head and we sit there. No TV, no phones. Nothing but silence, our own thoughts, and each other, drinking our coffee. Everything is just right until my phone rings, interrupting our vibe.

Austin CHAPTER

THIRTY

The police have been at my house talking to Montana for over an hour. I'm trying my best to remain calm, but we've asked multiple times for an emergency restraining order and they don't feel like there's enough evidence. Montana is doing her best to maintain her composure, but I can tell she's had about enough of the runaround. The police are clearly intimidated by Ben and I'm nosy enough to want to know why. When they finally leave, I know exactly what I need to do.

"Montana, are you sure you feel up for date night tonight?" I ask, running my knuckles up and down the small of her back.

She leans into me, pressing her head against my chest before responding. "I'm not just up for it. I need an escape from

reality. Something or maybe someone to help me take my mind off all these things.”

I scoop her hair back from her face into a makeshift ponytail, pulling it gently, yet forcefully enough to make her look up at me. “I think I can handle helping you forget, kitten. Why don’t you go take a bath and relax? I’m going to make a few phone calls and see about getting a petition for an emergency restraining order in front of the eyes of a judge.”

“Austin, you heard the police. They don’t have enough evidence.”

“I heard them, but my sister-in-law owns a law firm and is a practicing attorney. I’m going to give her a call and see if she thinks there is enough evidence to file a motion with a judge. The police are lying. They are clearly afraid of him, or he’s paid them off. I’m not really sure which, but I’m not afraid of him, Montana, and I’m not going to let him get away with an attempted break-in. You deserve justice. Women everywhere deserve to be protected from men like him.” I release her hair, wrapping my arms around her. “My father was just like Ben until my mother left him.”

“Oh, Austin,” she cries, her hand cradling my face. She kisses me lightly on the lips. There’s nothing sexy about this kiss. It’s light, soft, filled with emotions, and then it’s over. “I’m so sorry. I understand now why he bothers you so much. Be careful. Ben owns several clubs. He’s loaded. I’m sure he’s bought some immunity from the local police.”

“Don’t worry, he isn’t the only one with connections to law enforcement. He’s not going to get away with this, and now that he thinks he has, it’s going to be even more dangerous to return to your place. He will not stop until he gets what he wants and something tells me Audrey is just a pawn in whatever game he’s playing.” I scoop her up over my shoulder and carry her down the hall. “I have a claw-foot tub in the room my mother used. She insisted I get one and I’m told the ladies love them. Take a bath, then get ready for date night, and don’t worry about Ben anymore.”

“But Austin, all my stuff is in the other room,” she says, giving my ass a pinch.

“I think you mean all your stuff is in boxes and packages in the other room. Someone has an online shopping problem. Run and get it. I’ll be right here watching.” I put her down with a shit-eating grin planted on my face, and she scurries off to the other side of the house.

With Montana situated in a bath, I slink off to my downstairs office. I established an entire second living space downstairs when my mom got too sick near the end. I needed a place close by where I could take phone calls for work and meet with her care staff while she rested. Now that it’s just me here and I’m rarely home, I never use the upstairs. My downstairs office does the job just fine. I think I feel closer to her down here, anyway. She was always just a few steps away. Most of our time was spent outside. At first, she spent as much time as

possible outside. Gardening until it got to be too much for her. Golfing at the club with the old lady cougars, as she used to call them. She loved to get outdoors.

I plop down in my office chair to call my brother, because I need to tell him what's going on. I can't just tell Charlotte I'm in love without telling my brother, and the first thing she will do is tell Alex. God bless my sister-in-law. I love her to pieces, but that woman has obsessed over finding me love for years. It makes me shudder. Telling her the double dates are finally possible has me cringing and debating if this is worth confessing to. Do I really want to subject myself to the torture of Charlotte becoming Montana's new best friend? I mull it over longer than I should before deciding it might be more of a Montana problem than a me problem.

My brother's phone rings a few times before he picks up. "Little brother, to what do I owe the pleasure? And how's that pretty little number you brought by?"

I run my hand over my face. Yup, I should have seen that one coming. "Hey, Alex. Funny you should bring her up. She's doing okay, but I need to call Charlotte about something, and wanted to tell you before she drags it out of me and spills the beans."

"Oh my God, Austin, are you going to ask Charlotte to write you a prenup?" He asks, excitedly.

"No, there's not a prenup request incoming. I just met her, and despite that, I'm pretty sure she's the one. Don't say anything, don't judge me. I swear I will not do anything stupid

or crazy. She's just in some trouble, and I think Charlotte can help." I blurt it all out really fast, like the guilty brother I am.

"You think she's the one, but she's in some kind of legal trouble? What kind of legal trouble? What have you gotten yourself mixed up in this time, Austin?" His tone does a complete switch from brother to parent mode.

"It's not bad trouble, I swear. Her ex is just obsessive. He came to her house, not once but twice to take a dog he doesn't even like, under the premise that he only wants it to cause her pain and suffering. The second time he showed up, he swung on me, connected, and tried to shove his way inside."

I barely finish and Alex is back in big brother mode, ready to throw down and demolish Ben. "What do you mean, he swung on you and forced his way in? Do we need to grab Hendrix and show up at his house? Nobody puts their hands on my little bro but me."

"Calm down, Alex. That's part of the problem. Let me tell you the rest because now the police are involved and as much as I want to beat this guy into a bloody pulp and leave him in an alley, something in my gut tells me that's a death sentence."

"Okay, now I am upset. Why am I just now hearing about this, Austin? Why are the police involved?" His anger is shifting from Ben to me, and I know I need to keep things focused or risk a lecture.

"It just happened. Listen, I had a bad feeling about this guy, so Hendrix, his dad, and I all went over and installed a security

system like mine. Cameras, sensors, the whole nine yards. Last night, the monitoring company called to let me know not only do they have him on video throwing a brick through her window and attempting to enter the premises, but they called the police and started the report process. Fast forward, the police came to my place to talk to Montana—“

He interrupts me. “Montana, that’s a pretty name. Charlotte will love that. Go on.”

I sigh, go figure he’s already plotting. I’m willing to bet he’s texting her while I talk to him. “Okay, so they were here, and I’ve pressed them multiple times for an emergency restraining order for her, and get this. They say they don’t have enough evidence to start that process.”

“They don’t have enough evidence!” Alex shouts in my ear, irate.

“Yeah, so there’s something fishy going on because no way is there not enough evidence, right?”

“Austin, who is this guy and has it crossed your mind that he could have some kind of police protection?” Alex asks.

“That’s exactly why I figured Charlotte might be able to help. I remember all the victim advocate work she did on the high-profile case a few years back. I also realized I couldn’t call Charlotte without calling you first, so here we are.” I reply awkwardly.

“Once we get past this mess, I want to hear all about Montana, Austin. I need to know everything about the girl

who stole my brother's heart. She must be quite the thief to have broken through your impenetrable defenses like this. As for Charlotte, I think it's a great place to start. I'm going to call her as soon as we hang up. How about I have her set up a new client consultation? The two of you can meet her at the office." Alex suggests.

"I think I need to have someone watch the dog. Now that the police know where we are, I'm not sure I am confident in their ability to keep their lips sealed about her whereabouts. If he's stupid enough to go to her place, then he's stupid enough to come here. There's no sense in risking it. Maybe I can get Hendrix to do me a favor." I say, thinking out loud, more so than I am responding to my brother.

"I can watch the dog," he chimes in. "Bring her by the house and I'll watch the dog while you meet with Charlotte. And Austin, if anything else happens, call me right away. I don't like this situation one bit. I can't let anything happen to you. We only have each other now, do you understand?" He's choking up. I know he's thinking about mom.

"I understand. I promise, you don't need to worry. Text me the details after you talk to Charlotte." We hang up and I lean back in my chair. I'm not sure whether or not I should be relieved. Things just got thousands of times more complicated, but one thing I'm not going to let it do is ruin my first date with Montana.

Montana XOXO
CH  PTER 

THIRTY-ONE

This dress looked perfectly adorable online, but on me, I'm not sure I like it. I'm standing in front of the mirror in the bathroom, scrutinizing over the way it hugs my curvy body. I've always been self-conscious about my weight and Ben only made my insecurities worse. Granted, I'm not a big girl by any means, but I'm no model either. I know I need to lose weight. I just always lacked the initiative to take control of that aspect of my life. Since I started classes with Hendrix, and now that Austin has pretty much taken over as my personal trainer plus live-in healthy chef, I feel better about accomplishing these goals. I don't want to just be skinny, though; I want to be healthy. Inside and out.

I run my hands down the dress, smoothing it over my hips, taking another few glances in the mirror. The dress is cute; the

lace covered halter top wraps around my bust in a flirty way without showing more than I am comfortable in public. Overall, the fit is tighter without being overly tight across my midsection. Its waist fans out into a silky chiffon skirt which flows over my hips nicely. The lavender color doesn't wash me out either. It actually compliments my pale complexion. I'm really digging the way the shade pops with my raven black hair. I tousled my curls into fun, beachy waves; they run down my back, sweeping past my shoulders. Sighing heavily, I steal a glance at my strappy flat sandals sitting in the box next to me on the ground and debate changing. I half-expect Austin to come in yelling at me that we are going to be late. It has me uneasy and on edge, even though he's never treated me that way. Old habits from Ben are hard to overcome.

I close my eyes, grounding myself, taking some deep relaxing breaths like the way I learned in yoga. Internally, I'm giving myself a pep talk. *You've got this, Montana. Austin is nothing like Ben. He's the best thing that's ever happened to you. It's okay to be scared, but we can't run from him. We've been waiting for so long to find a man like Austin to love and cherish us.* When I open my eyes, I jump in surprise. Austin is standing behind me with the most adorable look of devotion sprinkled across his face.

“Sorry, kitten, I didn't mean to scare you. I was just checking to make sure you are close to being ready. Our reservations are not for a little while and I talked Hendrix into swinging by to watch the house. I didn't want Audrey to be alone. He offered to take her back to his place and let the girls wear her out if it's

something you're okay with." His voice is velvety soft and patient. There's not a single hint of agitation or anger lingering behind his words.

I can feel the tears welling up in my eyes, threatening to spill out and ruin my makeup. I blink them back and Austin notices right away.

"What is it?" He asks, stepping closer to me, laying the palm of his hand against the small of my back. "Do you want to cancel? I can order in. I won't mind having you all to myself here in that dress," he whistles low, pulling me back into him.

"I want to go. I would also be happy to stay here." My reply sounds frazzled. "I'm sorry. Honestly, I'm fine really, it's just you're so kind and patient and I'm not used to it." I confess, immediately regretting doing so.

"Well, then, why were you standing here with your eyes closed when I walked in?" His warm voice rumbles against my ear sensually.

"I was trying to decide if I liked this dress on me. I ordered a few to decide which ones would look the best," I say, looking at the pile of dresses and bags hanging out of an open shipping box on the other end of the counter.

"Mmmm, I see," he hums. "What if I told you I think you look good wearing anything you pick? I'm sure the others are winners too, but seeing you in this one has me wishing I could be selfish and keep you here all to myself."

I'm blushing, and I can feel the heat flooding my cheeks. "I don't know what to say, Austin. I've never felt attractive before."

"I guess we need to change that immediately." He answers with a snap.

Before I can sort out what's happening, I'm being whisked around and thrown on the counter. Austin's hand slides up one thigh as his other does the same, spreading me wide open to receive him.

"What are you doing?" I stammer, my breath caught in my throat and raspy.

"Making sure you know how goddamn irresistible you look in that dress, Montana. Now either kiss me or I'm kissing you, and let's just say I've brought my appetite tonight, so I might need a little snack to hold me over before we leave."

Holy fucking shit! I wrap my arms around him without wasting a single second on playing games. I know exactly what he's insinuating and there's no way I will be able to go out a melted mess when he's through. His hand slides further up my thigh until his fingers land against me. He runs them across my aching pussy one deliberate stroke after the next. Austin kisses me long and hard, teasing me before pulling away to whisper, "What's wrong, kitten, afraid I wouldn't have cleaned up my mess like a good boy?"

I can't say anything. I just stare at him, speechless. Thank fuck! The doorbell rings at exactly the right moment, saving me from a response.

“You’re lucky Hendrix just saved you,” Austin snickers, walking off to answer the door, leaving me to follow after him.

Montana XOXO
CH♥PTER 

THIRTY-TWO

Hendrix whistles at me from the entryway as I round the corner. “Looking good, all cleaned up, Montana. I’m glad you finally caved. My man Austin hasn’t been on a date in ages.” His comment earns him a punch from Austin.

“Hey, so do you want me to take Audrey to my place or bring the girls in?” He asks, Austin sensing he’s worn out his welcome already.

Austin shrugs, looking at me for an answer. “What do you want to do, Montana?”

I think about it, ultimately deciding the girls deserve a treat, and Audrey is just the dog for the job. “Go ahead and take her to your place, Hendrix. I’m sure she’ll have a blast. How old are your kids?”

“Eight,” Hendrix answers.

“Tell them if they give her a bath, I will tip them both for dog sitting.” The look on his face says he is not excited about my offer.

“You know that means my house will smell like a wet dog, right?.” Hendrix laughs.

“Well, it gives them something to do and Audrey loves baths.” I taunt, not trying hard at all to convince him.

Hendrix rolls his eyes. “All right, you two have fun tonight, but not too much fun. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

Austin snorts, “Later, I’m going to need an example of something you’ve said no to doing.”

I laugh at them both as I clip Audrey’s leash on and give her a thousand doggy kisses goodbye. I hand her leash to Hendrix. “Thank you, and I hope the girls enjoy her.”

“They’ve always wanted a dog, but we aren’t home enough. They are going to have a blast with her.” He replies, giving Austin a secret man-shake before he leaves.

I’m trying so hard not to laugh at their boyish secret handshake. Once Austin has closed the door behind Hendrix, he turns to me with a dubious smirk. “I believe we were in the middle of discussing a snack.”

“Austin, we have to go. We have reservations. No time for a snack, sorry.” I say, shrugging at him.

He crosses his arms, looking me over like he's ravenous for me and only me. "What if I say fuck our reservations because I've decided I want you all to myself tonight so I can do whatever I want?" His voice drips with desire as he stares me down.

I match his energy, crossing my arms. "I would say you made me get all dressed up, so you better take me out and show me off."

A low, sexy chuckle rumbles from his chest. "Show you off. I don't want anyone's eyes on you but my own. Tonight, you're all mine, and only mine."

"Deal," I say happily sashaying over to kiss him. I have to stand on my tiptoes to reach his lips. I kiss him softly, one small little peck, then pull away so he can't turn into it.

"You're playing dirty, Montana. It's almost like you're afraid of how good I'm going to make you feel later when I tell you to lay there like my pillow princess."

I giggle, blushing. I don't even know what to say in response to that. Instead, I follow him like a little lost puppy dog to the garage. I'm doing my best to remain calm and collected because inside I'm already melting from all his dirty talk. Austin helps me into the car, leaning in to buckle me and everything. He whispers, "I have to keep my passenger princess safe." Then strolls around the front to slide in next to me.

"Are you going to tell me where you are taking me to dinner?" I ask, already knowing the answer is no.

He stares at me the entire time he's backing down the driveway. When the car rolls into the street, he smiles before replying, "Nope, that's a surprise."

He drives us in our usual comfortable silence, with the music loud, and his hand on my thigh. His fingers run up and down my bare skin affectionately. There's no pressure for anything more than this, and yet my body is screaming for him. He smells good, like a spicy aftershave, with hints of vanilla and warm woody notes. His touch awakens all the nerves in my body, as they remember how good he makes us feel. All I've dreamt about for days is finding myself beneath him as he worships me in ways I've only ever written about in the pages of my books. The road we are on twists and curves away from the busy lights of the city until we are nestled against the rolling foothills, coasting into a smaller sized town. The shops and restaurants line the streets like a perfect little town from a mushy holiday movie. I look over at Austin as he pulls into a small parking lot. He smiles at me. I swear it's the kind of smile that he has when he's up to no good.

"Have you ever heard of a place where you can eat a fancy dinner inside of an old abandoned mine?" Austin whispers, unable to contain his excitement.

"No, I don't think so. I didn't even realize it was safe or possible. Are we having dinner inside of an old mine?" I'm genuinely curious where we are going to find an old mine in the middle of this quaint, movie-ready downtown area.

Austin glides around to open my door and help me out of the car. “I guess I’m not very good at keeping secrets.” He pulls me into him, kissing my forehead, and I inhale his cologne, crumbling against him. “I hope you don’t mind walking from here. The place we are going is only a block away.”

It’s a rhetorical question. He doesn’t wait for me to answer before pulling me along behind him to the sidewalk. The shops we pass fascinate me as I peer into the storefront windows. On the other side of the street, loud music plays from a rooftop cantina. We pass a candy store and a used bookstore with a small coffee shop inside before finally making it to our destination. From the street, I can’t see anything impressive about this place. There’s nothing that screams eat inside of an old mine at me, aside from the rustic facade. Austin opens the door for me like a perfect gentleman. I am transported into an entirely different atmosphere the moment I step inside. The restaurant is dark and swanky. Beneath my feet, the wooden floorboards groan and creak with each step. The hostess, along with all the other staff, are dressed in suits or fancy cocktail dresses. They wear all black, blending in with the dimly lit shadows.

“Do you have a reservation, sir?” She asks Austin politely.

“Kinsington,” he replies.

I realize in the time we have been seeing one another, I never knew his last name. It shouldn’t surprise me I’ve jumped into something with a complete stranger. My toxic trait seems to be

falling hard with little to no information about the person I am falling for.

The hostess interrupts my thoughts with her reply. “I will let your server know you are here. They will come for you as soon as your table is ready. Until then, feel free to have a seat at the bar.”

Montana XOXO
CHAPTER 

THIRTY-THREE

Before the bartender can bring us a glass of water, the waiter has arrived to show us to our seats.

“Good evening, Mr. Kinsington, are the stairs all right for both of you tonight?”

“Yes,” Austin replies, casually.

He goes through his speech about being our host tonight, and launches into talking about the restaurant. I’m only half-listening to what he is saying as he leads us up a steep grand staircase. Shadows sweep across the room, adding to the ambiance. We pass several tables full of men in dress shirts and women in fancy cocktail dresses. I have never been more excited to be perfectly dressed rather than underdressed than I

am right now. The open beams above us make it feel like we really have walked into an old mine.

“Over there is the famous mine shaft. You can book reservations to eat at that table, but you need to book nearly six months in advance, as it is the most popular seat in the house. I understand, however, Mr Kinsington, that you requested our private dining section this evening. If you will both follow me please,” he says, unclipping a red velvet rope with a sign attached. The words private are printed in gold on the small dangling metal sign regally.

I suck my breath in, questioning what kind of private experience I am about to embark on. Behind the rope, we turn down another dark hallway lined with red velvet curtains. Most are closed, though some are open to reveal a large oversized table and fancy booth seating. A girl wearing a silk skirt and nothing but a lingerie bodysuit strolls past us. I’m a mixture of nervous and excited to see where this goes.

When we arrive at our curtained table, there are candles and rose petals covering the top. A vase of long-stemmed roses adorns the table as well. It’s beautiful. Austin has outdone himself as usual.

Austin waits until I’ve slid into the booth before he joins me, casually draping his arm around my shoulders and leaning back comfortably. The waiter goes over the menu with us, grabs a drink order, then closes the curtains behind him. He makes sure to tell Austin all about the do not disturb token hanging outside and the color meanings. Green for service,

and red for do not disturb. I can feel myself blushing at the way he is casually describing romantic encounters happening inside the booths around us and the many we passed on the way to our own.

“Have you ever been anywhere like this place, kitten?” His voice is low and dangerous as it invades my thoughts.

“I have never been anywhere like this and I have also never had fancy fondue. I didn’t realize it lived past the seventies,” I laugh.

“Get ready to have your mind blown.” He nips at my ear, then kisses my neck. Before he can go any further, the waiter returns to take our order.

Austin orders everything for us. Ben used to do the same thing, but with Austin it’s different. He asks my feedback on things I like and dislike and uses his knowledge of the menu to order our couples four-course meal. The waiter leaves us alone before promptly returning with a spread of apples, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, and fancy bread pieces. He leaves once more to retrieve a pot and cheese supplies. Methodically, he begins to melt the cheese right in front of us on the cooktop, making light conversation with Austin. Once the cheese is melted and blended to perfection, he leaves us alone once again, behind the curtain.

Austin pulls a skewer out and places a piece of bread on it, then dips it into the cheese. He brings it to his lips, blowing on it first, then feeds me. I awkwardly accepted his offering. He goes back for his own while I chew mine. “This is actually

way better than I thought it would be.” I gush, “the cheese is incredible. It’s better than anything I’ve ever tasted before.”

I reach for my roll of silverware, which garners me a hard glare from Austin.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk,” he clicks his tongue at me, brushing my hand away. “Sorry, kitten, I’ll be in charge of feeding you tonight.”

I open my mouth to protest and he pops a cheese covered apple inside then presses his finger to my lips. “Shhh, be a good girl, kitten, and don’t make me flip that sign over to do not disturb.”

Oh my God! Where has this man been all my life?

He’s not through with me just yet. He pulls my legs over his own and runs his free hand up and down my bare skin as he continues to feed us both, one bite at a time, until the platter is empty. I never in my wildest dreams thought someone feeding me could be such a sensual experience, but the eye fucking has me so turned on. I think I could survive off of just the first course if it meant climbing into bed with him faster. All his previous threats to change the privacy hanger suddenly feel less like a punishment and more like a reward. I don’t have long to mull it over. Within minutes of finishing the course, our waiter arrives to switch out the pots and bring us a tray of raw meat. My stomach does a one eighty degree flip. Raw meat disgusts me. The waiter ignores the look on my face, proceeding to explain how to cook the meat properly. When he leaves, Austin reaches out and turns the hanger to do not disturb. I’m sure my eyes are about to bulge out of my head.

He turns back to me. “The meat takes a lot longer than they say it does. I’m going to need to keep my hands busy while we wait.”

His hand slides between my legs, parting them, and then his greedy fingers find all the right spots. I gasp in surprise and he covers my mouth with a kiss to silence me. “Shhh,” he purrs as he works me over, slowly at first, letting the tension build. When I’m close to coming, he slips a finger inside of me, as he pulls me over. My pussy betrays me like always, falling victim to his magic hands. Satisfied with having made me cum, he pulls his finger out, licking it clean, and growls, “Should I have dessert before or after steak?”

“After,” I pant, my heart racing, and completely overwhelmed.

He resumes the process of cutting the steak into smaller pieces to feed me over and over again. All the while staring me down with intense eye contact, that has me craving even more of him. Since his hands are busy, I reach for his cock, hoping to find him hard and ready to entertain me. His reflexes are fast. He stops me before I can touch him. “I told you to be a good girl, kitten. You’re my little play toy tonight. Our night is all about you. All you have to do is sit back and enjoy yourself.”

“But,” I try to protest.

“Don’t be greedy, kitten. Not unless you want me to pull you on my lap and ravage you here where everyone can hear you moaning my name.”

Part of me is tempted to push him into doing just that, but I also don't feel like going to jail for having sex in public, and yet something tells me this is not the type of restaurant that would report themselves to the authorities out of fear of being shut down. I decide it's best to play it safe, so I do as I am told until it feels like I can't eat anymore.

Austin flips the hanger over then whispers, "I can't wait for dessert."

This time, when the waiter arrives, he has an assistant. The assistant clears the tabletop, while I do my best to keep a straight unsuspecting face. I keep telling myself not to look guilty. The waiter sets down a pot full of chocolate.

"Half white and half milk chocolate. If you need any more cakes, fruits, or assortments, please let me know and we will be happy to bring you a complimentary second plate." With that, he leaves us alone again.

The plate has everything from marshmallows, rice crispy, brownies, and angel food cake to strawberries, bananas, and pineapple. I don't even attempt to dive in. "Close your eyes, kitten, and don't open them." Austin growls.

I do what he says, but try to peek and catch him flipping the sign around, which has me squeezing my eyes shut, hoping he didn't catch me. The anticipation is killing me until I hear his directions. "Open wide."

I open my mouth and am surprised by a combination of both chocolates covering a piece of rice crispy. Once I swallow, I hear him in my ear again. "Open."

A strawberry slides inside covered in milk chocolate. He licks chocolate off my bottom lip, moaning low enough only I can hear. This continues with a piece of brownie and a slice of banana. Austin whispers, "Open really big this time,"

Part of me wonders if he is going to replace the food with himself. A girl can hope, I guess. I open one eye trying to cheat instead, I catch a glimpse of a marshmallow incoming. "No peeking, kitten." He scolds. Dropping to the ground beneath the table and spreading my legs wide.

My panties slide down around my ankles and then I feel a mix of warmth and cold as chocolate-covered fruit lands against me. His tongue glides from the bottom to the top, sucking the fruit and my clit into his mouth. He pulls back, swallowing the fruit, and goes back for more. I moan, unable to stop myself as his tongue swirls around my clit, taunting and teasing me until I feel ready to burst.

"Stop," I cry. "Please, I can't stay quiet."

He pulls away. Sliding my panties back up where they belong. "Do you think I give a fuck if anyone hears you, Montana?"

The way he says my name has me coming completely undone. The silence is killing me. I don't know whether or not to answer him.

"No," I finally whisper.

"No what, kitten?"

"I don't think you care." I answer.

“That’s a good girl. There’s more chocolate. Do you want it for the road?” He asks me.

“Should I want more for the road?” I ask, challenging him.

“No, but I’ll make sure all your needs are met before we leave, my passenger princess.”

“Where are we going next?” I ask.

“You’ll see.” He answers ominously, with a devilish smirk.

Montana XOXO
CH  PTER 

THIRTY-FOUR

Austin drives us deep into the mountains, past several towns, and through a tunnel. He takes a few side turns. We drive past private property signs, and no trespassing warnings as we slowly ascend the mountain, making our way to the tippy-top. It makes me nervous. *Where is he taking me and why?* We've reached the top of the mountain. There's a dirt parking space with numbers and an address screwed into a wooden sign. Austin eases the car into the spot. He turns his brights on, sets a playlist and turns the music up. He gets out of the car, coming around my side to help me out. I hesitate, but he reassures me.

“Come on, Montana. This place is special and I want to share it with you.” Austin holds his hand out for me, I quickly unbuckle to accept his help. He leaves both doors open and

leans against the hood, pulling me into him until I'm practically sitting on his lap. The wind blows, crisp air around us making us both shiver. Austin wraps his arms around me instinctively, then his deep voice is in my ear, spilling all his greatest secrets. His whispers feel like the lyrics to a love song; something he's always wanted to sing. He's a dreamer, just like me.

“This place is special to me, because it's mine. I own all this land. The entire top of the mountain belongs to me. One day I am going to build a house up here, but not until I have someone special to share it with.” His confession feels heavy. “I want our story to start in the same spot it ends. I've only just met you and can't imagine spending a single moment more of my life without you. Even if you don't want to define what we are, I want us to be exclusive. I don't want to share you with the rest of the world.”

I put my hand on his arm, stopping his speech. “I want to define us, Austin. I'm ready for that step.”

He kisses me on the cheek. “So, are you saying you want to be my girlfriend?”

“Are you going to ask me?”

“Montana, will you be my girlfriend?”

I turn to face him and cup his face. I kiss him hard, full of passion. “Yes, but not just me,” I whisper.

He smiles against my lips. “Of course, Audrey too.” Austin laughs, squeezing me tighter.

It's surreal. The quiet of the darkness, the soft glow of the stars. The music playing in the background as we snuggle together. His hands explore my body. I don't think it can get any better than this, but then he kisses me over and over. He's relentless, showering me in kisses, until I beg him to stop. I lay my head against his chest, and we just exist, melted into one another.

"Austin," I whisper.

"Mmm," he moans in reply.

"A shooting star," I point to the sky.

"Make a wish, kitten," He purrs in that velvety soft voice of his.

It does things to me, it really does. I close my eyes and make a wish.

"What did you wish for?" Austin asks.

"I don't know if I'm allowed to tell, but I wished this night would never end." My confession catches him off guard, and it takes him a minute to recover.

"I do too, kitten. I do too."

He whisks me around and we start to slow dance. "Dance with me, Montana." His words are soft as his lips brush against my ear.

We dance until the song is over. His lips crash down on mine hungrily. It's the type of kiss that gets your heart racing and

leaves you gasping for air. The kind of kiss that consumes your entire being, and I never want it to end.

Montana XOXO
CH♥PTER 

THIRTY-FIVE

Austin carries me a few steps before setting me down on the hood of his car. His lips meld with mine as if they are never meant to be parted. My pussy throbs in anticipation of the pleasure he's going to bring me. His fingers glide lightly over my knees and wrap around the strings of my thong. He pulls it off, dropping the lace underwear to the ground.

“The next time you wear panties on a date, I’m going to really punish you, kitten. Do you understand?” Austin growls after breaking our kiss.

“Yes, sir,” I pant.

“Fuck, I love the things that does to me.” He moans.

I reach for his waistband. He doesn't try to stop me. My hands slide over the thin fabric between his rather enormous

cock and my skin. He thrusts into me, so I grip him tightly, pumping my hand up and down his length slowly.

“Mmmm, what’s your rush, kitten?”

I stop what I am doing, then stare him square in the eyes as my hand slips over his waistband freeing him. “You know exactly why I am rushing, sir.”

His cock jumps. Austin’s eyes hood over at the same time his tongue darts out to lick his lips. My hand lands against him, stroking him gently, running the pads of my fingers firmly across his length. It has him breathing heavily before I feel him slide a finger inside of me. I’m dripping and ready, which only turns him on more. He curls his finger just right, working me over until I come.

Suddenly, he grabs me by the hair. His pre cum leaking down my hand as he groans, “Say the words, Montana. Tell me what you want me to do to you.”

“Yes, sir.” I purr, watching as he swallows hard. “I want you to get a condom.”

Austin cracks a smile as he reaches down to search for his pants pocket. Once he’s dug it out, he holds it up with a smoldering look and says, “What’s next, kitten?”

“Put it on,” I instruct.

He does as he’s told. I wrap my arms around his neck and pull him into me.

“Fuck me like I’ve been a naughty little kitten.” I rasp before kissing his lips like a tease.

His hand flies around my neck, catching me by surprise in all the best ways. “What do you say?”

“Please, sir.”

“That’s a good girl,” he whispers, resting himself against my entrance.

I roll my hips, trying to send him deeper, but he pulls back, then rubs his tip over my clit until I’m whimpering. The anticipation of being filled is down right torturous. It’s all I can think about. The desire overwhelms my senses. I’m breathing heavily, his hand necklace never waivers, even as I throw my head back tilting my chin to the stars. A moan escapes my lips and Austin is quick to encourage me.

“That’s it, kitten, be as loud as you want. There’s nobody around but me and you. I want to hear what a good job I am doing.” Austin’s voice is husky and deep.

“You want to know how you’re doing? F for failing. I want you inside of me. I want to feel you.” I tease.

“If you want to be filled, all you have to do is beg for it, kitten.” His smile is cocky.

“Please. How’s that?” I moan, rolling my hips into him.

“Beg harder, kitten.”

“Please, fill me up with your heavenly cock, send me to the stars until I come all over you.” I whisper in his ear.

His grip tightens around my neck just before he slams his entire length into me. He moans before his lips find mine and

then he's sliding out, playing with just his tip. He works it in and out a few times until I'm panting and writhing beneath his grip. I close my eyes as the orgasm builds deep inside of me.

"Eyes on mine, kitten. Don't even think about looking away."

"And if I do?" I hiss, pushing back on his instructions.

"If you do, then I guess you won't finish. Do I make myself clear?" Austin's not asking. He's commanding, and I am loving every bit of it.

"Fine." I say, knowing it's not the answer he's looking for.

"Excuse me," he says, sliding all the way out.

I cry out in protest.

"What do you say, kitten?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's my good girl. Now tell me, are you going to do as you're told, or am I going to finish without you?"

"I'm going to do as I am told," I relent.

"Sir. I am going to do as I am told, sir," he corrects.

"I am going to do as I am told, sir," I parrot.

"Fuck yes, you are," he moans, sliding into me, until he's buried as deep as he can go.

I keep my eyes glued to his, enjoying watching his face as the pleasure from his thrusts reaches him deep inside. He's picking up his pace. I feel the soft pads of his finger touch my

throbbing clit and fight the urge to squeeze my eyes closed. He swirls his fingers over me, working harder and deeper until I'm crying out louder than I've ever cried before. The pure ecstasy of my orgasm fills me. I can feel my walls closing in on him tightly, then he's grunting and moaning right along with me as a second orgasm pulses through me. He pumps himself in and out until we both come at exactly the same time.

It's over and I already ache for him once he pulls out. How can one man make me feel so fucking good? It's like every time we fuck, it gets better and better. I crave the way he makes me feel. I've never longed to be fucked like this before. The way Austin makes me obsess over our sessions is unlike anything I've ever experienced. The look on his face tells me he feels the same way. His hand slips from around my neck to cup my cheek, then he's kissing me deep and slow.

When he breaks our kiss, he asks, "How was that, kitten?"

"Fucking perfect, sir," I purr in a state of complete, utter satisfaction.

"Just like you," he whispers.

Austin CHAPTER

THIRTY-SIX

I'm up early this morning, earlier than Montana. I have to be if I want to beat her to the coffee maker so we can get a workout in this morning. It's going to be a long day. We are supposed to meet Charlotte at her law firm on the south side of town. It's hard to believe we waited two weeks for this moment. I had the security company email over detailed reports at two a.m. They've been tracking the number of Ben's drive-bys each day. Charlotte says as long as we can show it's consistent and the plates trace back to Ben, we can use it to help nail him in court. She asked her friend at the DMV to pull a plate report for her, and sure enough, they found out the mysterious black car is registered to his company. I've tried to keep Montana's involvement in the matter nonexistent because I've noticed it affects her ability to work. I can't blame her.

She's terrified to go back there to the point I actually suggested we move all her things to a storage facility and rent the townhouse out. At least until we decide on a permanent solution. I told her to bring anything she wants back to my place. Hendrix set up the storage unit for me and next weekend we're moving her things out. A property management company is all set up to take over from there.

It's going to be an emotionally draining day for her. The last thing we need to do is have Montana sign her legal statement and complaint, along with all the other paperwork. The document has to be notarized, unfortunately. It also requires both her and Charlotte to sign. Our appointment is the last one before they go to lunch, so we can't be late. We agreed working out in the morning might give her the serotonin boost she needs to make it through the day unscathed by her trauma. I'm planning to make our workout extra motivational and supportive. I can't keep my hands off her, and I don't have any remorse over it.

My alarm goes off, meaning it's time to go wake her, because she's slept through her own alarms. I tiptoe down the hall quietly, easing the door to the bedroom open so as not to make a noise. My eyes sweep over the room in search of her, but she's nowhere to be found. I hear the echo of Audrey's nails clicking against the kitchen floor. "Montana," I call out, unable to contain my laughter. "Do not turn the coffee machine on." It's too late. I can hear it warming up as I bolt back to the kitchen and slide in front of her. I pull the empty

mug from her hand, setting it on the countertop. “No coffee before workouts. What have I told you?”

“Aw, come on. Can’t you take it easy on me today?” She whimpers, batting her eyelashes at me.

“Absolutely not. We work hard every day.” I remind her.

I hand her a water bottle filled with ice and point to the filtered faucet. Montana rolls her eyes at me, makes her water, then sulks off to the basement to wait for me. I can’t help but smile. She can be a little spicy in the mornings when she’s denied caffeine right off the bat. I kind of love it. I make myself some water and follow her down to the basement. It’s not the size of the gym and I don’t have all the top-of-the-line equipment like I do there, but I have a home gym that rivals a professional athlete’s.

I give her ass a playful pinch when I walk past her. “Come on, kitten. I’ll help you warm up.”

She glares at me, but doesn’t stop me from stepping behind her to guide her stretches. I pretend our bodies are melted together. Everything I do, I make her do, all the while taking every opportunity to run my hands over her body. My hand wraps around her hips as I guide her into a side stretch, pressing my hardness into her. She giggles mischievously and I know she can feel me.

When we are done stretching, I hand her a kettlebell. “Weighted squats. When you come back up, if you have good form, I’ll give you a kiss.”

She's smiling, which tells me the endorphins are kicking in and helping her start the morning right. I demonstrate the form, then help her get set up for success, taking my place in front of her. She squats down as low as she feels comfortable, getting a rhythm for the movement. When she comes back up, I give her a reward kiss. She gets her one hundred squats in, only needing to be corrected once she gets tired.

“Good job, kitten.” I smack her on the ass. “Grab some water.”

“What's next?” She asks, eyeing the equipment.

“How about we jump on the rowing machine and you sit in front of me? We can take turns rowing each other. I'll start. You earned a break.” I set the machine and climb on, waiting for her to sit in front of me. I row us for ten minutes as she runs her hands up and down my thighs, exploring my muscles. It's driving me absolutely wild. I'm tempted to stop our workout and fuck her before we leave to take Audrey to my brother's house, but then I would feel awkward. I feel like he would know we had sex before we came over. I'm probably just paranoid. Either way, it's my turn for a break. She rows us like a champ while my hands slide into her sports bra. I drag my thumbs across each nipple until she falls back into me, moaning.

“What's wrong, kitten?”

“You, sir, know exactly what is wrong,” Montana pants.

“Sir,” I growl in her ear. “I fucking like it. Maybe you'll have to answer me saying only *yes sir* the rest of the day.”

“Oh my God, Austin stop! You know that isn’t possible, and we are meeting your brother. Do you know how embarrassing that would be?”

I laugh. “Embarrassing for you, but fun for me.”

I turn the rower off, then hand Montana a set of ten-pound dumbbells. “Lunges, twenty-five per leg. When you dip into the lunge, your arms come up for a curl rep before you come all the way up. Pull in, keeping your core tight to work the muscles here,” I instruct, tracing my fingers over her lower abdomen. My hand dips greedily between her legs and I drag it across her pussy.

Montana moans, not worrying about being quiet. It’s the first time she’s ever done it without being told. I grab her by the ponytail. “You’re a naughty little kitten this morning.”

She nips at the air between us flirtatiously, and all the sass of a feral gremlin girlfriend. Thinking about it makes me smile. It was a big step for her, and I haven’t made a big deal about it. I turn my attention back to my feral kitten. Kissing her forcibly. She opens her mouth, inviting me in. Fuck, I’m about to lose control, but we don’t have time. I break our kiss, pulling away and pointing to the open space in front of her. “Lunges.”

She turns her blazing blue eyes on me like the temptress she knows she is, batting her long thick lashes and croons. “Please.”

Who the fuck am I to deny this beautiful creature? She’s changed so much since the first day I met her. All she needed was someone to care for her. Montana is blossoming into the

perfect woman right before my eyes. I can't believe someone could have ever worked so hard to diminish her. She shines so brightly, I treasure every piece of herself she has given to me.

I sigh, I hate that I have to tell her no, so I take the weights from her, drop them on the ground, then shove her into the nearest wall. I grab her hands, pulling them over her head and pinning them against the wall with one of mine. My free hand snakes up her leg, grabs her by the knee, and pulls her into me. She kicks her other leg around my waist while I hold her in place against the wall. My length is situated perfectly, splaying her pussy around it. I kiss her deeply, whispering dirty nothings in her ear, before I set her down easily.

“Not now, kitten. We can't meet my brother like that. He'll know, I just know it. Don't you think it would be awkward?” I whisper. “Be a good kitten and wait until later.”

“Awkward for you, indifferent for me.” She replies, teasing me the same way I teased her.

“Go get in the shower. You want to make a good first impression.”

“What's in it for me if I do?” She asks, raising a brow at me.

“I'll treat you to a coffee from your favorite spot,” I reply, bribing her.

“I'm on to you, sir.” She gives me her own dubious grin. “But I'll gladly accept the coffee.”

Austin 
CHAPTER     

THIRTY-SEVEN

I pull up to my brother's house and watch as Montana's jaw drops open. "You didn't tell me your entire family is a bunch of millionaires."

I kiss her hand. "Don't be nervous. This is Charlotte's house. Her dad was a huge hotshot lawyer. He wanted her to follow in his footsteps and when he passed, he left her everything. I don't know much about her mother, only that she passed away when Charlotte was a teenager. Alex and her met at a grief support group. They put each other back together, fell madly in love, and here they are. She saved my brother, just as much as he saved her. But, hey, don't tell him I told you any of this."

She squeezes my hand. "Your secrets, sir, are always safe with me."

This woman is exactly what I needed. She may not realize it yet, but our story is just like theirs. It may feel like I'm saving her, but she's saving me just as much, if not more. I want to tell her everything, but I know she's still not ready to hear those words. I know she's still not ready to admit I love her.

"Thank you, kitten." I release her hand and walk around the car to open her door. I let Audrey out next. She's wagging her tail excitedly. She's never alone anymore. If she's not with me and Montana, she's with Hendrix and the girls, or my aunt. Alex opens the front door, walking out to greet us. He gives me a giant hug, and a pat on the back, before turning to Montana to hug her.

"Hi, Montana. I'm so glad you gave my brother a chance. Thank you for teaching him how to smile again," he says, embarrassing me.

He lets Montana go, and we chat casually for a few minutes. I check my phone, then nod at them both. "We need to get back on the road. There's no way to avoid the tail end of rush hour traffic from this morning."

Montana says her goodbyes and hands Audrey over to Alex. "It was nice meeting you," he says, pulling her in for another one of his famous hugs. "Don't worry. Audrey and I are going to have a blast. I ordered a few toys for her to play with while she's here. Take your time. I've always wanted a dog, but Charlotte says we travel too much and she's right."

"I promise to make Austin take the long way home. Enjoy her all you want. I can't believe how many people love this

silly rescue dog so much.” She beams from ear to ear, and I can tell the two of them are hitting it off.

“All right, we’ll see you in a few hours.” Alex waves as we climb back into the car.

The rush hour traffic wasn’t bad getting down to Charlotte’s office. We even arrived a few minutes early. “Are you ready?” I ask Montana, searching her eyes and body language for any signs that she’s not.

She closes her eyes for a few minutes, thinking it all over. “Yes,” she answers, wet tears line her lower lashes. “I’m ready. I need closure, and I deserve to keep on thriving.”

“That’s my girl, kitten. Just remember, you can be as brave as you want, but the minute you need me, I’ll be there to carry you through it all. Montana, I’ve got you, and I promise, I’m not too good to be true.” I kiss her fingers one at a time, then wipe a few rogue tears from her eyes with the edge of my finger. “I’m here for you. I’m not going anywhere. You can count on me.”

She nods, biting her lip, trying to fight back the tears. I can tell she’s already uncomfortable and anxious from the way her hands are shaking.

“Hold my hand and close your eyes. Take a deep breath in and blow it out while I count for you.” I say calmly, leading her through a breathing exercise.

She smiles. Allowing me to help her through the anxiety and panic she's experiencing. After a few minutes, her breathing is smooth and natural. Her body relaxes. I kiss her fingers, squeezing her hand back. "Tell me when you're ready and we'll go inside. We still have another six minutes before our appointment time, okay?" My tone is calm and reassuring.

I don't want to rush her. I shoot off a quick text letting Charlotte know we are here, working through the trauma response she's having.

"I'm ready," Montana says firmly, reaching to open her door.

I don't correct her at all. This is her moment, her peace. It's not the time or place to make her feel bad. I follow her to the door, clicking the lock button until the beep goes off. She lets me open the heavy glass doors for her. We walk through the building security pretty quickly, then follow the signs to the third floor.

"It's weird going through security." Montana hisses, as we stroll through echoing empty hallways.

I chuckle. "High profile clients, kitten. I've always felt like this place is a little too much for me, but I also understand not everyone in this building works with the best clients."

"What do you mean?" Montana asks, her curiosity getting the best of her.

"I mean, kitten, that sometimes people with lots of money do bad things, and where do you think they go for help with their

cases?”

She stares at me in disbelief. “You mean to tell me Charlotte helps bad people?”

“No, No. You have it all wrong, kitten. She doesn’t help bad people, but sometimes good people make mistakes. Sometimes people, like celebrities, get themselves mixed up in things they shouldn’t be. Her firm helps good people who make poor choices stay out of an overcrowded system.” I explain.

We arrive at the suites owned by Charlotte’s firm and I open the door for her again. Charlotte is standing at the reception desk waiting for us both. I wave to her smiling.

She smiles back warmly. “I didn’t want you to have any trouble getting checked in, so I came down to do it myself.”

“Thanks, Charlotte. It’s good to see you too. This is Montana,” I say, introducing them to one another.

“Montana, it’s so good to meet you. I wish we were meeting for the first time for a better reason, but my brother-in-law there is famous for doing things backwards.” Her tone is light and playful.

Montana laughs. “Something tells me I am going to love the stories you tell me about him.”

“I promise you will love them. Follow me to my office and we can chat some more.” Charlotte motions for us to follow her to an elevator.

She scans her ID card. The doors close behind us. The elevator whooshes us up a few levels to her spacious office on

the fifth floor. In the center of the room is a long, dark wooden table. Cream-colored chairs line each side and on top of the table are piles of papers laid out neatly. “The notary will be right up. She’s just a floor below me. The receptionist let her know you’ve arrived.” Charlotte explains.

She goes over the process with us both and has Montana read over her statements while we wait. The elevator dings and out steps the notary. She’s a cute little old lady who shuffles over to the table and sets up her stamp, along with her log book.

“This is Rosemary,” Charlotte says. “She’s going to notarize each page as we sign them, and then my assistant will make you two copies for your records. I need to keep the originals. We will pack your copies up in a heavy manila envelope.”

Montana nods her understanding.

“Are you ready?” Charlotte asks her, handing over a pen.

“I’m ready,” Montana replies.

“Then let’s get you an emergency protective order.” Charlotte’s tone is dangerous.

If only Ben knew what he was getting himself into. He’s about to be in for a rude awakening in the next few days. Call it karma, call it revenge, but I’m calling it justice for Montana. I can’t wait to rub one more thing in his face. I’m never going to let him hurt her again.

Austin CHAPTER

THIRTY-EIGHT

“Where to next?” I ask Montana. “You promised Alex we would take the long way home.”

She looks at me, unsure how to answer, and I can tell she’s too overwhelmed to decide something like what we should do. “How about this? What do you do to feel better? What’s something that makes you happy?”

Montana cracks a smile. “Retail therapy makes me feel better, and boba tea.”

“What kind of retail therapy are we talking about here, because kitten, don’t think I haven’t noticed the amount of boxes you have delivered.” I tease, trying my best to lighten the mood.

“Austin, I have no clothes at your place.” She laughs. “My car has sat parked in your garage since we got it back, and I’m pretty sure you’re never going to let me drive anywhere again.”

“Hey, are you complaining about being a passenger princess?”

“Absolutely not.” She cackles.

“There’s my girl. Tell me what kind of retail therapy.”

She smiles so big, I know I should be terrified, but here I am trapped in a situation I am suddenly extremely nervous about. “There’s this place, we are pretty close by, it’s a bookstore, and they have boba.”

“Put it in the GPS. Let’s go to this bookstore.” I cave, feeling absolutely ridiculous.

“Austin, there’s something you should know about this particular bookstore.” She confesses.

“Are your books there? Is this your big reveal?” I pull out of our parking spot, following the directions playing on the GPS.

“I’m not answering that. This bookstore is high-end. They only stock special editions. Just don’t look at the prices, okay? No judgment.”

I’m sure I shouldn’t be agreeing to the no judgment clause, but I do despite knowing better. The store is only fifteen minutes away in traffic. I roll the windows down and crank the music up. Montana leans back in her seat and closes her eyes. *Good girl*, I think proud of her self regulation. She’s a fighter,

my fighter. I'm so proud of her. I doubt she's going to let me pay for any of her retail therapy, but it's not going to stop me from trying.

We pay for parking and walk through the quaint little shopping area to the bookstore. It's just over a block from the parking lot. My first impression when we step inside is that I've suddenly found myself involved with some sort of cult. Montana is completely in her element as she releases my hand, scampering over to the shelves full of books. I use the opportunity to find the checkout register.

A girl with bright purple hair and a nose ring greets me. "Hi, can I help you find something, sir?"

I smile. "No, I'm okay, but can you do me a favor?" I ask.

"Maybe- depends on what it is." She replies.

"You see that girl over there?" I whisper, pointing to Montana.

The girl behind the register nods.

"She needs some retail therapy. Here's my card. Don't listen to a word she says. It's my treat." I half expect her to tell me no, but she smiles instead.

"Smart man." She replies. "I feel bad for your bank account."

I shrug. "She deserves it."

"Austin," Montana hollers from across the store. "Where are you?"

I jog toward the sound of her voice. “Sorry, I lost you.”

“It’s okay,” she replies when I come into view.

Montana is holding a pile of books. “Here, take these up to the register for me please, and let them know I’ll be making a pile, unless you want to carry them around for me.”

“Montana, you know I’m not judging you, but um, how are we getting these back to the car?” I ask, slightly concerned.

“Don’t worry, Austin,” she kisses me lightly. “They have curbside pickup for purchase over five hundred dollars.”

I look at her like she’s crazy. “Kitten, there are only five books here.”

“Don’t worry, I’m not done. I usually spend more than this, besides there are a few copies they have that I absolutely need for my collection.”

“Collection?” I say, giving her a look.

“Don’t judge me, Austin. It could be drugs.” She says, with a perfectly straight face.

“Excuse me what? It could be drugs?” I repeat.

“Yes, it could be drugs. Are you going to help me or not?”

“I’m going to help you, but I am absolutely terrified to see what this book bender is going to cost.” I whisper.

“Don’t worry, I’m a big girl and I know what I’m doing.”

I kiss her forehead. “Enjoy yourself then, kitten. Go wild. Be happy, live your best life.”

I take her books to the register and the girl doesn't even hide her gloating grin. "I'll start ringing you out and boxing these up. Good luck, buddy. You're going to need it."

Montana spends a solid hour picking out at least twenty books, and when they read her the total, she doesn't even flinch until the girl tells her the books are already paid for.

"Who paid for them?" She asks, confused.

She looks at me, waiting for a confession. "Guilty."

"Austin, I told you not to." Montana scolds.

"I loved every minute of watching you smile. It's worth every penny to me. Are you good if I go grab the car?"

"What kind of tea do you want?" She asks.

I shrug. "I've never had boba before. Surprise me with your favorite."

She glares at me, knowing full well I just gave her a taste of her own medicine. It's fucking adorable. I hope she has good taste in tea flavors, because I can't stand the thought of disappointing her. Before she can say anything else, I blow her a kiss and bolt for the door. Behind me I can hear the two of them erupt in cackling laughter. She must know the owner of the store or something. I guess that shouldn't surprise me.

Montana's books are packed carefully in the trunk and she's got one hand out the window, enjoying the warm air as it blows across it. She sips her boba happily. As we cruise back to my brother's place. I've been texting him updates all day, so I'm not at all concerned about where the day took us.

The tea isn't bad. I'm not the biggest fan of the little balls, but I would drink it again. I feel like Montana showed me more of herself today than she has since we met, and I also learned she has a wish list at the store. If I ever want to surprise her with a gift, Megan is happy to help. I made sure to tip her for helping me with my sneaky plan. I'm pretty sure Montana completely made her day today, and she made Montana's equally special.

My phone rings through the car, interrupting both the music and my thoughts. It's my agent. I hesitate, debating whether or not I should take the call. I decide to hit ignore since I'm with Montana right now, and it's important to me she knows when we are together she has my full attention.

"Who was that?" She asks, noticing I hit ignore.

"My agent."

"Shouldn't you answer it?" She replies.

"No. I'll call him back later. Whatever it is, it can wait." No sooner do I finish my sentence and the phone is ringing again.

"Maybe it can't. Honestly, Austin, answer your phone call. It's not going to bother me any."

I answer, "I'm driving, Phill. Is this important or can I call you when I'm not in rush hour traffic?"

"Call me back as soon as you get home. If I don't hear from you in the next two hours, I'm calling you back. I have a job for you, but it's a quick turnaround." Phill says.

"Okay, hanging up now. Bye, Phill."

Montana doesn't ask me anything about the call, but I tell her anyway. "He has a job for me."

"Austin, that's great news." She's genuinely happy for me.

"Maybe," I reply, knowing it's not. The money is great, I'm sure, but the timing is awful.

Austin CHAPTER

THIRTY-NINE

Alex insisted we stay for dinner, which he had ready within minutes of arriving. I think he secretly plotted this, but regardless, we stayed for over an hour laughing and talking. I finally had to confess my need to call Phill back, and even then I don't think Alex wanted us to go. He begged me to bring Montana back for dinner next week. She tentatively agreed for us, letting it slip that we will be packing up her townhouse next weekend. Of course, my brother, being the good brother he's always been, was quick to volunteer his help.

I'm sitting in my office alone, replaying moments from earlier over and over in my head. I wish my mom was here to meet Montana. All I have left is my brother. It means the world to me the way we stepped up to parent each other. Even

though he's older, I've still had my fair share of parenting moments. I'm glad he and Montana hit it off so well. She's so fucking perfect. She knows how to light up a room, or maybe it's just me she lights up, and it makes the world feel alive again. I run my hands through my hair, agonizing over the phone call I am about to make. I left Montana in the living room, curled up with her tablet reading. Audrey was sprawled out on the rug, snoring. Alex really wore her out today. Go figure, I finally feel I'm where I belong with the person I belong, and work has to fuck things up.

"Time to stop avoiding this," I say to myself, and swipe open my phone to call Phill back.

He answers on the second ring. "Austin, I was just getting ready to call you back."

"Hey, Phill. Sorry I couldn't talk earlier. Traffic was awful."

"That's fine. I just have an offer for you, but it's going to be a real quick turnaround. You'll need to fly out to New York in less than twenty-four hours for a photo shoot. Austin, it's for one of the big brands and they are offering double on your rush fee plus a four thousand dollar travel voucher so you can book your own flight, hotel, and have money left over for food." He pauses, waiting for a response from me.

"How much can you get my flights for? I want the latest possible flight out and the earliest flight back in. I also need a decent hotel, nothing fancy. You know where I am willing to stay. Are they providing transportation to the shoot or will that be a part of the stipend?"

“They are providing a driver to and from the shoot. You’ll only need to worry about getting from the airport to the hotel. We can definitely get this done under the budget without skimping on the important things. This is the kind of interest you need. Don’t say no,” Phill replies, urging me to think about everything we’ve been submitting for.

The timing is awful, but the money makes it more than worth it for two days away. It’s only two days, and it could be worse. It could be a tour schedule. I sigh. It would be stupid to turn it down.

“Yeah,” I agree. “Text and email all the details over. Get everything booked and set up. Including scheduling a driver to pick me up and take me to the airport, and one to bring me home. I’ll also need rides from the airport to the hotel and back again scheduled.”

“Consider it done. Austin, you’re not going to regret this. Get a permanent deal closed and we can scale way back on the dancing gigs.” Phill has never thought highly of my backup dancing career, but it gave me everything I have now.

If it hadn’t been for my dance career, I would have never started modeling and I would have never met him either. He wouldn’t even be my agent. Shoot, I might not even have an agent. I hang up the phone with Phill and think about how I am going to break the news to Montana. She’s not going to like it, but I’ve got to work. I can have Hendrix check on her if she needs anything. *It will only be for a few days*, I think, trying to reassure myself. I wait to get the details from Phill. It

gives me time to sit and think about everything that just happened.

Once Phill's text and email both roll through my phone, it's been almost thirty minutes. I open the text looking over all the flight information. He has me leaving tomorrow, Tuesday night, on a flight at ten, and returning Thursday morning landing at five a.m. I've got to give him credit, he did a great job on the flights. As promised his cost estimates have me pocketing nearly fifteen hundred from the stipend.

Time to go break the news to Montana. I pocket my phone and flip off the lights to the office. She's right where I left her. I clear my voice as I walk up to her, taking a seat on the sectional at her feet.

"I have some bad news, kitten." I say, getting it done and over with.

"Oh no. What is it?" She asks, setting her stuff down and sitting up to look at me.

"When my agent called earlier, it was about a job opportunity. It's great news, because I've been trying to get on their shooting schedules for a while. It could be the break I need to land a permanent placement on their lists." I pause, and her hand lands against my arm.

She runs her fingers up and down my arm lightly. "Austin, this is great for you. I'll be fine without you for a few days. Honestly, I know how to drive myself places."

I laugh, leaning over to kiss her on the head. “Oh, I know you can drive. I just don’t like for you to. I don’t trust you to keep yourself safe and out of trouble.”

She punches me right in the chest. I have to give her credit. It’s a lot harder than I expected, which makes me smile.

“Are you laughing at my punch?” She hisses, offended.

“Yes. No. Yes. Wait, don’t punch me again.” I reply. “I was thinking how proud I am of you. The punch was much harder than the last time.”

She rolls her eyes and scoffs at me. “Austin, I will be fine. Honestly, you need to go to work.”

“I wanted to talk to you about that. You know I want you to stay here while I am gone? I don’t want you to go to your place without the police being there like we have set up for this weekend.” It feels like I am begging her.

“I promise I will not leave the house, but I can’t promise there won’t be some online shopping happening.” She’s gloating. If I’m not here to spy on her online shopping, then there’s no telling what she is going to sneak into the house.

“Montana, no junk food. Absolutely no junk food comes through that door.”

“Got it, no junk food,” she recites.

“Thank you,” I say sincerely, even though I know I will come home to a pile of boxes in the recycling. I pull her onto my lap, and she wraps her arms around my neck. She snuggles into me, right where she belongs.

“Will you promise to text me all day while I am gone?” I whisper.

“Only if you promise to text me all day and all night while you’re gone. Also, I demand pictures.” She replies without missing a beat.

“Deal. Should I carry you to bed?”

Yes, she nods. I stand, and whistle for Audrey, then carry her off to bed.

Austin CHAPTER

FORTY

The moment my head hits the pillow, she attacks me. Montana climbs on top of me, forcing her kisses on my all too eager lips. My fingers roam her body before settling on her hips.

“What’s this, kitten?” I whisper.

“Goodbye sex. Plus, I behaved all day as promised, so now I get to take what I want for payment.” Her voice is sultry and soft.

I reach for my drawer, but she stops me, pulling a condom out from under the pillow. “What in the world?” I laugh. “Montana, when did you put that there?”

“Emergency condom,” she replies, ripping it open.

Her hands slide down, maneuvering my boxers off. My dick is hard and waiting for her as she slides the condom over it. I can't help but moan, enjoying the way she's taking control. My hands slip up beneath the oversized t-shirt she's wearing to trace and tease her nipples.

She slides my hands down, scolding me. "No, sir. I didn't say you could play with those."

"Oh, my bad," I apologize. "I guess I missed a step." I don't let her stop me. I slide her panties off and return my hands to each one of her breasts. They make the perfect handful.

"Fine, but only because I've been waiting all day like a good little kitten. You keep your hands there." She instructs.

She doesn't have to tell me twice. I'll do anything she asks right now. I'm so fucking turned on by her assault. The broken woman I met with a flat tire is gone. I don't know who the fuck this new girl is, but I'm all fucking for it.

Not thinking anything of it, completely lost in my thoughts about how fucking sexy her awakening is, I remove a hand, reaching for her face. She catches my hand and gives me a dangerous look. "What are you doing?"

"Sorry, kitten. I want to look into your eyes while you take something for yourself." I confess.

"You can look with your eyes, but your hands stay here." Montana slips my hand back to cup her breast.

Satisfied with herself and my compliance, she tilts her hips just right, sliding my tip inside of her tight, hot pussy. I start to

moan, but find her lips covering mine. She rocks me in deeper, all the while rhythmically working her hips. It has my dick throbbing deep inside of her. The way she's working me sliding up and down my cock has me fighting the urge to come. Her frosty blue eyes holding mine in place when she breaks our kiss to lean back and pull me over the edge. My orgasm is building and so is hers. Montana slams into me and I feel the warmth of her cum as her pussy clenches around me. I come, filling the condom and immediately pulling out.

When we are all cleaned up, I pull Montana into my chest to spoon her while she drifts off to sleep. I can't imagine what it's going to feel like to sleep alone. Every night since that first one we spent together, Montana's fallen asleep in my arms. It's hard to say who this is going to be harder on- me or her. My fingers weave through her hair, and I inhale the scent of her shampoo. I've never obsessed over anyone quite like this before. I can't believe I'm even thinking about how much I am going to miss the smell of her. This girl has my heart. I'm falling hard and fast, but I wouldn't change a thing. She was worth the wait and all the years of loneliness. My thoughts instantly go to my mom. It's the only thing I would change. I wish she could have met her, even just once. My arm slides protectively around her and I squeeze Montana a little closer to me, nuzzling against the back of her neck. I close my eyes. I hope the next few days apart fly by, but I already know they will be agony.

Montana XOXO
CH  PTER 

FORTY-ONE

I wake up all alone. The bed feels empty without him in it. Today is going to be a long day, and it hasn't even started. Waiting on Austin's pillow is a note for me. It says he left me breakfast in the fridge and microwaveable, single-serving meals for the entire time he's gone. He's sweet, the way he looks out for me. I'm not complaining, either. His cooking is way better than mine. I will happily let Austin feed me for the rest of my life. As much as I would like to stay in bed all day and do absolutely nothing, I need to take advantage of the time Austin is gone to get started on my next book. The only thing stopping me is I have no idea what I feel like writing next. Audrey groans from the dog bed Austin bought her as a housewarming gift. I swear I don't know who he likes more—me or my dog. She barks at me to let her out.

While we go through our morning routine, I day-dream possible book ideas. I'm still coming up blank, not really satisfied with any of the possibilities. Austin suggested picking out a room for an office space. I wouldn't mind wandering around upstairs to find the room with the walkout to the upper patio, since everything downstairs is fully furnished. Once the town-house is rented, I think my first purchase will be decorating the patio of my new office space. I want somewhere I can escape to, day or night.

My mind is going a thousand miles a minute down a rabbit hole. I call Audrey in and grab my coffee to go on an adventure upstairs at my boyfriend's mansion. Okay, it's not a mansion, but to someone like me, it's huge. Ben and I had a condo downtown. I shouldn't even say we. It was his place. Before that, I lived in a tiny two-bedroom apartment because my lease was locked in at a crazy low price. It wasn't until my lease was up I moved in with Ben and that was honestly the worst decision I ever made. Those two years of living with him were suffocating. The town house felt big and empty to me when Audrey and I moved in. Austin's house is at least five of my townhouses, plus he has a pool and lives on the back nine. I'm in heaven here. The princess I always dreamed of being. A man who takes care of me on every level. I don't think it can get any better than this. I take a sip of my coffee and turn at the top of the stairs, trying to find a west facing room.

The upstairs has a minimal amount of furniture. Some rooms sit empty, others are sparsely decorated. I wonder how long he

lived here before his mom's health declined so quickly. There's a giant oversized room on the east side of the house filled with empty built-in bookshelves. As much as I want to commandeer this for my office, I would much rather fill it as a library to enjoy and store my book collection. I close the door behind me and creep back down the hallway further to the last west facing door. There's a loft at the end of this hallway overlooking part of the family room. This might not be a terrible place to start. I can put together a place to lounge and hang out. It would be near the office and near the library, almost like having my own personal space in the house that's all my own. I'll ask Austin when he comes home. I don't think he will care, but I want to make sure he's comfortable with the extra rooms.

“Cross your fingers, Audrey, and let's hope this room is perfect,” I say, swinging the door open slowly.

Audrey looks at me like I am crazy. Luckily, the space inside is perfect. There's a large walk-in closet I can install built-ins for storage of my merch and books. There's even a small private bathroom, but the best part is this room has a set of double doors leading out to the upper deck. I spin around in the room while Audrey runs around me in circles.

“What do you think, Audrey? Should we start shopping?” I ask her excitedly.

She barks and I laugh, spinning around to sit next to Audrey, and snapping a selfie with the doors in the background. Austin made me promise to text him, so I send a quick message about

finding the perfect office space and tell him Audrey and I are going shopping for the rest of the day. I leave my phone on the ground and sprint down the stairs to grab as much of my work stuff as possible. Audrey's on my heels, trying to beat me to the bottom. We make several trips back and forth. Audrey beats me every time. When I am satisfied with all my stuff, I wander around the rest of the house in search of a couch or cushions I can use for now. Eventually, I find a lone leather couch in another half furnished room.

“It won't be that hard to move this, right, girl?” I say to Audrey.

She barks her encouragement. The couch is a lot easier to move than I expected. It helps that the hallways are extra wide and spacious, making fitting the furniture a breeze. It only takes me half an hour to move this sucker and then I am off again, grabbing a cozy blanket from my hoard. I spend the rest of the day ordering a few things to spruce the space up. I only order things that I don't already have at my place.

I've been texting Austin back and forth all day. He even sent me a steamy one of himself shirtless at the photo shoot. I'm laying on the best leather couch ever, just staring at his photo on my phone and thinking about how good he would look on a book cover. That's when it hits me. I know the perfect way to tell Austin about my books. He's been so patient while waiting for me to reveal that side of myself. It's just after six and not abnormal for me to email my agent in the evenings. I type up a quick email to my entire team asking them to book Austin Kinsington as a cover model. Then I spend the next few hours

plotting out the book that will go with his photo shoot. It's as if all my writer's block has disappeared.

Montana XOXO
CHAPTER  PTER 

FORTY-TWO

It's early morning, the sun is just beginning to peek through the blinds. *I don't care*, I think, realizing I stayed up all night writing and plotting. I close my eyes and am just drifting back to sleep when I hear Austin whisper to himself as he walks into the room. "Hey, Audrey. I missed you too, girl. Shhh. You want some breakfast? Okay. I'll get you some."

I can hear him walking over to where I am sleeping and that's when the panic sets in. I realize I left my computer open and he can read the entire skeleton plot of the manuscript if he wants to. This is bad, so bad, but I also wonder what he'll do. My curiosity and trust issues far outweigh my logical thinking and so I lay there pretending to sleep, waiting to see if he will look at my computer or not.

“I see you were a busy little kitten,” he says softly, leaning down to pick up my computer.

I crack a sliver of my eye open and watch as he closes my computer and sets it on the coffee table I pulled in here from another room. Satisfied with the way he respects me and feeling guilty for not trusting him, I allow myself to ease back to sleep. I crash so hard this time that I don't wake up until mid-afternoon. The sound of Austin's phone ringing wakes me up, which is weird. Austin is out of town. Everything flows back to me. I remember him coming home, and that he fed Audrey. I smile. He also closed my computer and respected my boundaries in a way that Ben never would have. I stretch and sit up, looking for Austin. I follow the raspy sound of his voice, and spy him laying on a makeshift bed of cushions and blankets.

“It's fine, don't stress,” he says into the phone. “No, don't close. I've been sleeping since a little past seven o'clock. I've got you.”

It must be important. I wait patiently for him to finish his call. When he hangs up, he smiles up at me. “Hey, good morning, beautiful.”

“Hey, good afternoon, handsome.”

“I missed you,” he rasps.

“I missed you too.”

“You stayed busy, I see,” he says.

“I had to,” I respond, reaching down to stroke his chest.

He laughs, snagging my hand in his and bringing it to his lips. He kisses it, then holds my hand against his chest.

“Who was that?” I ask him, curious.

“Hendrix. The twins are sick and Alex can’t come in to cover because he has class tonight. He needs me to go in and cover the open session hours. Do you want to come with me?” Austin gives me a sad puppy dog look.

“You didn’t even have to beg. My answer would have been yes either way. I wasn’t kidding when I said I missed you.” I tease, poking him in the ab.

He surprises me by pulling me off the couch and on top of himself. He wraps his arms and legs around me, smothering every inch of my body. “I missed you more,” he laughs. “You at least had Audrey to keep you company.”

“I can’t wait to hear about your trip.” I snuggle into his chest.

He kisses my head. “And I want to hear all about your ideas for this room. Are you excited about getting your stuff?”

“I have missed my books and my clothes, if that’s what you mean.” I sigh. “Only one more day.”

“First, I need a shower. I know you haven’t worked out either. Go change into your gym clothes and I’ll meet you in the kitchen for an afternoon pick-me-up tea. That’s not a suggestion, it’s a request.”

I roll my eyes. “I need to shower too, and then I will meet you for that tea.”

“Montana, are you inviting yourself to my shower?” He waggles his eyebrows at me.

“I wasn’t, but I am not going to say no either.” I’m smiling from ear to ear.

Everything with him feels so natural, so right. He makes me feel good. He tells me and shows me how much he cares about me. Austin enjoys spending time with me, and I enjoy spending time with him. When I am on his arm, I feel unstoppable. He makes me feel safe.

“What are you thinking about?” He asks, interrupting my thoughts.

“You,” I answer honestly. “I was just thinking about how much I appreciate the man you are, and the way you respect me.”

He pulls me into him, kissing me everywhere. “I promise, Montana, I am going to heal every last bit of you and I will always—“ He stops himself.

I know where that was headed. I feel it too and I wonder why he stopped himself. Does he think it will freak me out? I want to tell him I love him too, but I don’t want to make this awkward either.

Austin recovers and finishes his sentence. “I will always respect you, Montana. All you ever have to do is tell me what you need. I may not always understand your boundaries, but I will always respect them. Come on, kitten, let’s go get showered and I’ll fight the urge to fuck you before we go.

There's just not enough time for all the things I've been thinking about doing to you the entire time I've been gone."

Holy shit. I fan myself for a moment, and Austin laughs at me. "What's wrong, kitten? Can't handle the heat?"

"More like I can't deal with your teasing lips and the way they make my body ache for you. Just remember what I do for a living. Two can play this game and I'm not sure you want to challenge me. You should be terrified, Austin. I can absolutely wreck you, but I like Hendrix and he's your best friend. Instead, I'm going to be the bigger person and go get in the cold water." I saunter off to shower, leaving him to follow me.

Either he's truly speechless or he knows if he opens his mouth again I might make good on my promise to wreck him and then Hendrix will be mad at both of us. When I get to the bottom of the stairs, he calls down to me. "Hey, kitten." He takes his shirt off and tosses it down at me. "Don't think you won. This is just the intermission."

I do not deserve this man and that mouth of his. He keeps me on my toes.

"I'm going to rock your world, just you wait," He calls down, wearing the sexy, cocky grin of his that makes me weak in the knees.

Tonight is going to be fun, I think, my pussy tingling in anticipation of having its world rocked.

Montana XOXO
CH♥PTER 

FORTY-THREE

Austin has been teasing me all night. I haven't kept my eyes off him. I brought my tablet with me to work. It's far more universal than just my computer. This way, I can flip around tasks as I become inspired, and let's just say, watching Austin all night has thoroughly inspired me and my writing. I've knocked out nearly six thousand words. This book is coming right along and will be finished in no time at the rate I am going.

I glance at the clock. It's finally nine o'clock and we are all alone in the gym. The last person just left, and Austin practically runs to the door to lock it behind them. I'm just as excited as he is to workout. The sexual tension between us is intense right now. He's been driving my thoughts wild all night. I watch as he scurries from window to window, pulling

the blinds down, as if he's closing up for the night, but I know he's not. He has discovered that being alone means he can eye-fuck me all he wants while he makes me his little gym kitten. When he turns to begin his nightly eyeball assault across my ever-changing body, I can't help but let the thrill of his attentive gaze wash over me. I'm just as guilty of being a gym whore when we workout together. I like the way he stares and I've made it a game to see how sexy I can make each workout. It's like we've waged a war that the other knows nothing about. A silent challenge to see who will cave first. I won't give up because I'm playing a long game. I know all his dirty thoughts about me and I want him to play them out with me.

When he reaches me, he pulls me out of the chair, grabs me by the ass, and swings me in for a kiss. His lips devour mine. Even when I pull away, he's unrelenting. Austin snakes his hand around to cradle the back of my head, holding me in place for as long as he desires to lay siege upon my lips. When he lets me go, I dramatically gasp for air, and he laughs. "I'm sorry, I told you I missed you and I don't think the clients would have appreciated witnessing that today."

"Well, next time we might have to just slip away to the supply closet to steal secret kisses." I tease.

"Mmmm," he growls in my ear. "If I slip away with you to the supply closet, I will be doing more than stealing kisses. I'll be licking pussy and all kinds of other things."

I punch him in the arm. "Oh, my gosh, with all those people in the gym?"

“Yeah,” he rasps. “With all those people, and they just might hear us.”

“Sounds fucking exhilarating.” I purr before kissing his lips lightly, then walking off to start my stretches.

On the warm up floor, I bend over into a few of my favorite yoga stretches, taking great care to ensure I look irresistible doing it. I chance a peek back at him. Sure enough, he’s strutting his way in my direction with his eyes glued to me. He’s wearing those fucking gray sweatpants that send my pussy spiraling out of control, with a need to be filled by him. I know he did it on purpose because he’s playing extra dirty, but I don’t mind. I’m here for all his naughty behavior tonight. In fact, I hope he surprises me by getting all kinds of kinky. I can’t wait to show him this side of me.

Austin walks up, giving my ass a hearty smack. “Oops, sorry about that. Didn’t see you there.” He says with a smart smirk as he slams his hips into me like he’s going to fuck me doggystyle right here, right now.

I’ve never been so turned on by foreplay like this. All his sexy banter and the way he taunts and teases me, only makes me crave him more. I give him one of those magical slow motion sexy moves, swinging my body up slowly from where I am touching my toes to standing. I turn equally as slowly into him so our bodies are touching. “Sure it was an accident,” I tease back, using air quotes around the word accident with one hand, and reaching out to grab his cock with my other.

“Ohhh, I think I like when you get aggressive,” he says, his voice deep and throaty.

He doesn't deny it though, and that's when I realize today could be the day he finally loses all control. I guess I better make it extra worth it. My freaky side has been dying to make an appearance with him.

“Are you ready to get started?” he asks, taking a sip of water and spraying his black shirt with it.

A horribly wicked idea pops into my head and I can't resist the urge. “You're doing it all wrong, Austin.” I take my own sip of water, then squeeze the water all over my white gym tee. The material instantly clings to the black sports bra I have on underneath. “White shirts just do it better, do ya know what I mean?”

I'm wearing a shit-eating grin as he stands there staring at me, completely speechless for a minute. “That's fine.” He walks over and pulls a jump rope from the hooks on the wall. “I was thinking for cardio today we would jump rope. Can you hang, kitten?” He whips the rope around and does some insane moves with it. The music playing to the beat of his moves in the background has to make this one of the hottest things I've ever seen this man do. I'm about to melt into a puddle. I can already feel the cum threatening to leak out of my pussy if I dare to jump with that rope. If my body hits the ground at all tonight, I'm going to be begging him to fuck me, and that's not how I want this to play out. I lick my lips and make my way to

the ropes hanging on the wall. *It's a good thing my shorts are black*, I think.

“Okay, show off. How do I know what size to pick?” I ask.

He walks over and measures a rope for me, then hands it over. “Let’s see those moves, kitten.” He winks then steps away, leaving enough space between us so he can jump across from me. He demonstrates how to jump.

“I know how to jump rope, you goof,” I laugh, jumping slowly at first before falling into a rhythm. He watches my wet shirt, his eyes never leaving my chest until I get tired and stop.

“Ahh, ahh, ahh. Kitten,” he chastises, clicking his tongue. “I didn’t say stop. Keep going.”

“But you don’t have a timer. How do you figure?” I complain.

“Eye timer.” His grin is cocky. He’s not even trying to come up with a reason. “White shirts jump longer.”

I roll my eyes and flip it over my head. I give him another twenty-five swings before I hang up the rope and declare I need a water break. He lifts a brow at me in response.

“That’s fine. When you’re done, shirts off. We’re doing pull ups and resistance bands. No loose clothing, kitten.” He takes his shirt off slowly, letting the material creep over each of his perfectly defined abs. My eyes trace his happy trail down to the waistband of his sweats. I don’t even bother to hide my hungry stare. When I am satisfied I get my water, needing very

much to cool off after watching that little performance. I guess this makes me his official gym kitten now, and if I want to keep him playing, I have no choice but to go along with his crazy demands. I take my shirt off awkwardly, but he's not letting me get away with it.

“Next time, I'll be happy to help.” His words are teasing along with his grin.

“Fuck off, Austin, and show me how to do a pull up.” I bite back, sipping water and cocking my hip to one side with some sass.

Montana XOXO
CH♥PTER 

FORTY-FOUR

It's his turn to eye-fuck me. I can see the way he drags them slowly from my lips down to my pussy. When he's had his fill, he turns, waving me over to a set of bars on the other side of the gym.

He wraps the resistance band around the bar, then slides one foot inside. He demonstrates for me how he wants me to do a pull-up.

"Thirty on each foot," he instructs, letting me off with less than one hundred total. I step up to the bar and Austin stops his pull-ups to set up my band. He holds it pulled down for me to slide my foot in the loop. I allow my weight to drop into the band and feel Austin's muscular hands slide up my legs, landing beneath my ass. As gravity pulls me lower, Austin's hands creep up my torso, slipping dangerously close to the

hem of my sports bra. *If he wanted to touch me, he would*, I remind myself, turning my focus back to the task at hand.

“Hold yourself up, Montana. You need to support your body weight. You don’t want to work this hard. Control your drop and use your core to pull yourself back up.” He slides his hand until he’s palming my ass and steps behind me. His other hand takes its place beneath the other cheek. “Here, let me give you a boost back up.”

He gives me a small lift and catches me from dipping too low. His thumbs slide closer to my aching pussy. I want him to run his fingers across it. All I can think about is how good it will feel as he gives me yet another boost. Austin helps me get a good form and rhythm going.

“You’re doing great. I’m going to do a gradual release.” Austin says, removing one hand and sliding the other to rest between my legs.

He’s literally lifting me by the pussy. The way he’s rubbing the palm of his hand into me has my body shaking as the sensation sends me to the edge. “Time to switch,” he growls, removing his hand, allowing me to drop.

Austin helps me switch legs and gives me another boost, lifting me by the pussy once more. He’s torturing me. After fifteen pull-ups, I’m tired and struggling to finish. Austin pulls his hand from my pussy. I’m about to sulk when his body slams against mine. He cradles me against him, pulling me up with him so I can complete the remaining fifteen. His dick is

hard as it presses against me through his sweats. I'm trying hard not to moan as I imagine him fucking me just like this.

“We don't quit, kitten. I'll always be here to pick you up when you need me to.” His voice is raspy, dripping with adoration as he powers through the final reps.

All I can do is close my eyes and imagine he's fucking me like this. It's so fucking hot and then it's over way too fast. When he pulls away, I have to fight the urge to call him back. He knows what he's doing, but two can play this game and I'm not going to be the one to make the first move.

We rest for a few minutes, both of us catching our breath. After a few drinks of water, Austin leads me over to the bench. I hate lifting. It's so embarrassing. I can barely lift the light forty-five pound bar. He has it laying out next to his own bar. He leans back on the bench to demonstrate the correct form for the hundredth time for me. It's not that I don't understand the form. I just have no arm strength whatsoever and can't lift the bar without either assistance or a reduced number of reps. I can easily see the bulge of Austin's cock as he's splayed out in front of me with one foot planted firmly on either side of the bench. My eyes trace its outline repeatedly until I'm not sure what comes over me. Austin is talking about the position my hands need to be in to control my ability to lift the bar when I climb on top of him, straddling his cock.

My fingertips trace over the tip of his dick. I can feel it swell in response, nestled between my pussy.

“What are you doing?” He asks, suddenly out of breath.

“Getting a better view so I can get it right.” I answer, moving my hips so I’m grinding up and down every inch of him.

“Is that right? So, am I just supposed to sit here and run through my reps while you get a better view?” He asks me.

“I mean, if you don’t mind, that would be great for me,” I answer him in a sultry tone.

“You are pushing your luck, kitten. You better behave before you make me tie you up and do what I want to you until you beg me to fill that tight little pussy of yours.”

He starts banging out his reps. I swear watching him has me dripping wet in my shorts. I stop rolling my hips. Oh. My. Fucking. God! This man is doing things for me I’ve only imagined in the pages of my books. He has a dirty mouth, but never in my wildest dreams did I think he would be this kinky. I’m so fucking turned on, biting my bottom lip, contemplating encouraging his offer.

“What’s wrong, kitten? Nothing to say?” He asks, returning the bar to the rack above him.

Game on, Austin. He is going to regret awakening this side of me. I’ve been holding back, but if he wants to get kinky, then I’m going to unleash this kitten and absolutely wreck his world. “What if I like it?”

Austin sits straight up, eyes wide, staring me down. “Excuse me?”

“I said, what if I like it?” I repeat.

“You’re pushing. I’m warning you.” His voice is strained, like it’s taking everything in him to refrain from ripping my clothes off.

I smile at him innocently and run a fingertip down his chest.

“Say it, Montana.” He growls.

“Say what?” I’m challenging him, practically begging to see what pushing him will do.

“Give me permission.” He demands, grabbing my ponytail and yanking on my hair.

I can’t help myself. I moan, enjoying the way it feels. I don’t want him to stop. My pussy is begging me to let him fuck it. “And if I don’t?”

“If you don’t, then I’m not going to give you what you want from me.” His words are practically feral as he fights his self control.

“Mmmmm,” I say, grinding against him. “Give you permission to do what, Austin?”

“You’re misbehaving, kitten.” His voice is a low growl as he grabs me by the hips, pulling me even closer.

I shrug him off, batting my eyelashes.

“Give me permission to tie you up and fuck you until you beg me to cum.” He rasps, running his fingers up my thigh.

I lean over top of him, moaning, before grabbing him by the hair and reply. “Please, Austin. I want to be your little rope bunny. Tie me up and have your fun.”

He doesn't hesitate. He wiggles his way free from me and runs to grab a handful of the longest jump ropes on the wall. Austin takes them behind the desk, grabs a pair of scissors, and cuts the handles off. When he's done, he ties them together, never once taking his eyes off me.

"Austin, do you know what you're doing?" I ask, teasing him.

He walks over to me, places his finger on my lips and says, "Shhh, you naughty little kitten. I know exactly what I'm doing."

My pussy aches. This man is fucking sexy as hell. He's just as kinky as I need him to be, to keep things exciting. I'm convinced there's nothing this man wouldn't do to satisfy me.

His hand runs down my neck and across my breasts. His fingers dipping beneath the material to give my nipple a pinch. "You can take this off or I can cut it off the way I did the jump rope handles."

I don't know when to behave, honestly. My mouth always gets me into trouble in these situations. "Cut it off," I challenge him. "But you're buying me a new one."

"Done," he says, walking back to get the scissors, then using them to cut my bra right in half.

My breasts spill out, I'm wearing nothing but my workout shorts, and I never wear underwear with this pair. I know the door is locked, but my eyes flash to the lock anyway. I'm terrified Hendrix or someone else could walk in on us.

“Should I cut your shorts off while I am at it?” Austin teases, his voice commanding my attention.

I slip my pants off while stammering, “No...no. I love these shorts.”

I can't believe I am standing in the middle of Austin's gym stark naked, waiting for him to tie me up and fuck me. *What's wrong with my moral compass and why the fuck am I so turned on?* My body craves him like it's addicted to the way he makes me feel.

“What are you waiting for?” I ask, taunting him.

“I'm just enjoying this perfect fucking view. You look just like fucking revenge and I bet you taste like it, too.” He rasps, beginning to wrap the makeshift shibari jump rope around me.

Austin drags it slowly and sensually across my skin, watching as my nipples peak in response to what he is doing. He takes so long to tie me up. Every minute of waiting is excruciating. I can't wait to feel him deep inside of me. He runs the rope across my upper body until my arms are restrained and my breasts are encircled in rope. From the upper body ties, he runs the rope down to wrap around my ankles. He measures everything out precisely. When he's done, he takes a picture of me standing there all tied up.

Once he has his picture, he throws me over his shoulder and stalks off to a bench that's pushed against the wall nearby. He sets me down on the bench, arranging me how he wants me. Austin pushes my legs up so my knees flop open. Then straddles me, leaning in like he's going to kiss me, except he

taunts me some more instead. “I’m tempted to call you a little rope bunny and tell you to behave, but you’re my fucking feisty kitten.”

“Sometimes the kitten pretends it’s a bunny,” I moan against his lips.

He grabs me by the hair, pulling our faces so they are close together. “What did you just say?”

“I said—“ I repeat myself but he interrupts me with a Tsk.

“No, kitten, we never pretend to be something we’re not. You’re a kitten, not a bunny. Do you understand me, beautiful?” He asks, stroking my cheek and running his thumb down my lip.

I try to nip at him playfully, but he pulls away, whispering as he does. “That’s exactly why you’re a kitten, Montana. Kittens are naughty, and bunnies are more well behaved.”

Fuck, my body has never felt so alive.

Montana XOXO
CH  PTER 

FORTY-FIVE

Austin grabs me by the jaw, kissing me aggressively. I can tell I've driven him incredibly close to the edge, but now I'm at his mercy. I let him tie me up, which, in retrospect, may have been a poor choice on my part. While he ravages my lips, his fingers trace the lines of his rope work, dragging sensually across my body. The sensation is electrifying; the experience consumes my thoughts. All I can think about is how good his hands feel caressing my body. For the first time, I am not ashamed of the lines and curves he's tracing. When his fingers reach my nipples, he strokes them lightly, dragging the pads of his fingertips over both of them until they pebble beneath his touch. The moans and groans escaping my lips are unrestrained. Suddenly, it doesn't even matter if anyone else can hear us.

“Oh my God,” I pant.

“Yes,” he rasps. “Would you like me to show you what salvation feels like?”

“Please.” I’m begging. My body has never wanted anything as bad as it wants his dick slammed deep inside of me, bringing me to wave after wave of orgasm.

“I think before I give you what you want, you’re going to do something for me. You can be a good kitten, can’t you, Montana?”

I feel his fingers leave my nipple, and my eyes follow as he pulls the waistband of his sweats down and grips his cock. His hand slides against it smoothly. I watch, paying close attention to the way he touches himself. He strokes his hard, swollen cock a few more times, then his other hand grabs me by the hair in my ponytail. He wraps my hair around his fist, while dragging the tip of his dick across my lips. My tongue darts out to swirl around it.

“Mmmm,” he moans, his voice deep and raspy.

“What is it, savior?” I ask, looking up at him to bat my eyelashes and sucking the tip of his dick into my mouth to play with.

He sighs with satisfaction when I pop it out. “That’s my good girl, kitten. Now open wide and take me.”

Fuck, I thought he would never ask. I part, my lips opening wide enough he can slide himself between them. As he slides his dick in slowly, I run my tongue against him. The friction

has him squirting pre-cum down my throat. I eagerly swallow each drop. His eyes hood over as I stare him down, giving him my full attention.

“That’s it, kitten, swallow all my cum,” he whispers, picking up his pace as he slides it in deep, then pulls it back out.

Austin deserves nothing less than the best blow job I’ve ever given. I suck him harder, creating a vortex with my mouth as my tongue swirls around him. I lick and play with him until he can’t take it anymore. He’s thrusting his dick down my throat deeper, and deeper it goes, until his cum leaks out all over my tongue and the back of my throat. He pulls his throbbing cock from my mouth with a moan.

“I wasn’t expecting that,” he pants. “It was fucking amazing.”

“I warned you, sir, I can wreck your world.” I tease.

“I think you just did,” he replies.

I nip at the space between us playfully, and he slides his thumb over my bottom lip, wiping his cum from it. I surprise him by licking it off. He pulls my hair hard again, bringing our lips together and slipping his tongue inside my mouth. When he pulls away, he rasps, “Sorry, I wanted to taste myself on your lips.”

I can feel my pussy throbbing in response to his dirty confession. As if he knows he’s in store for a treat, he releases my hair and turns his attention to running his hands up my legs. He slides me so I’m laying on the bench all tied up

waiting for him to destroy my pussy. The anticipation has my heart racing as I suck in gasps of air. I long to feel him, instantly wishing I was no longer tied up and had more control.

Austin slips his head between my ankles and leans down on his forearms in the ultimate pussy eating plank position. I can feel his hot breath landing against my clit. The tension he's creating is unbearable. I buck my hips in response, looking for friction from either his fingers or his tongue, but nothing happens. The deprivation has me dripping. I can feel how slick I am with cum. To think he hasn't even touched me yet, he's only had to look at my pussy to make me cum for him. It's invigorating and thrilling to be fucked by a man who understands my body's desires.

My breath hisses when his finger finally runs lightly up my clit, around it, and back down to dip inside of me. I clench around him.

“What is it, kitten?” He asks, sensually, his eyes taking turns between looking at me and watching the way my pussy responds to his touch.

“You're teasing me, and it feels so good. I like it.” It's the truth. The things he does to me should be illegal. That's just how good it feels.

“Do you like when I drag my fingers around your clit like this?” he asks, as he swirls them around.

I whimper in response, enjoying the feeling of my orgasm slowly building. He slips his finger inside of me and curls it,

coaxing my orgasm closer.

“Do you like when I slide my finger inside of you?” Austin whispers.

“Yes,” I confess.

He continues fingering me with one hand and uses his other to play with me until I come. Satisfied, he licks his finger clean. “Mmmm. I can’t get enough of how good you taste.”

His tongue lands against my pussy and then he’s working some kind of satanic magic with his mouth. I’ve never felt such intense orgasms. He works his tongue and fingers over me until I come so hard I squirt into his mouth.

“Oh my fucking, yes!” He growls, lapping up every last drop. “I didn’t know you could do that. It’s so fucking hot.” He sounds like he’s about to come undone.

“I didn’t know I could do that either.” I stare at him, completely shocked and satisfied.

“You don’t even know how hard that has me. It’s the first time you’ve ever squirted, and I made you do it.”

He sits up then moves me, positioning me on the ground. “I’m afraid if I fuck you on the bench, I’ll break it from pounding you so hard. Are you ready, kitten?” He asks, slipping a condom on then dropping to the ground.

Austin slides himself so my tied up ankles rest above his hips. Not only can I feel every last muscle in his back as he slides into position, but I can feel the heat coming from the tip

of his dick. Which is now resting against my entrance as he lines himself up.

“Please, Austin,” I moan.

His lips find mine and then I feel him slip inside. All the teasing and deprivation have prepared me for the intense amount of pleasure washing over my body. My orgasms build quickly, back to back, as he drives his cock into me. Austin fucks me harder than I’ve ever been fucked before. He’s burying his thick cock deep inside of me, exactly how I fantasized all afternoon.

“Do you like it when I stretch that tight little pussy of yours out, kitten?” Austin growls in my ear.

I was already close to coming, but now I don’t think I can hold back. His dirty growling words, mixed with the warmth of his breath, make it impossible to control my body. I can feel my pussy clenching and throbbing around him as I prepare to explode.

“Come for me, kitten,” he rasps.

“Not yet,” I protest.

“That’s a naughty kitten. I want you to come.” He demands, taking more control.

Just when I think I can torture him by holding my orgasm back a few more minutes, his tongue drags across my nipple, sucking it between his lips. He swirls his tongue around the hard peaks until I am moaning and crying out with pleasure. Austin slams into me faster and deeper. The feeling from

earlier returns, only this time I can feel the flood of liquid coming from me as I squirt all over his dick. The sensation sends him over the edge and he comes, then pulls out.

Austin CHAPTER

FORTY-SIX

Hendrix just pulled up in front of Montana's house with the moving truck we rented for the day. The plan is to get everything in one load. Montana is inside throwing stuff into boxes at warp speed. She packed her office and her clothes first. I've run at least a hundred boxes to fill her living room. Alex arrived a few minutes ago and has the furniture organized with a pile for storage and a pile for my place. Montana asked about taking over the loft and the room with all the built-in shelves. I have plenty of room in the house. She can have any of the spaces her heart desires. I would do anything for this woman. I don't even think she realizes how head over heels for her I actually am. As much as I want to tell her I am falling in love with her, for now I have to settle for showing her. I don't want to scare her off. It's hard to know

where she stands with things. We don't really talk about those things. I take a sip of coffee and walk outside to talk to Hendrix.

"Hey, buddy, thanks for doing all this. I know you would much rather hang out with the girls and your parents at the zoo today." I give him a fist bump.

"It's not a problem at all. You know my parents enjoy them." Hendrix says, patting me on the back. "Hey look, the fuzz just arrived."

"You're so fucking weird." I laugh, walking off to meet with the officers.

Charlotte pulled some badass attorney moves and forced them to have an officer on-site for the day to make sure there are no confrontations. She received the confirmation of service yesterday, which means he's aware of Montana's motion for a restraining order. I've had a bad feeling about moving her out and bringing her here all week. It's nagged at me nonstop, but she refused to allow me to hire movers to do it for her.

"Good morning. Thanks for being here today. I think it makes us all feel a lot better." I offer him a handshake.

The officer looks me up and down suspiciously and gives a harrumph. "A big guy like you feels better having a police officer around." He rolls his eyes. "Just when I think I've heard everything." He looks down the bridge of his nose at me with a condescending stare. "I'll be parked a few houses down the street, keeping watch." He rolls up his window and drives

the unmarked car a few houses down, flips around, and parks on the opposite side of the street.

I head back inside to check on everyone. Montana has a million more boxes ready for me. I get them down the stairs and Hendrix, Alex, and I start to load the truck. We're flowing through everything pretty quickly. The house is just about empty and I'm inside the moving truck when I hear the car door slam. I run to the open door and jump from the back, narrowly missing the loading ramps. Ben is walking up the front walk toward the open door.

"Hey," I shout. "You can't be here. You need to leave." I stick my fingers in my mouth and whistle. It's a secret signal my brother and I have been using for years. Of course, Hendrix and I adopted its use as well. Ben's not stopping. I'm running to catch up to him as fast as I can, but my body feels like it's moving in slow motion. I breathe a sigh of relief as Alex and Hendrix slide into the open door frame just in time to stop him from getting inside. Realizing he has no chance at getting past the two of them, Ben turns to face me.

"What the fuck is this bullshit?" He screams at me, waving the paperwork in the air.

I look over my shoulder at the officer who is just now climbing out of the car. Why am I not surprised? More time to fuck with Ben, I guess. "That's your final eviction notice. Don't show up here again. The courts will not like you on camera coming over here waving that around."

"You think you're really funny, don't you?" Ben snarls.

Behind him, Montana slides into view between Hendrix and Alex. Something in my face must give it away. Ben smiles, curling his lip up in an evil grin, then turns to yell at Montana.

“You stupid little cunt!” He takes a step toward her. “Do you really think this kind of behavior is cute? Do you really think hiding behind a restraining order can protect you from—“

He doesn't get to finish his sentence. I grab him by the back of his shirt, yanking him around to face me and punch him right on the lip. Blood sprays onto my knuckles, but it doesn't stop me from landing several more punches. Ben swings at me and misses.

“I already killed the stupid dog. Just wait, bitch, you're next.” He yells at Montana.

Montana looks to me for reassurance. She's trying so hard not to give him a reaction.

“It's okay, baby, you know he has no idea where she is.” I say, trying to reassure her.

Ben can't stand it. He swings, clocking me right in the side of my head. *Where the fuck is this officer?* It sure seems like he is taking his sweet ass time. Oh well. The fighter hoodlum in me takes control and I knock Ben to the ground. Alex and Hendrix pull me off of him, but not before I kick him in the ribs. “Stay the fuck down on the ground, asshole.”

The officer waddles over on his radio out of breath. He takes one look at Ben, then at me, and breaks out his handcuffs.

“Turn around and put your hands behind your back,” he says to me.

I can hear Montana screaming, but I see Hendrix throw her over his shoulder and slam the door behind him. I do what he says, while Alex calls Charlotte.

The sorry excuse for an officer reads me my rights as another squad car pulls up. Before he loads me into the car, Alex shouts at me, “Charlotte will be there to meet you. They are copying all the video footage of the officer doing absolutely nothing while Ben violated the emergency order. She’s got someone else on the team escalating an internal complaint with the P.D. We’ve got Montana. Don’t worry about anything.”

I duck my head as he loads me into the car. The other officers cuff Ben and load him into a separate car. I know it was stupid, but kicking his ass was worth it and Charlotte can get me out of anything. Everything will be fine. I trust my brother and my best friend to keep my girl safe and sound until she’s back in my arms.

Austin 
CHAPTER     

FORTY-SEVEN

“What the actual fuck were you thinking, Austin?”
Charlotte hisses at me inside our meeting room.

I shrug my shoulders. “You will never understand.”

“I got your juvenile records sealed, or have you already forgotten the last favor?”

“How many double dates or family dinners will this, plus all the work on Montana’s case, cost me?” I ask with my sly cocky grin.

Charlotte, gives me the stink eye. “You know that’s not going to work on me, right? I’m married to your brother and immune to both of you.”

“You know he deserved to get the fuck beat out of him, right?”

“I do and that’s exactly why I’ve decided to make Montana one of my charity write-off cases this year. I’m going to cover her entire case in exchange for unlimited family dinners. If Alex invites you, what do you say?”

“Yes, Alex, I would love to attend a family dinner with you.”
I sigh, rolling my eyes.

“You need to work on that. I’m going to need more enthusiasm.” She laughs.

“And for this, how much?” I wait anxiously for her to decide how to answer.

“Let’s call it either two date nights, or a couple’s weekend.”
She gloats.

“Jokes on you. I would love to have a couples weekend with you guys.” I give her a cheesy, toothy grin.

“Fine, when they come back to release you, please don’t say anything. We are going to file formal complaints, but we are not mentioning them. All you need to do is say nothing and follow their directions.”

I cross my arms. “I promise not to say anything, like last time when I almost compromised the entire case.”

“Was that so hard?” She asks.

“Yes,” I sulk.

When I walk out of the jail release doors, I can see Montana standing next to Hendrix's truck, waiting for me. She's wearing a baggy pair of sweats and a black hoodie. As I get closer, I realize it's the one I was wearing this morning. I smile and shake my head, whether or not she wants to admit it, she's my girl. I don't know who fell harder, me or Montana.

Once I hit the parking lot, I jog the rest of the way. The next thing I know, Montana is diving into my arms and wrapping her arms and legs around me. I catch her without missing a beat as she smothers me in kisses, then inspects my black eyes and bruise.

"We need to ice that immediately." She says before kissing me again.

"No, nice to see you, or what the hell were you thinking? Just we need to ice that?" I ask her, laughing.

"Yes, you have a photo shoot in ten days. You should be worried about the bruise." Montana scolds me.

"I promise, I asked for ice. They just wouldn't give me any." I say in my best scouts honor voice.

"I'll be sure I add that to the file," Charlotte says, as Alex drapes his arm around her shoulders.

"Thank you. You are amazing," Montana says to Charlotte, before releasing me to turn and look at everyone else. "You all are. Thank you so much. Hendrix and Alex, you both helped me finish getting as much as we could loaded up. Then you drove me over here. And Austin, I'm sorry. We can have

movers get everything else. I should have trusted your bad feeling.”

“You’re welcome, Montana.” They all reply.

“Austin cares about you a lot,” Alex says, his tone becoming more serious. “If Austin cares about you, then we care about you, too. In our family, we always have each other’s back.”

I wait for Montana to shift uncomfortably, but she doesn’t. She walks over and gives my brother a giant hug, then she hugs Charlotte, and finally, she hugs Hendrix.

“Thank you, Hendrix. If it weren’t for you looking out for your best friend, we may not have ever met. I owe you a favor for telling me he was single when you caught me checking him out.”

“Wait,” I interrupt. “You told her I was single?”

“Guilty,” Hendrix laughs. “But hey it worked out good for you.”

“Fine,” I chuckle. “But you,” he says, wagging a finger at me. “You are busted for checking me out when I was trying to do a good deed.”

“What did you do that you so desperately needed good karma from helping a poor damsel in distress?” I ask, dramatically flailing the back of my hand against my forehead.

Alex laughs. “It’s a good thing his juvenile record is sealed.”

I shoot daggers at him and crack my neck. Montana laughs. “Did you really think I let you in my house without doing a background check first?”

“Yes,” I confess, and everyone laughs. “Come on, let’s blow this popsicle stand. You guys are welcome to come back to the house, but if you just want to go home, crawl into bed, and collapse, I completely understand.”

“I’m going home and sleeping in,” Hendrix says with a yawn.

“We are also going home and crashing, little brother, but soon we need to come over and use that fantastic pool of yours. Maybe we can play a round of golf.” Alex suggests.

“Good, I am so relieved. My face is killing me.” I groan.

Hendrix snickers, “Your face kills me every time I see it.”

“Nice!” Charlotte high-fives him. Alex and Montana both laugh.

“That’s fine, laugh it up. My face is literally my money maker.”

“You’ll be okay. I promise to nurse you back to health.” Montana winks at me.

I blush and thankfully no one notices in the dark. We say our goodbyes, then go our separate ways. I’m exhausted. All I want to do is snuggle up in bed with Montana in my arms, and Audrey at my feet, and while my face might be bruised, beating the shit out of Ben felt fucking amazing. He’s had that coming since the day we met.

Austin CHAPTER

FORTY-EIGHT

10 days later...

Luckily, my bruise healed quickly. It's nothing a good make-up artist can't cover up. It's so faded it's hardly noticeable. I can't believe the hearing for Ben's permanent restraining order is the same day as the photo shoot. The author was really flexible when I asked if we could shoot in the afternoon. It ended up working out perfectly. I give Montana's hand a squeeze. She's standing next to me, swaying nervously and clearly uncomfortable with seeing Ben again. I check my watch and look at Charlotte. The hearing was supposed to start five minutes ago, and he hasn't arrived. His attorney doesn't seem phased. I remember from my teenage years the judge gives a fifteen minute window before moving to the next case. It's only been seven.

The doors open, interrupting my brooding. My head snaps back to look over my shoulder and my eyes lock with Ben's. He's looking pretty rough. His face is still healing and his lip has a giant scab running through it where I split it open. He glares back at me, his eyes narrowing into slits as he stares me down. I keep my eyes on him the entire time he walks to the front of the room to take his place next to his attorney.

“So nice of you to join us. Can I please have the council approach?” Charlotte approaches the judge and Ben's attorney does the same.

They whisper back and forth, arguing for a few minutes, and then return to their places. I lean over and whisper to Charlotte, “What was that about?”

“Don't worry about it. They tried to have the case continued. The judge was letting the attorney know it was declined because Ben already broke the temporary.” Charlotte explains.

I nod my understanding, then whisper the information on to Montana. She looks like she's on the verge of tears. I kiss her forehead affectionately. “Everything will be fine. Don't worry yourself.”

“Would either party like to make any additional statements before I give my ruling?” He asks.

“My client has no further statements. We feel strongly the evidence we submitted is sufficient in establishing her need for the court's protection from the defendant.” Charlotte sounds so calm and collected.

Ben's attorney speaks next. "My client would like to petition one last time for the court to drop the restraining order and consider his need for a restraining order against the prosecution. It is clear the prosecution's boyfriend is violent and psychotic."

The judge nods his head, looking over the paperwork one final time. It feels like his decision is taking forever. For Montana's sake, I hope this judge makes the right call. If not, Charlotte has already explained, we can challenge the ruling in a higher court. She squeezes my hands so tight I have to tell her to loosen the grip.

The judge clears his throat, commanding our full attention. "I think I have made a decision about this case. There was lots of evidence presented by both sides. I have decided that I will be enforcing the restraining order and making it permanent. The temporary order will stand and become effective as permanent immediately. Failure to comply with this order can result in an arrest. Do you and your client understand?"

Montana XOXO
CH♥PTER 

FORTY-NINE

I've never felt more relieved than I do right now. Austin pulls me in for a celebratory hug. He kisses the top of my head as his fingers trace up and down my back in reassurance. It feels like an enormous weight has lifted from on top of my chest. Ben has to follow the restraining order, and the only thing making this win even sweeter is the way he can't rip his eyes off of my revenge body. I take great solace in knowing that I belong with Austin now, and I will never have to be treated the way Ben treated me ever again.

"Thank you, my savior," I whisper against his chest while fighting back the tears that burn my eyes.

"Why are you thanking me, kitten?"

“Because you fought for me. No one in my life has ever fought for me like this. I owe you endlessly for my safety and sanity.” I confess.

“Shhh,” he whispers, holding my head against his chest, stroking my hair. “I have a confession of my own to make, Montana.”

I hold my breath, praying with every fiber of my body that he’s not about to say he loves me. The truth is, I’m planning to tell him later today when I surprise him at the photo shoot. I want to tell him first, but I think he might beat me to it.

“I will always fight for you,” he rasps, surprising me.

I smile. I don’t care how angry it’s going to make Ben. My chin tilts up to connect with Austin, and I plant a kiss on his unsuspecting lips. Austin’s hand slips behind my head as he returns my kiss. He doesn’t hold back one bit, and I am sure it’s because he has no issue showing off in front of Ben.

When our kiss is over, I sneak a look at Austin. He’s wearing a gloating grin as Ben glowers at him from across the room. I sigh, relieved. It feels good to close this chapter of my life. Ben and I are over. He can’t bother me anymore. Audrey is mine to keep. I’ve purchased my first rental property, and I’ve fallen head over heels in love with a man I just met. It may be the end of my relationship with a narcissist, but it’s only the beginning of my journey to heal. Austin and I are just getting started. I want to continue falling in love with him. My soul has longed to know what true love feels like, and now that I know, I never want to lose it. Austin really is my savior. He

saved me from Ben; he saved me from myself, and he's kept me away from the darkness that threatened to take hold of me and never let go. Austin healed me, taking the time to put me back together one piece at a time, his patience with me never wavering or fading away.

It hits me as I stand here, reflecting on everything. I love him. I love him for so many reasons, but I love him most because he changed the trajectory of my life with one simple act of kindness.

I've never felt like the luckiest girl in the world before, but I'm pretty sure this is exactly how it feels to be her. I have my happily ever after, my always and forever, and for that I am eternally thankful.

THE END

Epilogue

Everything about this photoshoot makes me nervous. It's the first time I've ever done a cover shoot. When Phill called to let me know he booked it, he said the booking agent kept reiterating the author was adamant about the cover model being me. It's a very flattering situation, but part of me feels like I am cheating on Montana with another author. I asked Phill to find out who the author is, and their agent said they requested to remain anonymous because they didn't want me to agree based on the author's success, but rather my interest in the project. I can respect their anonymity, but it didn't make telling Montana about it any easier. Or maybe it did, because she's an amazing human. Montana was completely unphased at all and actually encouraged me to take the booking. She seems to think branching out will be good for my brand. Montana also told me she thinks I could make a pretty decent amount of money off of modeling for covers. To be honest, I would much rather be modeling for her, but this particular gig is all about the money and supplementing income I would make while on tour, so that hopefully I can skip it this year.

Phill is determined to get me off the back up dancer track and fully committed to modeling. He's been booking everything he can fit into my schedule to offset the pay loss and so far we are about twenty-five percent funded which means I only need to make up another seventy-five percent of my wages and I can bail on the tour.

The make-up artist stands back to examine her work, satisfied she gives me a nod of approval.

“Take your shirt off and we will get all these fake tattoos placed.”

I follow her directions, removing my button down flannel shirt.

“I'm going to enjoy this way too much,” she says with a chuckle.

I shake my head, holding back a smirk. It never fails there's always at least one person on every photoshoot who is not ashamed to gush over the parts of their job they enjoy. I follow her directions, holding as still as possible, moving from sitting to standing, as she places each one carefully. The author was apparently oddly specific about the tattoo placements. While she continues to work, I let my mind wander back to Montana.

It hasn't even been that long since I kissed her goodbye and I am already wishing she was here. If she could see this, I am pretty sure she would not only be egging the make-up artist on, but having a grand time teasing me. Unfortunately, she has a meeting with her agent about special editions of one of her

books. *Maybe it will end up at that store she took me to.* Something in my gut tells me she's friends with the owner and it absolutely will. I can't keep my thoughts off Montana and the way I feel about her. Earlier, I wanted to tell her how much I am in love with her so badly, but I am terrified of breaking down all the progress we've made. I don't want Montana to be uncomfortable with us and I am perfectly content waiting until she's ready to hear it before I say anything, even if it means living with a tongue that's constantly burning.

The small victory in court is only the beginning. I will have plenty more opportunities to get my feelings out in the open. I plan to make sure there is justice for Montana. Mark my words, she will have the ultimate revenge. I plan to stop at nothing when it comes to righting every last one of Ben's wrongs.

"These are going to take a half hour to dry. Try not to move. If you want to grab a snack or some water before we start shooting, now is the time to do it." The makeup artist says, interrupting my silent plotting.

"Hey quick question," I say, feeling adventurous. "Any chance you know who the author is, or did they keep it anonymous for you, too?"

She laughs. "Oh, I know exactly who the author is. They are on set today. Don't worry, you'll meet later," she replies with a playful wink, before sashaying away to the snack station.

It makes me shift uncomfortably. *What kind of strange setup is this?* I wonder. I send off a quick text to Montana to tell her

I miss her and have been thinking about her. I don't expect a reply. I know she's busy, but I like her to know she's always on my mind.

I shrug it off, pocket my phone and go to check out the snacks. Phill and I learned a long time ago if we wanted healthy options to list my food choices as vegan. I'm not, but it has always ensured fresh vegetables and fruits are available. I could really use some natural sugars right about now. Its midafternoon and the combined stress and excitement from the hearing this morning has left me running on fumes.

The tattoos dried right on time. After being cleared by the make-up artist, they left me alone to change into a suit with a black tie. I'm dying to know what kind of character I am supposed to be. Whoever he is, he has excellent taste in suits.

The make-up artist knocks on the door and calls to me, "Are you dressed? I'll take you out to the set and introduce you to the author. Everyone is ready to go when you are."

"Ready," I reply as I open the door.

"Lord, what did I do to deserve this level of karma?" She whispers, before turning on her heels and yelling over her shoulder, "Come on, follow me."

We take a few twists and turns through corridors before finally arriving in a large space all set up. The photographer walks over to me and extends his hand for a handshake. When he introduces himself, he has a thick Spanish accent.

“Welcome, I am Ricardo. It is delightful to meet you. We are going to warm up with a few practice photos just to get the lighting right. We’ll try to get a nice feel for one another and then the author will chat with you about the character.”

“Austin, nice to meet you,” I reply, returning his handshake. “Let me know where you want me.”

“Let’s start on the black background. There are a few markers already labeled. You can just pick one and then we will begin.” Ricardo waves to the set up a few feet away.

I walk over and find a marker, then give Ricardo a nod. He gives me a thumbs up, then instantly begins directing me. I mindlessly follow his directions, trying hard to keep my eyes off the mysterious figure sitting with their back to me in the distance. They are wearing a gray hoodie with the hood pulled up. *Strange, it’s not even cold in here*, I think. Pulling my eyes away to look at Ricardo, who is snapping at me.

“Chin up. That’s it. Perfect,” he chatters, snapping off a few photos.

We take another twenty practice photos and then he whistles and shouts. “Take a break. Give me a few minutes to look over these.”

The man sitting with the mysterious hooded figure helps them up, and then they turn to face me. Just when I think I’m about to lay eyes on this mysterious author, I’m nothing but disappointed. *Sunglasses, who the fuck wears sunglasses indoors?*

My heart is racing as they walk toward me. I shouldn't be this nervous about meeting someone who is apparently insanely famous. I'm sure I look like an absolute idiot, squinting, hoping to catch some sort of sign to give away their identity. The mystery author arrives in front of me, saying nothing. I look on speechless and uncomfortable with the silence. Finally, they remove the hood, but beneath it they are wearing a baseball cap with their hair swept up beneath it. I glare closely, examining every detail, and then my eyes land on a stray strand of inky black hair. Daring a look over my shoulder, I try to hide my smile. When I turn back around, my hand flies out, pulling the sunglasses from her face while my other hand pulls her in close against my entire body.

“Kitten,” I rasp in her ear.

She pulls the baseball cap from her head, shaking out her raven black tresses. “Savior,” she whispers before her lips land against mine.

“It was you.” I say, breaking our kiss for a moment.

“It was me.” She purrs.

“You were ready to tell me.” My voice is deep and throaty as I kiss her neck.

“I am ready to tell you about all of me,” Montana confesses.

“What kind of book is this for, kitten? Am I a good guy or a bad guy?” I ask.

“Shhhh,” she replies, pressing her finger to my lips.

I kiss it, and she giggles.

“It’s a dark romance. You’re a bad guy, but a cinnamon roll for your girl.”

“For my girl?” I whisper.

“Yeah, all the touch-her-and-die vibes.”

My jaw drops open. I can feel it. *What the fuck am I getting myself into?*

“But, Austin,” she says in a hushed voice. “That’s not all I wanted to tell you today.”

“There’s more? Because, kitten, I’m still trying to process everything else.” I sigh.

She kisses me lightly. “I told you, I’m going to wreck your world. I love you, Austin.”

My heart is exploding. My timid little kitten just told me she loves me. I pick her up, pulling her even closer. “I love you too, Montana. Thank you for giving me this chance to love you.”

“Don’t break my heart.”

“I won’t. I promise.” I say, before dipping her dramatically and kissing her again.

Snap.

Ricardo snaps a photo.

“Kitten.”

“Mmm,” Montana moans in response.

“You set me up. You know I’m going to have to punish you for this behavior later, right?”

“Do you promise?” She asks, nipping my bottom lip.

“For you, always.”





Afterword

Can't get enough of Austin and Montana? They have their own community on Ream. It's always free to follow, or consider upgrading for access to exclusive content. The next book in the series will be posted in their community and available to read while it is written.

<https://reamstories.com/austinlovesmontana>

About Des Sweet

Des writes deliciously dark romances in the contemporary and paranormal genres. Her books contain dark themes and characters in varying shades of morally gray. She's a sucker for the bad guy getting the girl. Demons, creatures, unalivers, stalkers, and mafia men frequent her pages. Her books might leave you with a new kink, or obsessing over a filthy mouthed book boyfriend. Popular tropes she enjoys writing include: enemies to lovers, forced proximity, and torture, in many different forms. Her name may sound sweet, but there's nothing sweet about the things she's writing, unless it's her morally gray contemporary romance line.

Looking for more content?

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